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Keynote Remarks (as prepared for delivery)
Committee on Statistics, Eight Session

Tuesday, 23 August 2022
10.00 - 12.00 hrs. (Bangkok time)
Meeting Room: CR-1

Excellency Mr. Chaiwut Thanakamanusorn, Minister of Digital Economy and Society of Royal Thai Government;

Mr. Gogita Todratze, Chair of the seventh session and Executive Director, National Statistics Office of Georgia;

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and to the eighth session of the Committee on Statistics.

This session of the Committee is again being organized in a hybrid fashion. Still, we are pleased to have resumed some in-person participation despite the challenges we have faced over the last few years.

It is wonderful to note the high-level participation in the Committee by member States, and I hope all of those present in Bangkok will enjoy their stay here.

The Committee plays a crucial role in supporting the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The Sustainable Development Goals Progress report of ESCAP showed widening disparities in the region. COVID-19 has been a considerable challenge for all Asian and Pacific countries and for all of us as individuals and communities.

Progress towards the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region has slowed as the pandemic and climate change have exacerbated many development challenges. And the region is not on track to achieve any of the 17 Goals.

As members of the statistical community, we can be proud of our work which makes it possible not just to measure progress towards the SDGs but, more importantly, to help countries achieve them. I am pleased to see that the availability of data in our region has sharply increased since the first SDG benchmark report in 2017. Indeed, the number of indicators with sufficient data has almost doubled since then.

This trend testifies to the tremendous effort which has been made to strengthen national statistical systems in the region to respond to the monitoring demands of the 2030 Agenda.

With the exponential growth in data generated worldwide and with new technologies such as machine learning, governments worldwide are increasingly realizing the importance of data. Added to that, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for more timely and more granular data.

Although the value of data is now much better understood, that value is still not being fully realized and, too often, data is left in silos where it is not readily accessible and not easily understood or used.

COVID-19 showed how data scientists and statisticians could play a pivotal role in unlocking the value of data, and we have seen examples of countries where statisticians are suddenly in the spotlight, and in some countries, you, as national statisticians, have become media stars.

However, with increased availability and use of data come increased risks, including the need for data privacy and the need to maintain trust in data.

In this context, national statistical offices need to work in new ways, which include establishing sound data governance frameworks which respond to this new data-driven age. This Committee on Statistics comes at an opportune time to advance this work.

It comes at a time when your role as a Chief Statistician is probably changing as you move towards being data stewards, leading a whole-of-government approach to data and statistics. This change is crucial to the success of building national statistical offices fit for the data age.

I am therefore pleased to see the two priority areas which have been selected by member States for discussion at this year's Committee Session, namely: data governance and how the statistical community can respond to the challenge of capturing progress on well-being and sustainability that goes beyond the measurement of GDP.

ESCAP stands ready to be guided by your recommendations on what regional actions can be taken to support member States in these emerging areas.

I wish you a very successful and productive discussion during the Committee session. I look forward to your recommendations and action points to further guide our work.

Thank you for your attention.