



The South Africa I know, the home I understand

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Is it about your Rank or Position? Or is it about being a “Revolutionary”, an Agent of Change?



Dr O. Ajayi, Mr Ian Assam, Dr Pali Lehohla, and Professor Ben Kiregyera during the 5th ISIbalo African Young Statisticians Conference opening ceremony held in Pretoria, South Africa.

By: Dr Miranda Mafafo

This marked the sentiment at the opening of the 5th ISIbalo Conference of African Young Statisticians that kicked off this Monday 13 June 2016 at the Saint George Hotel in Pretoria.

Opening the ceremony, the Statistician-General of South Africa, Dr Pali Lehohla, recalled how back in university days in Lesotho, as they all discussed the career paths they sought, one of his classmates, currently today’s Minister for Foreign Affairs in South Sudan, announced that his career of choice was to be a revolutionary.

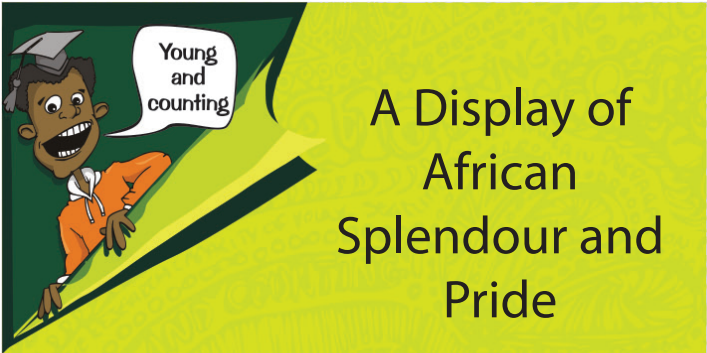
The Oxford dictionary definition of the adjective “revolutionary,” is one who is involved in or causes a complete dramatic change. This, the Statistician-General posed to African young statisticians, was the challenge they needed to take up: to embrace transformation and innovation in data platforms to produce better data for better development outcomes as statistics rapidly becomes a currency for the improvement of policy planning and decision makers by policy makers and politicians.

Tracing the revolutionary path that Stats SA has taken towards creating sustainable systems of statistics and secure data holdings through innovation and transformation in technology, the Statistician-General dwelled on the recommendation the global statistical community has made to the UN Secretary General on data availability through proper governance to manage the data demands of an increasingly complex universe seeking to improve the lives of its people.

As young statisticians from seventeen (17) African countries gather in Pretoria, the collective challenge put to them by the Statistician-General, Professor Ben Kiregyera and Deputy Chair of Statistics Council was for them to lead Africa in an emerging data revolution.



“Embrace transformation and innovation in data platforms”



“I am an African”

I am an African ... read the poem by five South African young statisticians at the opening of the 5th ISIbalo Conference of African Young Statisticians which was opened on Monday 13 June 2016 in a colourful event of seventeen (17) African countries who came from all parts of Africa to learn, share and deliberate on issues of population and development such as the demographic dividend; health survey datasets, population dynamics, an emerging data revolution, methods in population research ... to name a few.

As Young Statisticians from Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Swaziland, The Gambia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa walked in their colour flags, the essence of what it meant to be an African became a tangible reality as Africa’s young statisticians proudly displayed their African-ness. To see young African statisticians, take their seats, increases the responsibility of building African statistical capacity as a humble contribution to the betterment of this beautiful continent.

This week African young statisticians will deliberate on innovations in data to measure and monitor sustainable development in Africa. The post-2015 development agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has placed renewed pressure on national statistical offices and the statistical community in general, to provide an evidence base to monitor progress on commitments made to eradicate poverty, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, provide universal access to education, promote gender equality ... to name a few. Similarly as many African countries start to experience a decline in fertility and improved health access which leads to lower mortality, the youth population in the continent continues to experience growth that is not accompanied by relative economic growth, contributing widespread unemployment. Will Africa be able to harness the demographic dividend from its youthful population?

Hosted by Statistics South Africa, the conference aims to provide a discussion, research and training platform to interrogate these issues on Africa’s population & development build statistical capacity on the African continent by equipping attendees with skills in statistical sciences and research Building the capacity of young statisticians. This will enhance a critical mass of skill to provide data needed to accelerate increased participation of Africa at international statistical fora and also advance evidence based policy-making - Dr Miranda Mafafo.

Plenary on Research Gaps and Innovation for African Demographic Dividend

By: Christina Jiyane, Young Statistician

Dr Pali Lehohla opened the plenary by mulling on the question of whether Africa is up to the task of studying its Demographic Dividend. The trend he noted, in South Africa, shows low fertility and therefore no broad-band to provide fire for the dividend. In fact, its narrow base does not provide enough education in South Africa. Dr Pali Lehohla argued that the Demographic Dividend will assist in advising policy maker, unless we make the right changes, we may go through transition which will lead to a demographic disaster as it happened in China. China is still trying to reverse this. This is what happens when government does not to interrogate statistics and it needs to happen now. In response, Dr Mady Biaye (UNFPA) focused on the Demographic Dividend in Africa (DD), in his presentation he explained the economic benefit that can arise when a country has a relatively large proportion of working age population due to declining fertility and effective investment in their health empowerment education and employment through public action and private sector. He argues that potential for economic growth is not given and must not be squandered. Rather, it only becomes real if necessary investment is made by a government. A changing age structure can produce a window of economic opportunity. A common question asked is where do African countries stand regarding the Demographic Dividend? “We as Africans must understand Agenda 2063 and the 10-year Implementation Plan 2014-2024” said Dr Mady Biaye. It is one thing to move from narrative and rhetoric to action so that the translation of the potential into reality happens through a conducive policy environment which will create employment. The reason for this is that the state of the African economy informs either a youth potential or a youth burden on the economy, influences mainly by the high fertility and high unemployment rate mostly among young people.

A moment with Dr Pali Lehohla

By: Letshabo Maoba, Young Statistician

Drinking coffee with South Africa’s Statistician-General gave me an opportunity to pick his brain on how he has provided an oversight leadership for ISibalo. What I wanted to know is the SG’s vision for Young Statisticians

This was his response: *Well, I would like them to answer that question, not myself. Yet, I think they should remain revolutionary because the problems of the future are not defined now, they’ll emerge, but a prepared mind responds to these kinds of problems as they emerge. You have to have the capacity to understand the nature of the problem, you have to have the capacity to be inquisitive but you also have the capacity to be both. In all this, personal humility is needed, you can’t be arrogant. So that’s what young African statisticians ought to do. They are central to answering a number of questions as they emerge and shedding light is a crucial part of this, and you must be bold to shed light and clarify. Don’t say there is a number, no. Shed light, clarify and be bold about it, but personal humility must guide you.*

This wasn’t enough for me. I had to ask: Within Statistics South Africa, given the challenges the young statisticians face, how does the SG think the managers within the Organisation can assist in the growth and development of the young Statisticians.

This is what he says ... *It’s difficult to say. I think there is a*



Dr Mady Biaye (UNFPA) at a plenary discussion on African Demographic Dividend



Dr Pali Lehohla, presenting the YAS Conference

lot that they can do and I don’t think they are doing enough. Personal emersion into other developments, you can’t immerse yourself personally, I don’t see that. Does that come from the heart? Does it come as a matter of an informed necessity? You can’t see that this as an informed self-interest. When we exit the organisation we must be able to say, “that organisation that we led is shining even better than our time”, you can’t be an African widow. You can’t be saying “oh my husband was the best that we ever had, when he died, we lost everything, the cattle followed him and everything”. African widows will pass a word like that and we can only avoid it when we have personal immersion into a program. So managers have to personally immerse themselves, so we have to find out if they have or we have to measure whether they are. And of course there is a room for improvement. Thank you!!



“The Day it Rained”

By: Nomaxabiso Tata, Young Statistician

South Africa, over the past months has been quite dry because of the drought but on this mid winter morning the 13th of June 2016 it rained! The strong chilly winds and the drops of rain set the atmosphere for an eventful week ahead.

This pouring was symbolically an indication that the soil of Africa was being nourished and rejuvenated as a result of the momentous gathering. The 5th ISibalo Conference of African Young Statisticians themed “Population & Development in Africa” would certainly set a path for the development of young Africans. Mama Novensi Kheswa, the praise poet awakened the hall, welcoming the dignitaries in her robust voice bringing vibrancy throughout the hall.

The mood had already been created by the time the Chair of the Opening Ceremony Mr Risen-ga Maluleka stepped up to the podium giving instruction the choir to render the national anthem. Dr Miranda Mafafo introduced the guests welcoming all to the sitting.

She then continued to invite the procession led by participants from different countries as flag bearers. The colour and music which accompanied the procession was described by Mr Maluleka as “a true reflection of statistical opinion.” In his welcoming address, Dr Pali Lehohla remarked that “Humanity in its creativity must not self destruct, but protect.” This has truly set the tone for the conference.





Mr Ian Assam making a clarion call to Young African Statistician to be active citizens

A view from the Statistical Council on developing young statisticians

By: Nkateko Chabani, Young Statistician

What do you think as a Statistical Council, should be the direction we should take in developing Young Statisticians at this point in history? This is the question I posed to Mr Ian Assam, the Deputy Chairperson of Council, at the 5th ISlballo Conference of African Young Statisticians.

The view of Mr Assam is a simple one: *that African Young Statisticians should be familiar with world-wide principles, instruments, policies and frameworks that exist and govern statistics worldwide. Young Statisticians must not just be familiar with them or know them, but live them out in their daily work and understand that, that is their building blocks set before them to use to get to the next level. They must find out what has been built before them then, embrace it and build on it. They must use any opportunities they can: bursaries; study visits; internships, personal studies, web searches to familiarise themselves, interact with relevant statistical institutions and individuals so that they can be part of the discussions and influence the next developments and changes in those frameworks.*

How can the Stats Council support? The Stats Council's key priority is the development of youth and young statisticians, especially this month being Youth Month?

We want to remind ourselves of the sacrifices made in the past and sacrifices currently being made by young statisticians and the needs that they have. The second bid is to engage with young statisticians to find out what their concerns are as well as burning issues that we are not hearing, but we need to hear. We need to interact and discuss about what the priorities are e.g. you would be a successful Stats Council if you implemented X,Y and Z. I want to hear that and be measured on whether the priorities have been implemented."



The conference in pictures ...



I AM AN AFRICAN

By Wayne Visser

I am an African
Not because I was born there
But because my heart beats with Africa's
I am an African
Not because my skin is black
But because my mind is engaged by Africa
I am an African
Not because I live on its soil
But because my soul is at home in Africa
When Africa weeps for her children
My cheeks are stained with tears
When Africa honours her elders
My head is bowed in respect
When Africa mourns for her victims
My hands are joined in prayer
When Africa celebrates her triumphs
My feet are alive with dancing
I am an African
For her blue skies take my breath away
And my hope for the future is bright
I am an African
For her people greet me as family
And teach me the meaning of community
I am an African
For her wildness quenches my spirit
And brings me closer to the source of life
When the music of Africa beats in the wind
My blood pulses to its rhythm
And I become the essence of sound
When the colours of Africa dazzle in the sun
My senses drink in its rainbow
And I become the palette of nature
When the stories of Africa echo round the fire
My feet walk in its pathways
And I become the footprints of history
I am an African
Because she is the cradle of our birth
And nurtures an ancient wisdom
I am an African
Because she lives in the world's shadow
And bursts with a radiant luminosity
I am an African
Because she is the land of tomorrow
And I recognise her gifts as sacred





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