

**Key Note Address by the Director-General of the
National Planning Commission
at the User-Producer Workshop
NamPower Convention Centre**

9 July 2013

Director of Ceremonies
Statistician-General of the Namibia Statistics Agency
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank the Statistician General, Dr John Steytler for inviting me to be part of this important workshop. It is always good to be invited to events like these – it is a test whether one is still regarded as having something useful to say. So, thanks John for the invite.

But I know that John did not invite me to speak this morning for any other reason other than the fact that the Government position is currently hold has a formal relationship with official statistics. As the Director General – DG or DJ as I often get referred to – in terms of the Statistics Act No 9 of 2011, I am also the Minister responsible for the National Statistics System and the Namibia Statistics Agency. And this is the only time you may refer to me as Minister. It is therefore my honour to address you this morning.

This workshop is a very important one. It is dealing with one of the most important enablers in the process of our socio-economic development, namely statistics. We all have heard how important it is to “take control of your own life.” In many societies this statement has been accepted as good advice and it indeed sounds very meaningful and significant. And if all of us could take control of our lives, the world would be a better place to live for the human race.

But have you ever thought about the real meaning of this statement? How do I take control of my life? In my view, the real meaning of this statement refers to our ability to properly evaluate information and statements we read and hear on a daily basis. If we are not able to distinguish sound reasoning from flawed reasoning, then we are vulnerable to manipulation and to decisions that are not in our best interest. However, in order for us to make the right choices we need to have the right data and information. Statistics, therefore, provides us with the tools that we need to react intelligently to information we hear or read.

It is said, and I concur, that statistics plays a vital role in every fields of human activity. For example, as consumers of goods and services, we rely for instance on transparent price information in order to make the right choice when we do our weekly or monthly shopping. As employers and employees or as bargaining units, we need to have accurate information about the inflation rate in order to prepare for annual wage and salary negotiations. As government,

we need a whole range of data in order to come up with evidence-based policy decisions and to monitor and evaluate our policies and programmes that we are implementing. Without the necessary data our development planning will be based on unfounded information and cannot be expected to yield the necessary results. It will be like fishing without net.

You may recall that the Statistics Act requires the establishment of the National Statistics System – or in short the NSS. The act also requires the composition of the NSS to include statistics producers, respondents, users of statistics, and academic and training institutions. I hope that representatives of all these institutions are present here today.

The purpose of the creation of the NSS is to ensure that these stakeholders are working closely together in the production and dissemination of statistics; the use of statistics; the research of statistical methods as well as the training of statisticians. It is also the responsibility of the NSS to ensure that the users of statistics are trained in the interpretation of statistics. When users are not in a position to correctly interpret statistics the importance of statistics will be lost.

Let us also take note that it is not only the availability of statistics in general that is important. What is more important in our ever-changing environment is statistics that is fit-for-purpose. What will assist us is the statistics that is available on a regular basis; statistics that is made available in a timely fashion; and it is statistics that is accurate, up-to-date and reliable.

It is for this reason that the Government decided to establish an autonomous statistics agency, the Namibia Statistics Agency that can respond more flexibly and speedily to the demand for data. I am proud that we took this step of creating the NSA. The results of this decision so far have proven that we have made the right decision. You will agree with me that the availability and accessibility of data has improved substantially since the establishment of the NSA in a period of one year. I urge the NSA to continue to improve on their achievement and become the best statistics Agency on the continent and beyond. You have demonstrated that it can be done.

Now that we have reliable and timely statistics, as users of statistics we no longer have an excuse of not having the necessary information. As Government policy makers, our effectiveness at policy-making is enhanced and it is now possible to be more targeted in our approach. We no longer have any justification not to provide an in-depth evaluation of our policies and programs. As business people, our planning process for expansion is made easier and more effective. In terms of what is available, it is not only the reports that are easily accessible from the NSA web site, but also the data sets are available for us to do further research and analysis. It is now up to all of us as users to make use of the available information and review the progress we have made in implementing our programmes.

As a Government we have recognized that we need to strengthen our capacity to monitor and evaluate our development plans. You will recall that the NDP4 emphasized the importance of monitoring and evaluation. As a result, we now have a dedicated M&E department at the

National Planning Commission. In this respect, the NSA as the custodian of official statistics plays a vital role in the collection and provision of the necessary data for the monitoring and evaluation of our development plans. It is therefore necessary that the NSA ensures that its strategic and business plans are aligned to the objectives of NDP4.

Let me also underscore the point that the NSA cannot and should not play its role in isolation. It is not possible for the NSA alone to provide all the statistics that the users will need and demand. There is therefore a need for a meaningful collaboration and consultation between the NSA and other stakeholders of the NSS. So far I am aware of the collaboration between the NSA and various Government departments in carrying out certain surveys. For example the NSA teamed up with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare when carrying out the 2012 Labour Force Survey; the collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Services with regard to the health survey; the partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry with regard to the agricultural census; and the Directorate of Customs and Excise with regard to trade statistics. I would like to urge the NSA to extend this corroboration to more entities within the Government, private sector and civil society.

The NSS provides this platform for exchanging information from the producers on planned surveys and censuses. It also provides the users with the opportunity to identify their need for information. While NDP4 and other sectoral policies provide guidance on the data that is required to measure the progress, these policies should not be cast in stone. We must be prepared to subject our need for data to revision owing to the ever-changing environment we operate in. This is necessary even if it may lead to an adjustment of scheduled survey instruments or the design of additional instruments.

We also need to understand that in order to have a meaningful interaction between the users and producers of statistics, both parties need to have the requisite skills. Without both users and producers being equipped with the necessary skills and expertise, we cannot ensure the collection of statistics that is fit-for-purpose. We can also not have the timely and robust analysis of the statistics we have collected. It is therefore important that our institutions of learning need to play an important role in equipping producers and users with the required skills to fulfil their function. Tertiary institutions need to know what skills are needed in the future and the extent of the demand in order to plan their curricula and courses.

Moreover, while the NSA's mandate includes collecting, producing, analysing and disseminating official and other statistics, there is a limit up to which the NSA can analyse the data. We, therefore, need the involvement of other research institutions - be it at tertiary institutions or independent research institutions - to conduct further analysis of the data. I am told that the NSA has created a web portal through which interested researchers can access anonymised raw data for further analysis. This not only opens the NSA data to external scrutiny, but provides an opportunity for more detailed research on specific topics. I am requesting our tertiary institutions to promote this web portal and encourage their students to make use of the data

for their research assignments. This will help us to achieve at least two objectives, namely to develop and enhance our research capacity on relevant socio-economic research topics and to add further analysis of the data that can inform policy makers.

Because of the various stakeholders involved in the production and use of statistics, as well as the training of staff members, we need a platform for coordinating the different roles and responsibilities. The NSS provides this platform and thereby reduces the risk of duplication of data collected; reduces the reporting burden on respondents; ensures cost effectiveness in the utilisation of resources; promotes compatible statistics; and facilitates the integration of data from different producers to the benefit of the users.

Close cooperation between the various stakeholders is even more important because of the resource constraints we are facing, not only on the financial side, but also on the human resource side. We, therefore, need to pool our resources and ensure their efficient use across all agencies. While there might have been uncertainties in the past as to whose role it was to coordinate the NSS and hence the various surveys and censuses, the Statistics Act clearly stipulates that it is the responsibility of the NSA to coordinate the NSS.

I urge all those who are part the NSS to take your responsibilities seriously. To do so will require that we make the necessary human and financial resources available. We also need to avail time, especially when we have other responsibilities competing for our time. I am convinced that spending our resources on producing statistics that is fit-for-purpose is a worthwhile investment that needs to be made.

Let me conclude by once again reminding you that this is an important workshop. What you are busy with is the process of building a confident Namibia. Equipped with fit-for-purpose statistics, we will become a more confident nation when tackling our socio-economic development challenges. I therefore thank you for having made your precious time available for the NSS and I wish you a successful workshop.