Remarks by Mr. Dennis Zulu
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On the launch of the project:
Modernising Trinidad and Tobago's Statistical Ecosystem through Enhanced SDG Data Development

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When the world's nations formulated the 17 Sustainable Development Goals—or SDGs for short—they didn't just list aspirations for humanity by the year 2030, such as No Poverty, Good Health, Gender Equality, and Sustainable Communities…

They also understood that "What doesn't get measured, doesn't get done."

And so they provided indicators and targets to help countries measure their progress.

"The proportion of the population living below the poverty line."

"The proportion of youths with IT skills."

"The percentage of managerial positions held by women."

These are just three of the SDG indicators…

And it would be difficult to picture a country achieving the Sustainable Development Goals if it didn't regularly and reliably collect data on these and the other SDG indicators.

With this in mind, the UN isn't expected to just support countries with initiatives related to, say, "the proportion of the population who have received the necessary vaccines," or "the share of renewables in overall energy consumption"…

We are also charged, via the Secretary General's Data Strategy, with helping countries improve their data and statistics systems.

I am therefore very glad to be here at the launch of our project titled 'Modernising Trinidad and Tobago's Statistical Ecosystem through Enhanced SDG Data Development'.

That's quite a mouthful…

But at its core, the project has a simple aim:

To enhance SDG-related data and statistics in Trinidad and Tobago in ways that then catalyse wider, systemic improvements throughout the country's data and statistics ecosystem.

Being catalytic, and instigating small changes that can snowball into bigger, more-impactful transformations, is also the aim of the Joint SDG Fund—the project's sponsor.

The Joint SDG Fund is supported by donations from the Kingdom of Denmark, the European Union, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Ireland, the Republic of Korea, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Republic of Portugal, the Kingdom of Spain, and the Kingdom of Sweden…

And we are pleased that many of these countries are represented here by their ambassadors and consuls, so we can express our gratitude for their generosity.

Ladies and gentlemen, Trinidad and Tobago's Government has made laudable progress in the sphere of data and statistics...

And the country has outpaced many other countries with regard to the availability and quality of official statistics.

However, a few gaps still persist today.

Today, digital and online technologies can be paired with existing data sources and methods, like surveys, censuses and administrative records, and so allow those working in development to get the data they need when they need it—even in real time.

This will lead development actors to make more informed and timely decisions—and to take corrective action before policies and programmes go awry.

Digital technologies help data users cope with the huge volumes of information they face every day…

And to break down data to the smallest details, including disaggregation by age, sex, location, disability status, and so on.

Digital innovations like Big Data can exploit citizen-generated data, enabling official statistics to focus more sharply on the needs of specific groups—from commuters seeking a way out of traffic to vulnerable groups seeking support.

And yet Trinidad and Tobago's data and statistics ecosystem is not as digitalised as it could be—and some surveys still involve pen and paper rather than a stylus and a tablet.

Today, data producers and users don't collaborate and coordinate their efforts as much as they could.

This is true not just between sectors—with data generated by, say, companies and philanthropic foundations, figuring little into official development statistics…

It's also true within sectors, with some ministries and state agencies using different data standards than others…

And with some players working in siloes, with little appreciation of how they can benefit and help others by merely sharing their data.

It's even the case within the UN system in Trinidad and Tobago, as we don't have a central repository that our agencies can add their data to, or draw others' data from.

And today, there is draft legislation to replace the out-of-date Statistics Act –which was last amended in 1980—and to establish a National Statistical Institute.

This draft legislation is exemplary, meeting nine of the ten Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

But it's probably not as high on the legislative agenda as it should be…

Probably because data literacy—and an appreciation of the power and value of data and statistics—can be higher at all levels of society, from legislators to the general public.

Ladies and gentlemen, this project will help Trinidad and Tobago develop a data and statistics ecosystem that's fit for tomorrow.

Over the next 18 months—and with 721,400 US Dollars from the Joint SDG Fund and its donor countries—the project will pursue three key objectives:

One—A national statistical architecture that makes greater use of the latest digital technologies.

In fact, the project has already purchased 43,000 US Dollars' worth of computers and tablets for the Central Statistical Office—which will be handed over ceremonially today.

Two—Development actors across sectors, including the private sector, have the knowledge and networks needed to formalise partnerships and collaborate on data and statistics.

We've already partnered with the Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants to train accountants to integrate SDG-related data into their companies' reporting…

And just down the hall, a group of directors from some of the country's largest companies have just completed a session on environment, social and governance—or ESG—reporting, which we facilitated with the American Chamber of Commerce.

Then, finally, Three—A strengthened environment to advance the legislative agenda for data and statistics.

This will be accomplished through Masterclass-style sessions with Parliamentarians and decision-makers like Permanent Secretaries and business leaders…

And a media campaign that will use the tricks of the advertising trade to make data and statistics less mysterious among the wider population—and a bigger part of the public discourse.

In closing, I want to thank the staff at the four UN agencies who developed this project, and who will implement it in the coming months: PAHO/WHO, ILO, UNEP and ECLAC…

The Joint SDG Fund typically gives grants to low-income countries—not to high-income ones like Trinidad and Tobago…

So a grant from the Fund to this country's UN Country Team is testament to the brain power in, and the hard work of, these agencies.

Thanks, too, to the donor countries of the Joint SDG Fund.

Your contributions to Trinidad and Tobago's development, individually and collectively via instruments like the Joint SDG Fund, are deeply appreciated.

I give you my word that your funds will have multiplier effects, and that the project's benefits will far outweigh its cost.

Last, but not least, I want to thank the Honourable Minister of Planning and Development, the Ministry's Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary, and the Director of the Central Statistical Office.

Honourable Minister, your fingerprints and those of your team cover so many of the UN's accomplishments in the country.

We in the UN hope we can be as invaluable to your and your Government's work as you are to ours.

I thank you for listening and wish you a good evening.