

World Statistics Day

Opening Remarks by Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Managing Director, The World Bank

October 19, 2010

I would like to welcome you to this opening event of the World Bank's and IMF's celebration of World Statistics Day tomorrow -- on the 20th of October 2010 or 20/10/2010.

World Statistics Day is an opportunity for us to recognize the importance of statistics in guiding and monitoring our development programs and to learn more about the work being done at the World Bank and around the world to improve the quality and availability of statistics.

Over the next two days a number of important events will take place that reflect the growing impact of statistical work at the World Bank. This afternoon the Global Office of the International Comparison Program will hold the ICP Users Conference. This is an important step on the road to the 2011 round of the ICP and the largest data collection effort ever undertaken. Tomorrow morning we are launching the Virtual Statistics System, a new tool for sharing knowledge between statistical offices, data producers, and data users around the world. And tomorrow afternoon the Latin America and Caribbean region will present its second regional award for innovation in statistics.

The recent summit on the Millennium Development Goals was a reminder of why good statistics are needed. The MDG indicators show where the goals are being met and where they are not and focus our attention on the need for immediate action. Without the MDG indicators, we would have only words on paper and no meaningful measures of progress. But let us not forget that behind these statistics there is real human suffering: children out of school, mothers at risk in childbirth, and people who go through every day sick and hungry.

At the Bank this occasion provides an opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved and what still needs to be done. Fifteen years ago the Development Data Group was established as a focal point for statistical work and an integral part of the Development Economics Vice-presidency under the direction of the Chief Economist. Bringing together a core group of staff committed to building and maintaining a world scale database, the Data Group has forged partnerships at the national and international level to make a case for investing in statistical systems.

Since then, and especially since the new millennium, there has been greater awareness of the importance of statistical information for planning, implementing, and evaluating development programs. At the same time we have come to realize that the many of the national statistical systems in our client countries, which produce the basic data underpinning global estimates of important indicators such as poverty, food security, and social deprivation, are under-funded and under-performing. They often lack good management, reliable infrastructure, and well trained staff. An important part of our strategy for statistics has been to make a realistic case for investment in statistics and then to mobilize the necessary resources.

We, together with our partners, have made progress. The importance of good statistics is now widely recognized, within the Bank as well as at the country level and in the international community. The importance of investing in statistical capacity is now accepted by policy makers, and the place of statistics at the core of the results agenda is well established. Much more, however, remains to be done. We need to widen and to deepen our databases to address new and emerging development issues. And we need to increase our efforts to improve the statistical capacity of low-income countries, especially those emerging from conflict and with other special needs. Above all else, though, we must ensure that the statistics are used, by policy makers and politicians, and also by entrepreneurs and investors, by local development workers, and by citizens themselves. New technologies such as the

internet, mobile telephones, and social networks create opportunities for unlocking the power of our data and translating statistics into knowledge and action.

The World Bank took an important step toward unlocking the power of data through our Open Data initiative, launched in April this year. The Bank now provides free access to more than 4,000 financial, business, health, economic and human development indicators, most of which had previously been available only to paying subscribers. The decision to open our databases is part of our broader efforts to increase access to information. This means that researchers, journalists, nongovernmental organizations, entrepreneurs, and school children alike will be able to access the World Bank's datasets through *data.worldbank.org*, and through other applications and data portals.

Just making the data available, while an important first step, does not guarantee they will be used to make better decisions. We have to recognize that different users of our statistics have different needs and different capacities both to access information and to employ them. Our current tools and ways of disseminating data serve existing users well – and they will continue to improve with advancing technology – but we must still reach out to new users. And we should not assume that everyone is able to access information in English. We must make more information available in different languages. So far, all the indicators in the World Development Indicators and Global Development Finance databases have been translated into French, Spanish, and Arabic—the first time data have been available on the World Bank's Web site in languages other than English – but this is only a start.

Many individuals, especially new users in developing countries do not have access to what might be called traditional tools – telephone landlines and desktop computers -- but they are already experienced in making use of mobile communications technology, which they use to access information they need. Therefore, it behooves us to develop applications that match the tools and serve the needs of our clients. While we have a lot of skills in the Bank, we must also develop new partnerships with

software developers, application designers, and social entrepreneurs everywhere. That is the reason we launched the Apps for Development competition on October 7. The winners will be those who demonstrate the most innovative uses of our data combined with new technologies to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

As the Open Data Initiative is rolled out and as more data become available -- especially data on World Bank operations and other activities -- we must make sure that we maintain the trust of users in World Bank statistics. Trust in statistics and data is a complex phenomenon that depends on the extent to which the agency producing the data is itself trusted, as well as in the quality of the numbers themselves. High standards, professionalism, and respect for our clients are the basis for the trust others place in our statistics.

As well as being open with the data, therefore, we must ensure that we are also open and transparent about the methods and procedures that have been used to generate them. We must be meticulous in documenting what has been done, which may seem burdensome, but it is essential if we are to remain a reliable, respected source of data. We will also have to get used to having people use or misuse our own data to criticize the Bank and to make political points. To answer our critics, we need reliable data. Our best response, as always, will be to stick to the facts.

President Zoellick, in his speech, delivered at Georgetown University on September 29, 2010, unveiled a vision of a new approach to the development process led by *Open Data, Open Knowledge, and Open Solutions*. Brought together under the rubric "Open Development," it is a vision of a fundamentally new way of seeking and sharing development solutions in a multipolar world. By making use of new technologies in a networked development architecture, where no one dominates and everyone can and should play a part, we can multiply the power of our knowledge and hasten the day when we can have truly achieved a world free from poverty.

In conclusion, I would like to say that we are proud of the data work done throughout the Bank by many staff who have helped build the World Bank's reputation as a leader in development data. I am confident that the future of statistical work in the World Bank will be as exciting and challenging as the past has been.

Join me now in celebrating World Statistics Day as we salute the work of the many people around the world who bring us the data that inform our policies, guide our work, and record our results.

Thank you.