

DEBATE ON VOTE 12: STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA

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Misuse of statistics can produce subtle, but serious errors in description and interpretation, subtle in the sense that even experienced professionals make such errors, and serious in the sense that they can lead to devastating decision errors. Social policy, medical practice, and the reliability of structures like bridges all rely on the proper use of statistics. Even when statistics are applied, the results can be difficult to interpret for those lacking expertise.

It goes without saying therefore that statistics is a complex subject, for those who study it extensively but more so for a lay person. Having said that, we cannot continue to pardon general ignorance of statistics. Statistics form a key basis tool in business and manufacturing as well. It is used to understand measurement systems variability, control processes, for summarizing data, and to make data driven decisions. In these roles, it is a key tool, and perhaps the only reliable tool.

It is our view as UCDP that studies in statistics need to be introduced as early as possible to our learners so that it does not continue to be scarce skill and so that we can alleviate the general ignorance on statistics,

At an applied level, we need to develop a system whereby Statistics SA does not rely upon available data, which is usually made available by other entities or departments, to formulate statistics; but perhaps have a coordinated data collection system where Stats SA would be able to collect data from the original source.

It is always an embarrassing case to find that after certain statistics have been issued, for instance crime statistics, then allegations that statistics have been tempered with, come forth. We particularly cannot continue to

have a repeat of episodes like the 2009 episode where the media reported on Constable Craig Josiah of Pietermaritzburg who had been suspended and claimed victimisation after he exposed fraudulent activities in the capturing of crime statistics.

These are statistics that individuals rely upon to make real, serious life decisions like where to buy their homes and these should not be tampered with; we must ensure that. Besides, we are only able to tackle any problem when we know its intensity and therefore if we continue to have tampered statistics, we shall continue to make flawed decisions.

Notwithstanding, the UCDP accepts the Budget vote for Statistics South Africa.

Thank you.