

Statement by Tom K Alweendo, Director-General NPC
Official hand-over of the NSA Annual Report
Windhoek, 10 July 2013

I am delighted to receive the NSA's first Annual Report on behalf of the Government. As we all know, the NSA was established by an Act of Parliament in 2011 and became operational on 1 April 2012. It is governed by the Statistics Act No. 9 of 2011, but also by the State-owned Enterprises Governance Act no. 2 of 2006.

Both acts require the NSA to submit its Annual Reports, including Audited Financial Statements and a report of the external auditors on the financial statements to the line Minister. These are to be submitted within three months after the end of the financial year. The end of the financial year for the NSA is March. I therefore note with appreciation the fact that the Board of the NSA and the management worked hard to ensure that their first Annual Report is submitted on time. I believe it is also noteworthy that the SoE Governance Act requires SoEs to furnish their reports to their line Ministers within six months after the end of the financial year.

Given the short existence of the NSA, to submit the Annual Report including the Auditors' report within the prescribed three-month period could not have been an easy task. This can only be attributed to the commitment and dedication of the Board of Directors under the able leadership of the Chairperson, Mr Paul Hartmann, as well as the hard work of the management team under Dr John Steytler.

It is also satisfying to note that the external Auditors' report is unqualified. This is significant when taking into account the fact policies and procedures governing the administration and finance of the NSA were designed during the first months of operations of the Agency. I would therefore like to thank the Board and management for setting such a high standard of corporate governance. This is an example of excellence that I can only encourage other SOEs to emulate.

Speaking of good governance, in August last year, I have signed a governance and performance agreement with all the Board members, including the Statistician General. The significance of this governance and performance agreement is to ensure that my evaluation of the performance of the Board is based on what I have agreed with them – and therefore ensures objectivity. In order to promote transparency, this agreement is available to the public from the NSA website.

I am also impressed by the number of publications the NSA has released during its first year of operation. The NSA published almost 30 reports within twelve months – that translates into more than two reports on average every month. Obviously, it goes without saying that what is important is not the number of reports the NSA produces per month. My expectation is that the NSA must produce statistics that is fit-for-purpose. They must produce statistical reports that are relevant, produced and published on time. So far, it is my judgment that the NSA is living up to that expectation.

I am making a special request to the public to read the NSA publications. I especially call on our lawmakers to familiarize themselves with the findings of some of the reports published by the NSA. Reading these publications will enable our lawmakers to make insightful contributions when debating the prevailing socio-economic conditions in the country. These are all available on the NSA website.

I know that it is not always easy to appreciate the importance of statistics. We are all familiar with the statement about 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. It suggests that if all of us 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, part of the 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 in order to react intelligently to information we hear or read.

Let me mention just a few of the informative reports published by the NSA. In August last year, the NSA published the report on the 2009/10 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. This report, among others, provides up-to-date information on poverty incidence and income inequality in Namibia. It was followed by two in-depth reports on poverty in November 2012 focusing on Child Poverty and Poverty Dynamics in the country. In March this year, the NSA released the report on the 2011 Population and Housing Census that provides us with detailed information on population characteristics, the age composition of the population, the educational attainment and where our population resides. I can also here mention the Labour Force Survey report that was released in April this year.

Another milestone in the short history of the NSA was the inauguration of the state-of-the-art data processing centre that is second to none in Africa. I had the honour to inaugurate the centre in February this year. The center was made possible due to the generous support by the German government and we thank them for that.

While recognizing good performance by the NSA, I am aware of some challenges going forward. One of the challenges is to ensure that we continue to make the necessary investment in statistics. In order for the NSA to execute its legal mandate fully, it will be necessary for the Government to provide adequate financial resources to the NSA. While I do appreciate the financial constraints, what is not in dispute here is that investing in statistics is a worthwhile investment that must be made.

Because of the financial constraints facing us, I urge the NSA to also evaluate the effectiveness of the current data collection methods with the view to adopt and adapt existing best practices. I also encourage the NSA to form strategic alliances with our institutions of high learning.

Let me conclude by thanking the Chairperson and the entire Board of Directors, the Statistician-General, the whole management team and all the NSA staff members for putting the NSA on the map of professional statistics agencies. I wish you well for the future.

I thank you all for your attention.