The LIVE Database for Africa

World Bank

Also available at: http://www4.worldbank.org/afr/stats/ldb.cfm

Introduction

Bringing the Live Database (LDB) to Africa is part of a regional program to help improve monitoring and evaluation capacity in African countries. It is designed to provide decision makers in Africa, both within and outside government, easier access to the latest development data for more informed decision making. This is accomplished by installing the LDB system in national and regional institutions.

During the past two years ago, the LDB was installed as a pilot program at the National Statistic Institute in Mozambique, the African Development Bank, the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the South Africa Department of Finance, and demonstrated in another dozen institutions. To date, over 20 institutions have made formal requests for installation of the LDB.

The process of installing the LDB in a statistics office, a ministry or central bank inherently requires a needs assessment. It is a unifying framework for supporting the way in which statistics are collected, stored and disseminated to key constituencies. The LDB therefore transforms the way people work by centralizing all data in once place and providing users various tools to access and manipulate the data based on their needs. Thus the LDB becomes a key tool for strengthening statistical capacity.

Feedback from the experience in these institutions has been positive overall, though not without its problems. The positive feedback indicates that access time has been reduced and efficiency gains have been made in generating their regular reports. The Briefing Book was particular popular as it provided non-specialists analytical capability to understand the data and put it in context. Other indicators that reflected that these institutions benefited from the LDB were that the data were key inputs in their key publications and reports, the creation of LDB departments, the establishment of LDB hotlines or email addresses.

The negative feedback has been that the system is not flexible enough in its current state to really have full impact. The shortcomings are the unsophisticated query tool, the inability to access and generate reports with high frequency or sub-national data, the absence of meta data (information on the data), the complexity of designing new reports, and the lack of adequate data administration tools. The system design is closed and changes require

expensive and often inaccessible programming time. The ability to wholesale the LDB is limited given the enormous amounts of time required to fine tune the system to various operating systems and conditions.

As a result, a 2nd Generation LDB system has been under development and nearing completion. The new LDB system addresses all of the above concerns and adds new capabilities that make it a powerful analytical tool. The system is fully web based and uses On Line Analytical Processing (OLAP) technology. This means that users can perform complex calculations on the fly, capabilities not previously available or required expensive programmers to do. At the same time, the system is designed as a tool kit, using off-the-shelf technology that allows it to be replicated, transferred and installed anywhere. This assumes minimum hardware and know-how.

The strategy for installing the 2nd Generation LDB system is to transfer the knowledge of the system to regional institutions committed to supporting national institutions who wish to have the LDB installed. This wholesale approach builds on the commitment by regional institutions that have already installed the LDB, to support other institutions. Trust funds and grants are being sought to underwrite equipment, consultants (both short-and long-term) and training workshops for national statistical offices and ministries. Two workshops are current planned for Fall 2000, one in Southern Africa (SADC countries) and another in Western Africa (francophone countries).

For more information please contact Ronnie Hammad

Lessons learned from installation of the LDB in Africa

- **Transforming the way people work**: The LDB is more than simply installing hardware and software and periodically transferring data. It involves transforming the way staff and managers store, access, manipulate and analyze economic information. Where successfully installed task forces were set up, implementation teams were put in place, and appropriate administrative procedures were developed. The key is to customize the system and deciding on how the system can best serve its user's needs. This implies wholesale training of staff, extensive user support (hand-holding) and strong systems support.

- **Management commitment**: Organizations that perceive the LDB as critical to their mission of developing country economic knowledge are more likely to succeed in adopting the system. INE in Mozambique was strongly committed to the project. They sent two staff members to Washington for training, created an LDB unit within the National Accounts Department, and have committed significant resources and equipment to maintaining the system.
- **Focus groups**: As with the development of the LDB at the World Bank, the experience at the AfDB and DBSA has been that focusing on user's needs is key. An considerable amount of time was spent consulting various departments and understanding the relationships between the country departments, the statistics

department, the sector departments and the Financial Risk Management Department (FRM) units. What new features, indicators, or standard reports were need. Bottom line: buy-in from staff.

- **LDB Task force and role of team work**: In the initial phase of installation, an LDB task force composed of the Task Manager, the Data Administrator, Computer User Support, the Network support, and representatives of various departments, should be established. It is recommended that in the initial phase the task force meet weekly to review progress and to address any problem areas that might arise.
- **Data administration**: Instituting appropriate data administration procedures is perhaps the single most important function surrounding the database. The appointment of a qualified data administrator, the setting up of access rights, and controlling access to the database all determine the long-term sustainability of the system.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can the LDB system be customized to meet the needs of our staff and organization? Can we add our own indicators and develop our own standard reports? The LDB has the built-in flexibility to allow one to add new indicators, customize standard reports, change the methodology used to calculate growth rates, etc. It is a system, not simply a database with current data from the World Bank. However, the current LDB system does not accommodate high frequency data, sub-national data, and meta data (information on the data). These are being developed in the 2nd Generation LDB system.

Who and how will the World Bank support us if we need assistance? For how long will we have to rely on the World Bank. Can't they do this on our own? The World Bank is committed to supporting regional institutions requiring technical assistance and has dedicated resources to that end. The purpose of this support is to develop the in-house capacity to maintain the system independent of the World Bank.

How often will the data be updated and how will it be transferred?

The frequency of updates to the LDB will be based on the Data Reporting Guidelines established by the Africa region of the World Bank. Currently, a minimum of four (quarterly) updates a year are made to the macroeconomic data which come directly from the country desks of World Bank economists. However, with some of the new 2nd Generation LDB tools already in operational, more frequent updates are likely. In addition, data from other sources (IMF, OECD, UN agencies, etc.) are updated as they become available. Once the Database is updated at HQ, a backup copy of the file is made and placed on a World Bank File Transfer Protocol (FTP) site. An email is sent informing the data administrators in each organization of the availability of a new Update which can than easily be downloaded to replace the existing one. It is important to note, however, that institutions can do their own updating and need not have to wait for the next World Bank update.

How does the LDB link with econometric tools (RMSM-X, Maxsim, Eviews, 1-2-3, etc.)? Will they be receiving new upgrades to the system once they become available?

Through the Bank's PREM Thematic Group **Data and Tools for Economic Analysis (TEA)**, a number of econometric tools are currently being redesigned to become more compatible and allow for the easy transfer of data with the CLDB platform, which is now the standard platform at the World Bank. In addition, a number of new and powerful tool bars (developed by the designers of Maxsim) are being added to the standard CLDB that allow users to more easily access, calculate ratios and growth rates, and interface with other files, sheets, and even SQL servers. In other words, there is a group of people at the Bank dedicated to ensuring that new tools are constantly being added to the LDB platform.

How much will it cost? What's in it for the World Bank?

Currently the World Bank does not charge for either the LDB programs or for the regular transfer of data. However, it does seek to recover the cost of the supervision missions from country budgets. Additional costs could involve hardware, software, and licenses the institution might have to acquire for installation (such as an SQL server and Windows NT licenses). Finally, in cases where it is deemed necessary, a programmer might be required to maintain the system. These costs vary widely based on local costs and needs.