

KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY

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AT THE

NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE ON STATISTICS (NCCS)

HOLDING AT

AKWANGA, NASSARAWA STATE

14TH - 15TH DECEMBER 2020

PROTOCOL

- His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Nassarawa State,
 - The Honourable Commissioner for Budget & Planning, Nassarawa State,
 - The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Budget & Planning, Nassarawa State,
 - State Statisticians-General,
 - Representatives of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)
 - Members of the National Consultative Committee on Statistics,
 - Development Partners,
 - Gentlemen of the Press,
 - Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
1. I am delighted to join you today at the annual meeting of the National Consultative Committee of Statistics (NCCS), one of the most significant events on the statistical calendar. As chair, it is my pleasure to welcome each of you and appreciate the efforts to ensure the 2020 meeting holds as scheduled despite the COVID-19 pandemic. It is my fervent hope and prayer that the coming year will be less disruptive and more productive for us all.
 2. This year, our meeting is being held both virtually and physically, as a sign of the unusual times we find ourselves, but also our ability to adapt to change and make the best of any given situation. Despite various challenges some members have had to be physically present with us at the beautiful Akwanga resort, I am nevertheless delighted at the warm reception extended to NCCS participants by the Government and people of Nassarawa state since arrival. I therefore express our sincere appreciation to His Excellency for this honour, and to the Honourable Commissioner for the cooperation and support received all through the planning and preparation period for this event.

3. As we are well aware, an important component of the coordination mechanisms stipulated in the *Statistics Act, 2007*, is the NCCS which has the mandate to review the statistical programmes that have been carried out throughout the year, receive updates from members of the National Statistical System (NSS) and harmonize the statistical programs of the NSS. In addition, the committee is expected to regularly develop strategies to ensure uniform standards and methodology amongst the various agencies with a view to improving the quality, comparability and timeliness of statistical output.
4. This year, with the COVID-19 pandemic and how we have risen up to the disruptive challenges it presented, has further highlighted the important role of public institutions at all levels and why public policy must be based on accurate, timely and reliable statistics. Across the world, data and statistics have played an important role not only in understanding the magnitude of the crisis, but also in designing and implementing policies to address it. Statistical offices around the world have also played an important role in educating the public, supporting the policy making process and developing new standards and methodologies to ensure comparability over time and across countries. Distinguished participants, as the highest statistics committee within the Nigerian Statistics System, we should be able to assess if and how we have successfully handled the demands on the statistical system over this difficult period, and how well we have adapted our work processes and consequently renew our commitment to delivering greater value in the future.
5. While the challenges facing the statistical system have been further compounded by the current situation (with restricted vehicular movements and limited face to face communication), it also calls on us to be more adaptable, innovative and enterprising, and more willing to explore beyond

our comfort zones. More specifically, tackling these challenges require a better understanding of the emerging data ecosystem, the role of the Statistical System in this changing data ecosystem, as well as the need to have a robust and responsive system. This brings us to the need for continued investment in data and statistical production by the relevant stakeholders, to ensure that our statistical institutions remain relevant, responsive and effective.

6. I emphasise this point again because it is quite clear that low funding for statistical activities remains a major challenge to the development of the Nigerian Statistics System. Moreover, in cases of public emergencies, the temptation to implement large scale interventions in a hurry, with little attention to data and statistics, is always present. A recent report by PARIS 21 indicates that less than 0.5% of projects in development aid, addressing the COVID-19 pandemic had primary focus on data and statistics. This will have to change if we desire to see improved data production that influences decision making not only for the immediate need, but also in meeting the broader local, national and international development agenda.
7. As coordinator of the NSS, the National Bureau of Statistics, fully recognizes its role in this changing environment. As a system, we have continued to work tirelessly to meet our statutory mandate, as well as the ever-growing demand for data to make evidence-based decisions despite a low statistics funding environment. While we recognise and accept that we are not where we want to be yet, we are nevertheless encouraged that we have made significant strides and improvements in many areas of our work and this fact has been recognized both locally and internationally. Notably, despite funding and COVID-19 pandemic disruptions, we still produced over 120 different statistical reports with over 1000 indicators, we still logged over 800,000 visits to our website, and recorded over 170,000 downloads for the

published reports. This excludes the daily walk-in visits and direct data request from users around the world. This is certainly a testament to the fact that there is an increasing endogenous and exogenous demand and appetite for data and we are capable of meeting these demands, the prevailing circumstances notwithstanding.

8. In addition to improving technological innovations to ensure that we produce quality data that can be trusted, we also continued to strengthen technical cooperation with development partners to generate critical data, including those relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We initiated and deployed the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) device, which was adopted to conduct important surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS) under COVID-19 for the 2nd Quarter of 2020 and the various Nigeria Longitudinal Phone Survey (NLPS). Likewise, working with various partners, we created and launched a new portal for disseminating COVID-related data to assist government and the public in tracking the spread and gauging its socio-economic effects on households. Equally noteworthy here is the National Business Sample Survey, a major undertaking that is long overdue (after 30 years) which seeks to provide necessary data to guide policymakers not only in setting sectoral policy, but will also inform the new Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) to succeed Vision 20:2020 and the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP). We also have plans to undertake the National Agriculture Sample Census early 2021. All these point to our desire to rise to the occasion, to meet the needs of the moment, and support the policymaking process through accurate, timely and relevant data.
9. At this juncture, I wish to acknowledge the State Bureaux of Statistics (SBS) as well as Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) at the Federal and State levels, for their increasing efforts at sustaining sectoral statistical

production. We have seen a remarkable increase in the quantity and quality of administrative data published at NBS, and this is attributable to the increased cooperation and support of several MDAs. However, like the saying goes: *“the reward for good work is more work”*, so I am using this forum to once more challenge all of us to double our efforts at ensuring a rapidly improving system of administrative statistics continues to evolve, as it satisfies about 70-80% of our data requirements at the NBS and the NSS.

10. As I conclude, I encourage us all to be actively involved in these deliberations to improve our coordination and enhance our capabilities to deliver a more effective statistical system.
11. On this note, I hereby declare the 2020 National Consultative Committee on Statistics meeting open. Thank you for your kind attention and I wish you fruitful deliberations.