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Department:
Statistics South Africa
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Opening Remarks – Mr Risenga Maluleke, Statistician-General of The Republic of South Africa

Honourable SADC Deputy Executive Secretary – Regional Integration, Ms. Angéle Makombo N`Tumba,
Heads of National Statistical Offices,

Distinguished delegates from SADC Member States, United Nations Agencies, and Pan African Institutions,

SADC Secretariat Staff,

Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is a privilege and honour for me to officially open the SADC Statistics Committee Meeting here in Cape Town, in the Republic of South Africa.

On behalf of the Government of South Africa, and indeed the people of our country, I extend a warm welcome to all delegates and guests gathered here today. I trust your travels were seamless and that your stay in our country will be most enjoyable.

We remain committed to advancing the important work of SADC Statistics Programme, building on the foundation laid by Zimbabwe in 2025 and the Republic of Madagascar, despite recent political developments that constrained its ability to fully discharge its responsibilities.

We are pleased to host this important meeting at a time when the role of official statistics has become more critical than ever before.

1 Region, 16 Nations Working Towards A Common Future



As governments across the globe navigate increasingly complex social, economic and environmental challenges, statistics remain the foundation upon which sound policy, effective planning and accountable governance are built. In our region, this responsibility carries even greater significance as we work collectively to advance regional integration, sustainable development and inclusive growth.

The Southern African Development Community has long recognised that reliable, timely and comparable statistics are essential to achieving the aspirations of the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, Agenda 2063 of the African Union, and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

Without quality statistics, we cannot adequately measure poverty, inequality and unemployment. We cannot effectively monitor trade flows, migration, food security, climate vulnerability, education outcomes or health systems. And importantly, we cannot accurately assess whether the lives of our citizens are improving.

Statistics are therefore not merely numbers. They are instruments of transformation. They enable governments to identify gaps, allocate resources efficiently, evaluate impact, and build public trust through transparency and accountability.

Distinguished delegates,

The work of the SADC Statistics Committee continues to strengthen harmonisation and coordination across our National Statistical Systems. This work is essential if we are to deepen regional cooperation and ensure that the data produced across our countries speaks to common standards, shared priorities and collective development objectives.

South Africa appreciates the ongoing efforts by the SADC Secretariat and Member States to advance regional statistical capacity, promote innovation in official statistics, and modernise statistical production systems. We commend the important progress made in areas such as civil registration and vital statistics, population and housing censuses, economic statistics, environmental statistics and the development of regional indicators.

At the same time, we must acknowledge the challenges confronting official statistics globally and within our region.

Firstly, we are operating in an environment of rapidly evolving technologies and increasing demand for real-time information. Citizens, policymakers and markets now expect faster and more granular data than ever before.

Secondly, National Statistical Offices are under growing pressure to produce more with limited resources, while maintaining the highest standards of quality, independence and credibility.

Thirdly, we are confronted with declining survey response rates in many countries, rising operational costs, and increasing complexity in measuring modern economies and societies.

And finally, we face the challenge of misinformation and disinformation in the digital era, which places even greater responsibility on official statistical institutions to remain trusted sources of evidence and truth.

These challenges require us to think differently about the future of official statistics.

We must continue embracing innovation and digital transformation. The integration of administrative data, geospatial information, big data and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence presents significant opportunities to strengthen the timeliness, relevance and efficiency of our statistical systems.

However, innovation must always be accompanied by robust governance, ethical safeguards and protection of privacy and confidentiality. Public trust remains the cornerstone of official statistics.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

South Africa has itself been reflecting deeply on the future of data and statistics within the broader developmental state. We recognise that integrated data ecosystems are becoming increasingly important for responsive governance and evidence-based decision-making.

In this regard, regional cooperation becomes indispensable. No country can address these challenges alone. Collaboration within SADC enables us to share expertise, strengthen institutional capacity, harmonise methodologies and collectively respond to emerging statistical demands.

The strength of SADC has always been rooted in solidarity and cooperation. The same spirit must continue guiding our statistical community.

I therefore encourage this Committee to use this meeting not only as a technical platform, but also as a strategic opportunity to shape the future direction of statistics in our region.

Your deliberations over the coming days are important. They will help ensure that our statistical systems remain responsive, resilient and fit-for-purpose in an increasingly dynamic environment.

As you engage in your discussions, I urge you to continue prioritising:

- the modernisation of statistical systems;
- investment in statistical capacity development;
- harmonisation of regional standards and frameworks as guided by the SADC Protocol on Statistics
- strengthening data governance, integration and interoperability;
- and improving the accessibility and use of official statistics for policy and development.

Distinguished delegates,

Allow me also to recognise the dedication and professionalism of statisticians across the SADC region. Much of your work often takes place behind the scenes, yet its impact is felt across every sphere of society.

From informing economic policy and social development programmes, to supporting disaster response, public health interventions and investment decisions — your contribution to governance and development is both substantial and indispensable.

As governments, we must continue supporting and protecting the integrity, independence and sustainability of official statistical systems.

Before I conclude, I wish to once again thank the SADC Secretariat, **Statistics South Africa, serving as the SADC interim Chair for the remainder of 2026 and the incoming SADC Chair for 2027, and all organising teams for the work undertaken to convene this meeting.**

I trust that your engagements will be productive, constructive and forward-looking, and that they will further strengthen the regional statistical architecture of SADC.

It is now my honour and privilege to officially declare the SADC Statistics Committee Meeting open.

I thank you.