

# Interview with Oliver Chinganya<sup>1</sup>

Katherine M. Condon

*Interview Editor, Statistical Journal of the IAOS*

*E-mail: kcondoniaos@gmail.com*



Oliver Chinganya is a chartered statistician of the Royal Statistical Society of United Kingdom with more than 30 years of experience in statistical development in Africa, at both national and international levels, of which 18 years has been at managerial level. He has a wide experience and knowledge of statistical practice across Africa at both field and management levels. He has excellent interpersonal and leadership skills, which has led to the building of strong partnerships both in Africa, as well as at the international level. He is a strong believer in the effectiveness

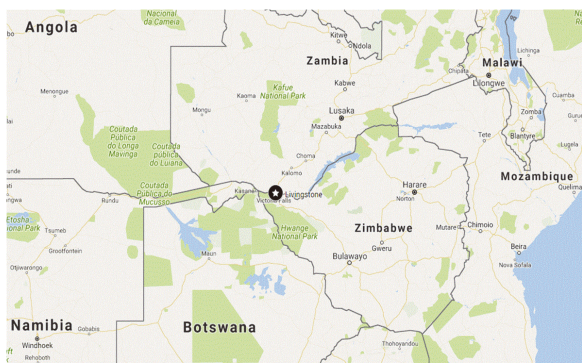
of partnerships, coordination at country, regional and international levels for effective and sustained development programs.

Oliver has experience in a broad scope of projects programming, statistical capacity development and building initiatives as well as strategic management of systems. His technical competences include strategic statistical policy development, household and enterprise surveys, prices statistics, labour statistics, poverty estimation and reproductive health. In addition, he has worked for IMF for 7 years. This gave him a good orientation in a number of areas of economic statistics, including national accounts, as well as direct experience in supporting and developing demands from users of statistical and economic information and in negotiating with international agencies and development partner (funders).

Before joining the African Centre for Statistics at UNECA in April 2016, Oliver worked for African Development Bank as Manager, Statistical Capacity Building Division in the Statistics Department starting in April 2010. Before then he worked for IMF as a Regional Advisor (2002–2009) providing support to 21 Anglophone African countries participating in the General Data Dissemination System (GDSS) programme and at the Zambia Central Statistical Office (1980–2002) where he rose through ranks to the position of Deputy Director. In addition, he also acted as Director prior to joining the Bank. From October 2009 to April 2010, he worked as a Consultant for World Bank.

Oliver is a Zambian national. He has an MSc. in Statistics from University of Southampton, UK, as well as an MBA from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya.

<sup>1</sup>The views and opinions expressed in the conversation are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the Statistical Journal of the International Association for Official Statistics nor IOS Press.



Map 1. Livingstone, Zambia and neighboring African countries.

*Interviewer: Thank you so much for allowing us to interview you. Let us start at the very beginning and go back to your childhood in Zambia. What was it like growing up in your country?*

I was born in Livingstone, a tourist capital of Zambia (See Map 1), which also hosts one of the seven wonders of world – the Victoria Falls – locally known as Musi-O-Tunya, literally translated as the “the smoke that thunders.” (See Fig. 1 for two views.)

I am the first born in a family of 11 children, 6 boys and 5 girls. Both my parents were first born of two each, and coincidentally of the same sex – my father and his brother; and my mother and her sister. Both my parents at the time of their marriage were blue collar workers, earning just enough for the family to manage. After I was born my mother became a full-time housewife. I started primary school at age 6, and in those days, it was considered very early for a child to start. Those days one yard stick for starting school – I had to show that I was of age by extending one arm over the head to touch the ear on the other side of the head. Because of my height, I was able to pass this test and was allowed to start school. I guess one of the reasons that may have led my parents to take me to school may have been the white man my maternal grandfather worked for in Livingstone who was very fond me. I recall that each time we visited my grandfather I came back with a lot of gifts including toys. This was a big privilege for me.

*Interviewer: What was your education like before university?*

During my primary school years, I had an opportunity to live with my father’s younger brother who was in the village for just a year. I then returned to

live with my parents, who were at the time in a town called Sinazongwe. My father was manager for Zambezi shops formerly (Susman Brothers).<sup>2</sup> I completed primary education at Sinazongwe Primary School in 1973 and proceeded to Linda Secondary School in Livingstone where I did Forms 1 to 3. This time I stayed with my maternal grandfather. In 1977, I decided to move to a boarding school at Pemba Secondary school, where I completed my Cambridge school education in 1978. Going to school those days was not easy especially given that Zambia was a very young country having gotten its independence from the British in 1964. There were not many educated people in my family whom I would emulate as role models, other than my parents.

Growing up in secondary school was more exciting and interesting. It is worth noting that during those days, the majority of the school teachers were whites. They were also a few Indians and some Zambians. In secondary school I took a few roles, such as being a House Captain, as well as head of the school cadet. I always loved seeing men in military uniform, and that inspired me to become a school cadet. In fact, at one time I even contemplated joining the army or air force. This dream was eventually to be “killed” by my father after witnessing the raids by the South African apartheid regime that was bombing camps of its own people who were being hosted by the Zambian government. In those days after graduating from secondary school, we had to go through the national service training, which involved a six-months military training before one goes to college. And finding employment was not as difficult – companies visited schools to talk to students who are about finish secondary school regarding job opportunities. In 1979 around June, the provincial office of the Zambia Central Statistical Office was recruiting young secondary graduates at the national service centre where I was based. I happened to be among the few selected for the interviews and fortunately I was the only one who sailed through the interview. I was released from the national service since I had completed my 6 months training. However, I had a

<sup>2</sup> ‘Susman Brothers was a business partnership that united brothers Elie Susman and Harry Susman after they crossed the Zambezi river in 1901. The brothers were Jewish businessmen from Rietavas, western part of Russian Empire, now Lithuania. They founded, owned, and operated several large businesses in Africa. Elie Susman, the younger of the two, was the founder of Susman Brothers. However, it was not until 1907 that the business name of “E. Susman” was changed to “Susman Brothers”’ Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susman\\_Brothers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susman_Brothers).



Fig. 1. Two views of Victoria Falls – Musi-o-Tunya.

choice at this point either to go to college or start working. The representative of the Zambia Central Statistical Office assured me that office also provided education opportunities. Being the first-born child, I opted to work and later go to school – although at the time my intention was to study accounting – a dream that was never fulfilled.

While working at the Central Statistical Office, I was also given responsibility of leading a team in charge of the census mapping in preparation for the 1980 census of population and housing. After the processing on the census in 1984, I was admitted to a statistical training program which was supported by the UN population fund – an in-service program. The program had two components; a 6-month statistical program and those who excelled continued to undertake a 10-months statistical program. These programs were meant for sub-professional cadres who would later become statisticians after attaining further training abroad. It is worth noting that there was no college or university in Zambia that offered statistical training programs. Fortunately for me I excelled in both programs and graduated 1985 with an intermediate certificate in statistics – an equivalent to what the Royal Statistical Society offered. I was immediately admitted in 1986 at the Eastern Africa Statistical Training Centre at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to undertake a Diploma program in statistics. I graduated as the best student in 1987. Intermediate training program and the Diploma program put together, were an equivalent of a Bachelor degree in statistics. Based on this qualification I was admitted at Southampton University, UK to undertake a post graduate diploma in 1988 with the sponsorship of Overseas Development Agency (ODA) which

later became DfID of UK.<sup>3</sup> Upon successful completion in 1989 and I was admitted to a Master's program in statistics at the same university where I graduated with an MSc. in Statistics in 1991. I then returned to Zambia where I continued my work but as a professional statistician.

*Interviewer: Looking back to our childhoods, we often find that a particular event or person had an impact on our later years. Did a particular person or event shape you into the person you are today?*

If there is a person I looked up to, it was my father. He did not have good education in the early part of his career, but when he was appointed to take care of a chain of shops, he decided to go back to school. He mainly studied how to manage such an enterprise. He was a goal getter.

*Interviewer: Your CV states that you did a Certificate in Statistics in Lusaka Zambia, and a Diploma in Statistics at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania before going to the University of Southampton in the UK to receive a Master of Science (MSc) in social statistics. How did that come about? Had you had any previous experiences outside of Africa before going to the UK?*

As stated above, I joined the Zambia Central Statistical office at the very young age of 19 – before I attained any tertiary education. The office offered an in-service program in statistics at the time since there was no col-

<sup>3</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department\\_for\\_International\\_Development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_for_International_Development).

lege that offered statistics in the country. The majority of heads of divisions and sections in the office were foreigners and, therefore, it was imperative to have a statistical program for sub-professional Zambians so that they could eventually take-over the responsibilities of managing the various statistical activities – and I happened to be one of the beneficiaries.

Going out of my country Zambia to Tanzania by train in 1986, was the first time I had left Zambia and equally the first time I left Africa was in 1988 to go to Southampton, United Kingdom.

*Interviewer: You returned to school after a gap of about 15 years to get a Master in Business Administration (MBA) from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Kenya, what spurred you to get an MBA?*

Yes, I returned to school in 2008 to fulfill a number of unfulfilled desires and dreams. First I had planned to do further studies after Southampton and subsequently in 1994 I was admitted for a Ph.D. program in statistics. In that same year my daughter, a fourth child after three boys was born. This excitement energized me to even proceed with my Ph.D. Unfortunately, my wife, Jennifer, was taken ill a few weeks after the birth of our daughter. The situation got worse and I had to withdraw all my school intentions so that I could care for my wife and my daughter. She could not even breast-feed and therefore I had to make arrangements for my mother to take care of my daughter. Six months later in July 1994 my wife passed away and that shattered all plans – I was devastated. My mother took care of my daughter until she was five years old. My daughter is currently studying for her Masters in Law at Durham University in UK. She will graduate in July 2017.

After several years of reflection, I decided to go back to school – the first time was in 2001 when I registered for MBA with Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt University, in UK but I had to defer some courses because I took an appointment with IMF as Regional Advisor in February 2002. It was difficult to get back to serious school because my job involved a lot of travelling. In 2008, I made a commitment to start again, but this time at Jomo Kenyatta University after negotiating with my employers to give me time and reduce the amount of travel, so that I can finish my MBA. Thoughts of pursuing a Ph.D. program have not faded away although I am not sure I can still do it given the various demands on my time. Notwithstanding, I am very satisfied with achievements in my career.

*Interviewer: You began your professional career at the Central Statistical Office in Zambia and rose through the ranks to the position of Deputy Director and acting Director. What did you see as your greatest satisfaction? And is there any one project while you were at the Central Statistical Office that you feel you will be able to look back on and say that it was your favorite project?*

Working at the Zambia Central Statistical Office was great fun, having started at a very young age. During my employment at the statistical office, I was involved in a number of statistical surveys including two censuses of population and housing. For example, I was heavily involved in the management of the Census of Population and Housing in 2000. Another survey that I drew a lot of satisfaction from was a “longitudinal income and expenditure household survey” in 1993 where I was a team leader. As a team, we were charged to derive new weights for the consumer producer index (CPI) for a new base year, 1994 – the last base year it was twenty years old. It was the first time I was given such a responsibility. I felt privileged to lead an excellent dedicated team. This survey not only derived ICP weights, it also developed a new basket of goods and services for CPI, as well as derived poverty estimates and employment estimates along with estimates of informal sector employment. The results were widely accepted and consequently they were also used to improve the national accounts. In addition, to other surveys, I was a principal investigator for a reproductive health survey sponsored by Population Council – an international, nonprofit, non-governmental organization. Being part of the survey made it possible for me to be the first staff at time then at Central Statistical Office to be a consultant in the Philippines in 1998, where I was involved in two Universities for a month on data issues related to reproductive health and to discuss best practices from the Zambian experience – this turned my professional life.

Of a huge scale exercise is the Census in 2000. Census taking is like a “war situation” because it literally puts every statistical activity at a halt include temporary demobilizing activities of other departments just to ensure the census enumeration is a success. I had the privilege to be appointed as acting Director since the incumbent also was acting in a higher position at the Ministry of Finance. My involvement in a census undertaking, entailed managing over a 100,000 staff at different levels. This experience helped me improve skills in strategic management, planning and leadership.

Another interesting experience I had was when I had to represent the head of Central Statistical Office at annual committee meetings of Directors of Statistics from member states of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). When I first attended, I could hear some of the Directors speaking in low tones. They wondered what this young man was doing in a committee of statistical elders. But over the years, I earned their acceptance and respect. I was a young man among the elders.

*Interviewer: Could you give a little bit of background of the history of statistics in Zambia?*

Zambia is relatively a young country, having received its independence on October 24, 1964 and at independence it had only 100 Zambian graduates. It had no university at the time. All Zambian graduates obtained their tertiary education outside Zambia. Most of the statistical records were kept in Salisbury in South Rhodesia, now Harare, Zimbabwe. But over the years, with the need to have evidence-based data to support the much-needed infrastructure, the national statistical system grew, especially after the first post-independence census of population and housing in 1969. With the support of UNFPA,<sup>4</sup> ODA (DfID),<sup>5</sup> World Bank and other development partners, the national statistical office became a pillar in the region in a number of areas; it set up offices in all 9 provinces to support the policy needs at provincial level. Currently, to a very large extent, the statistical office is robust enough and has continued to produce most of the data in a timely manner. However, like many statistical offices in developing countries, it continues to face a number of challenges, particularly with human and financial resources as well as ensuring stable IT infrastructure.

*Interviewer: You left the Central Statistical Office in Zambia to be the Resident Regional Advisor for the International Monetary Fund (IMF). How did that come about?*

Having been appointed Deputy Director in 1998 responsible for research, dissemination and data center, I was responsible among other activities to ensure that the operations divisions within the statistical of-

fice adhered to quality issues. I was at the time also appointed GDDS national coordinator after attending a training seminar in Pretoria, South Africa on GDDS. So, when IMF held the first meeting on GDDS in 1999 in Botswana, I was asked if I would be interested to work for IMF. Subsequently, I was interviewed by the then Director of Statistics at the IMF and was offered the job as Resident Regional Advisor, but since the initial appointment was only for 18 months, I opted to negotiate with my employers to be seconded to IMF so that upon completion of the appointment I could come back to my previous job. However, due to the progress and achievements of the project on GDDS, my contract was renewed twice until 2009. After working for IMF for seven years, I took an appointment as a consultant for World Bank before I joined the African Development Bank in April 2010.

*Interviewer: This position entailed you promoting statistical capacity building activities in 21 Anglophone African countries. I imagine that there was some great variation in the statistical capacity over these 21 countries. Could you describe the various activities that were required? Could you give a little bit of background of the IMF's role in these 21 countries before you arrived?*

Briefly talking about my role during my career at the IMF, I was responsible for the promotion of statistical capacity building activities in 21 Africa Anglophone countries under the General Data Dissemination System Project (GDDS). This involved the design, management and coordination of technical assistance of the GDDS components in collaboration with the recipient countries. My position involved planning inputs, managing work and liaising with the technical assistance experts providing support to countries. In this role, I also worked very closely with the World Bank GDDS Manager on the provision of technical assistance in the socio-demographic areas. Additional responsibilities involved representing the IMF at international meetings, and collaborating with regional and sub-regional agencies involved in statistical capacity building initiatives. The technical assistance under the IMF is in the areas of Real, Financial, External, and Monetary sectors.

*Interviewer: Is there any one project while you were in this position that you feel you will be able to look back on and say that it was your favorite project?*

During the period, we noticed a number of improvements in countries in terms of the quality of statistics

<sup>4</sup>United Nations Population Fund – <http://www.unfpa.org/>.

<sup>5</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department\\_for\\_International\\_Development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_for_International_Development).

and the dissemination of their statistics. Some countries started posting their data on their website including release calendars. A few countries, such as Mauritius, Seychelles, Botswana and Namibia, we targeted to be among the first African countries migrating to another tier, the Special Data Dissemination standard (SDDS) which provides guidance to countries seeking access to international capital markets in the dissemination of economic and financial data to the public. I also noticed that in countries such as Kenya, the GDDS played the role of a catalyst to bring donors together to support the development of statistics.

*Interviewer: Over your career so far, how has your international experience impacted your views on government statistics and how has it helped you in thinking in the strategic direction?*

I have been working in international agencies since 2002. My views on government statistics have been mixed. While statistics are widely considered important to inform decision-making at all levels including by national governments, this has not been matched with investment needed to generate the much needed data. Many governments have given lip service in support for data to inform development plans that would assist/improve the lives of the people – they have relied on development partners to provide the resources. They have not even cared to modernize statistical legislations. Thus, as a result, the quality of statistics has remained the biggest draw back in many African countries. On the other hand, when development partners have offered to assist, their support is uncoordinated and is on ad hoc basis, which has made it difficult to assure sustainability and capacity building. The partners tend to compete among themselves, and unfortunately recipients of support are not able to manage it efficiently. This, in many cases, has resulted in huge amounts of data being collected, but not adequately being analyzed because the national statistical systems are concentrating more on gathering data. Some of this is attributed to the multiplicity of partners who out-pressure the national statistical system to collect data within their mandate which is not always aligned to government needs. For example, some surveys have similar questions and if there was proper coordination among the donors, the number and frequency of surveys could be minimized. In turn, more time could be spent on analyzing the available huge amount of data.

That said, there are also a number of the countries where the national statistical system has operated

reasonably efficiently. In a few cases, countries rely on national resources to support the statistical surveys including censuses. Even where development partner provide support, it is through a common framework, with prioritized activities such as the national strategy for the development of statistics (NSDS).

However, overall, there is still a lot that needs to be done to have better and quality government statistics.

*Interviewer: Currently, you are the Director of the African Centre for Statistics (UNECA), could you tell me about the organization?*

The African Centre for Statistics (ACS) is one of the divisions at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and serves as a regional service centre for data on economic, social, demographic, geospatial information and environmental conditions. Over the years, it has focused its role on statistical development in Africa and has contributed towards better economic management and tracking of progress towards the achievement of national and international development objectives and goals including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>6</sup>

In 2012, the ACS refocused its strategic orientation in the area of statistics building on the recognition that despite ongoing efforts, African countries still face the perennial challenge that much of the relevant statistical data aimed at supporting development needs are not collected, compiled, and disseminated in a timely fashion due to a number of hampering factors, including a low technology base. The new orientation in statistics at the ECA entails an exploration of alternative data collection operations. ACS supports the collection, processing, analysis, dissemination and archiving of data in three main categories. These three categories are:

- Data labeled as official statistics that are already being collected using manual processes, with a view to improving the process through the application of ICT;
- Data labeled as official statistics, but which are not being collected regularly with a view to identify why they are not being collected regularly and where the application of ICT might alleviate the current problems and improve their collection and availability; and

---

<sup>6</sup><https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>.

- Data that are not usually classified as official statistics, but for which there is a recurrent need, with a view to establishing procedures for collecting them regularly using modern technology.

The latter include real time data collection and processing of unstructured datasets referred to as “Big Data” where available.

ACS efforts to support countries to build sustainable statistical systems involves all countries, Anglophone and Francophone as well as former Portuguese and Spanish colonized countries. It is worth noting that there are statistical capacity differences that exist between the Anglophone and Francophone countries. Much of these differences seem to be associated with the administrative arrangements from when they were under colonial control. However, these are addressed through governance framework which bring together all the heads of national statistical offices to discuss statistical development, as well as, share experiences, namely the Statistical Commission for Africa (a resemblance of the UN Statistical commission), African Statistics Charter and other strategic frameworks. Through these arrangements, significant progress has been made to improve the statistical systems, particularly in the last decade or so. However, despite the improvement, huge challenges still remain in a number of areas. For example, some include the statistical legislation, infrastructure including IT, human and financial resource as well poor coordination of statistical programmes. The latter situation is exacerbated by the poor or the lack of coherent and coordinated support by development partners. This situation, has led to a number of challenges at ACS as one of the functionaries supporting statistical development in Africa. It has required ACS and other agencies to continually support countries in order to sustain the capacity and gains made, as well as play a catalytic role, by assisting in the coordination of donor support in statistics. This is not easy given that ACS does not have enough capacity itself, both in terms of human and financial. Going forward, at ACS, we have resolved that one way of addressing these issues will be through a “win-win” partnership with other partners providing support in statistics. I know this is not going to be easy with many players coming on board.

*Interviewer: Most recently you were at the United Nation’s World Data Forum in Cape Town, South Africa, where you were on several panels*

- RETHINKING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT: NEW APPROACHES TO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR BETTER DATA;

- CAPACITY BUILDING FOR MODERNIZATION OF INSTITUTIONS, GOVERNANCE AND BUSINESS PROCESSES; and
- A MODERNISATION OF COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORKS AMONG DATA COMMUNITIES.

Could you give a brief summary of the panels in which you participated?

I attended this first World Data Forum which was held in Cape Town, South Africa in January 2017. This was the first ever platform in my recollection where the official statisticians interacted with data enthusiasts who were not statisticians. The forum was a platform for intensifying cooperation with various professional groups, such as information technology, geospatial information managers, data scientists, and users, civil society, academia and other stakeholders. It explored innovative ways to apply data and statistics for SDGs for instance. I was privileged to participate in High Level sessions as a panellist and also organised a session on “Making official statistics open by default.” The high-level sessions were:

- Rethinking capacity development: new approaches to capacity development for better data, where I addressed issues on what capacity development entails for SDGs, i.e. how to build capacity for SDG data measuring, monitoring and implementation; how to assist NSOs and/or NSS in general to build capacity in order to be responsive in tracking progress, i.e. provide data for tracking; and How to build data ecosystems where academia, civil society and the private sector have an increasing role to play in the production and use of data;
- Capacity building for modernization of institutions, governance and business processes, Here I focused on the following issues, promoting data to inform policies by putting more focus on increasing demand and use of data; fostering strong institutions and high-quality data processes; pursuing effective governance structures by encouraging independence, ownership, and empowerments; building partnerships with other public and private data producers and innovators; and establishing multi-year financing using domestic, regional, and international sources, based on transparent and collaborative donor funding streams; and
- A modernization of collaborative frameworks among data communities, and discussion was with respect to data revolution in Africa.

*Interviewer: Conferences and forums are usually beneficial on a variety of levels – this being the first UN World Data Forum; what did you find most beneficial regarding this forum?*

The forum was particularly useful because it gave me the opportunity to interact with non-statisticians and to hear their side of story on why data is important. Statisticians are terribly bad communicators and when they do communicate, they usually talk to themselves. They assume everyone understands what they mean. So, this was a big eye-opener for most forward-looking statisticians, like myself, allowing us to begin to look at issues differently. It was also an opportunity for forging new relationships, new partners etc.

*Interviewer: Did this forum experience impact your views on official statistics and has it made you change any of your thinking in the strategic direction or development/transformation as Director of the African Centre for Statistics?*

In a sense, yes. It did impact my thinking particularly on three issues, thus, given the diverse agenda, increasing demand, increasing number of players in the statistical arena and scarce resources, it is no longer possible to go it alone – partnership and building trust, simplicity and realistic approaches are the key to real impactful capacity development. Secondly, it was clear to me that statisticians cannot be the only players and that non-statisticians, as well as other data enthusiasts will be required to participate to have any meaningful impact; and thirdly, statisticians can continue to be gate keepers of statistical norms but if they don't allow others to come in, they will remain alone, and isolated. The users want the data now and not for yesterday but for today. Therefore, statisticians have to be innovative to ensure these needs are met, while putting in place measures to ensure the measurements are not out of forecast. The challenge is for us statisticians to embrace this change to make data available for today and not yesterday.

*Interviewer: May we ask you some questions pertaining to your other professional activities such as your involvement with the IAOS? How did you become involved with IAOS?*

I have always been involved in knowledge-sharing associations since my school days, although I became more engaged after 1990. In Zambia, I joined the eco-

nomie association of Zambia – though I was not very active since my background is in statistics. For the statistical profession, I became associated with the Royal Statistical Society of UK in the mid-1980s and I have remained a member since then. I eventually became a Chartered Statistician and a Chartered Scientist in 1999 and 2009, respectively. In addition, as you may have noticed from my resume, I have been a member of the ISI since 1992, as well as a member of the section for International Association of Survey Statisticians (IASS). The motivation for me to be a member of the IASS was the interest I had in survey sampling. I later became drawn to official statistics and became a member of IAOS. This interest has always been there, given that all my career life I have been working on official statistics. But I must say that I was also encouraged by ISI President Prof. Vijay Nair – given my involvement in official statistics.

*Interviewer: How do you see IAOS can have an impact on official statistics?*

The work of IAOS, in my view, has not yet become visible and therefore there is still a lot of work still to do to ensure a real impact, particularly in developing countries. Most of the statisticians in the developing regions are not aware of the association, let alone how they can benefit from IAOS. However, under the leadership of the current President, I see a lot of effort to reach out to statisticians through various means including university students. Student aspiring to become official statisticians will be key in creating the necessary impact on official statistics. This is even more important now given the drive to open official statistics. Statistical programmes will also need to change to take into account emerging issues and, in particular, the evolving statistical agenda.

*Interviewer: Your CV indicates a breadth of activities in a variety of arenas, and you have accomplished a lot already. Looking into the future, is there something you are still looking forward to accomplish?*

One area I would like to work on in the coming years is demystifying official statistics as an area that is open only to statisticians and that official statistics/data cannot be open, i.e. making official statistics/data open by default using the existing provisions within UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. I think there is scope for discussion with official statisticians to accommodate the new thinking around openness without



going against the principles. The superfluous gap of understanding openness between the open data community mainly composed of civil society and private sector needs to be bridged otherwise the official statisticians will be left behind, guarding the principles at the expense of providing the badly needed data for immediate use. So, this is one area I would like to champion along with others.

*Interviewer: Overall, what are some of the challenges you see facing statistician working in government settings?*

First of all, it must be acknowledged that government statistical settings provide opportunities to become very good statistically in a specific area. However, at the same time, one is exposed to other areas. I, for one, was exposed to a number of areas. This included the reproductive field, where at one point, I was even a principal investigator on a big reproductive health survey. I led this project with the support of the Population Council. However, the downside of it is that working for the government, the remuneration is low compared to the private sector including the reserve banks. Secondly, there is a tendency for the donors to support the statistical areas related to the social sector compared to those in the economic sector. The result is that statisticians force themselves to work in the areas that have donor support so that they can be involved in surveys and receive per diem which in turn increases their income. The result is that economic statistics end up poorly serviced. This needs to change and there needs to be a balance by creating the right environment for economic statisticians to remain focused and not be lured by allowances from social surveys. In addition, because of poor salaries, statistician can barely manage to be affiliated to statistical associations, including the ISI.

*Interviewer: Has the field of statistics changed since you received your education? If no, what has sustained it, if yes, in what ways did it change?*

The importance of statistics has undoubtedly remained at the centre of discussions over the years on data for development. No one questions its importance and its depth of understanding, diversity and need for it has increased with varying degrees depending on the level of development in a country. However, it has been observed that while it is recognized that statistics is important, the level of investment has not been matched, especially in developing countries, and more in fragile countries, as well as countries coming out of conflict. Most of the countries “play catch up” with the change of the statistical landscape with new demands, methodological changes, etc. Many countries are failing to cope, although one would have expected them to take advantage of new changes to leap-frog over other developed countries or countries which did not experience conflict. The many players in the statistical arena have not made it any easier either, as each one of them come with their objective, for the same activity, elbowing each other fighting for resources, etc. without assessing whether the recipient countries have the capacity to absorb the support. So, certainly the field of statistics has changed over the years. Especially in the last few years, the field of statistics has begun to include none traditional data generators and enthusiasts, such as the civil society.

*Interviewer: In conclusion, do you have any words of wisdom for students preparing for working in the world of official statistics?*

My advice to students is to be ready to learn, be adaptive to new ideas, be ready to be challenged and to challenge. I believe the best forum for serious learning which is not found in a classroom is to be affiliated with an association of practitioners in the field of statistics, and this includes those who generate data, as well as statistics.

*This concluded our interview with Oliver Chinganya.*