



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Workshop for African countries on the Implementation of
International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics
in African context: challenges and good practices**

**Jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division and
African Centre for Statistics of the Economic Commission for Africa**

27-30 May 2008, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

Report of the Workshop

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I. Purpose and organization

1. The workshop on the implementation of International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics for Anglophone African countries was organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in collaboration with the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The workshop took place from 27 to 30 May 2008 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The main purposes of the workshop were: (a) to present and discuss the *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (IRDTS 2008)* recently adopted by the thirty-ninth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission; (b) to review the state of distributive trade statistics compilation in African countries; and (c) to identify the challenges and good practices in their collection, compilation and dissemination. The workshop contributed also to the preparation of future manuals that will provide practical guidance to compilers of distributive trade statistics.

2. The workshop was attended by: 17 participants from the following Anglophone African countries - Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia; two staff members of UNSD; and 11 staff members of ACS. Among the country participants, 14 were funded by UNSD while the 3 local participants from Ethiopia were funded by their own country. The remaining participants were funded by their own organizations. Logistical support was provided by the ACS.

II. Summary of the opening statements

3. In her opening statement Mrs. Youlia Antonova, Chief of the Distributive Trade Statistics Section of UNSD, welcomed the participants and expressed her gratitude to the ACS for hosting the workshop and providing both substantive and logistical support. Further she outlined that this workshop is part of the UNSD strategy for assisting African countries with the enhancement of their knowledge and use of good practices in the collection and compilation of basic economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics in particular and to enable them to meet more effectively the needs of policy makers, business community and to support the implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts and statistical development in general.

4. The workshop is also a continuation of the UNSD joint work and fruitful collaboration with ACS, initiated last year and geared towards the advancement of statistical capacity-building in African countries. This collaboration has already resulted in the organization of two workshops on basic economic statistics which took place in Pretoria, South Africa on 23-26 July 2007 and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 16-19 October 2007 respectively. The conclusions and recommendations from these workshops covered a wide range of relevant issues which have been taken into account in the UNSD work on distributive trade statistics.

5. Distributive trade plays an important role in the economies of both developed and developing countries as it ensures the principal link between producers and end consumers in the economy. Increasingly it provides also a link between producers and buyers operating on the global markets as exporters and importers. At the same time the organization of distributive trade has evolved a lot during past years and statistics need to reflect the new tendencies. National Statistical Offices as producers of distributive trade statistics face the challenges of producing timely, high quality and internationally comparable statistics on distributive trade from scarce data sources and disseminating them to a very heterogeneous community of users. UNSD and ACS are strongly committed to provide assistance to African countries to enable them to meet these challenges.

6. One of the main objectives of the present workshop is to present and discuss the new *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008*, which provide a comprehensive methodological framework for the collection, compilation and dissemination of distributive trade statistics in all countries irrespective of the level of advancement of their statistical systems. As such, the workshop can be viewed as a forum for discussion on the general applicability of these recommendations, having in mind that they are not intended to be prescriptive but rather, should be implemented by national statistical offices in a way appropriate to their own circumstances, including identified user needs, resources, priorities, and respondent burden.

7. The process leading to the preparation and final adoption of the IRDTS 2008 included the establishment of a United Nations Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics mandated to assist UNSD in the review and revision of the old recommendations. UNSD expressed its gratitude to Egypt, Ghana and South Africa which represented the African region in the Expert Group, for their contribution to the successful drafting and completion of the document.

8. In accordance with the advice of the Statistical Commission in its thirty-seventh session the future plans of UNSD on distributive trade statistics include development of practical guidance on the compilation of these statistics and description of good country practices. More specifically, with the aim of improving international comparability and enhancing capacities of developing countries UNSD plans to prepare two follow-up manuals to complement IRDTS 2008: *Distributive Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual* and *Indices of Distributive Trade: A Handbook of Good Practices*. UNSD sees the forum of the present workshop as one that can constructively contribute to the preparation of these manuals by identifying special circumstances of organization of distributive trade in Africa and challenges and good practices of African countries in the collection, compilation and dissemination of distributive trade statistics. The deliberations during the second part of the workshop on the state of distributive trade statistics compilation in African countries will help us to achieve this objective.

9. In his opening statement Professor Ben Kiregyera, Director of the African Center for Statistics (ACS) welcomed the participants and expressed his delight to see so many

senior staff from national statistical offices attending this workshop and pointed out that this shows the importance that their respective governments attach to the improvement of distributive trade statistics in support of the compilation of national accounts and statistical development in general. The importance of the measurement of distributive trade in relation to both poverty reduction and national development cannot be over-emphasized. In many African countries retail trade, wholesale trade and transportation represent a significant part of economic establishments in the business register, hence the importance of collecting quality, timely and cross-nationally comparable data on distributive trade.

10. Statisticians need to be very concerned about the status of compilation of distributive trade statistics in Africa since a number of assessments of statistical development in the region have highlighted serious problems and challenges with their compilation, resulting in inadequate statistical information on distributive trade. These include among others the outdated and incomplete business registers; inefficient use of administrative data; non-compliance with the recommendations of IRDTS concepts; inadequate application of sound statistical techniques in sampling and data processing; and the lack of survey data from distributive trade units. There are also institutional constraints that hinder statistical development, such as poor collaboration amongst national ministries of trade or commerce, national statistical agencies and consumer and producer associations as well as inadequate level of human and financial resources to improve the collection and compilation of data.

11. African Center for Statistics extends its gratitude to UNSD for its contribution to the organization of this series of workshops in terms of technical support as well as provision of financial support. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), in collaboration with UNSD, will scale up assistance to African countries in a number of ways. ACS is strongly committed to support national statistical development in relation to economic statistics, national accounts, trade statistics and the informal sector. This commitment will be effected in full collaboration with UNSD along with sub-regional, regional and other international organizations.

12. The demand for quality and timely statistics in Africa has seen an unprecedented increase as policy makers and other stakeholders seek statistical information on national and international developments. To address this increased need the UNECA has been repositioned to serve Africa better and as part of this, knowledge management and statistics were identified as priority sub-programmes of the organization. In order to implement the statistics programme of the UNECA, the African Centre for Statistics with Division status was established in August 2006.

13. Professor Kiregyera concluded that the time has never been more opportune for Africa to make significant progress in statistical development, which supports social and economic progress throughout our countries and across the whole continent. African countries need to turn the rhetoric into reality and look for concrete proposals as to how to do this. This meeting saw an important step in such a process and the deliberations

during it will result in recommendations for improvement of distributive trade statistics quality so necessary for the compilation of national accounts.

III. Evaluation

14. The workshop on the Implementation of International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics in African context: challenges and good practices was evaluated as very important and useful in terms of providing participants with substantial knowledge on the collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of distributive trade statistics. Particularly important it was for those countries that are in the process of conducting distributive trade surveys and can immediately undertake steps for the implementation of the new recommendations. The participants recognized the importance of distributive trade statistics in their own right as well as the importance of making progress in their compilation and reaching conceptual compliance with the IRDTS 2008.

15. All participants expressed their full appreciation of the workshop and valued very positively its outcome as confirmed by their answers to the questions asked in the evaluation questionnaire:

Did you acquire at this workshop any substantive technical knowledge on how:	Yes/No ratio
to produce statistical data?	100%
to analyze statistical data?	100%
to disseminate statistical data?	92%

16. Using a scale from 5 to 1 (where 5 = excellent, 4 = good, 3 = adequate, 2 = poor, 1 = very poor) participants judged the achievement of workshop objectives and its overall value as follows:

Overall value of the workshop	4.64
Overall planning and organization of the workshop	4.36

17. It was a shared feeling in the group that the advancement of distributive trade statistics compilation in the region will require organization of follow-up workshops along with training sessions on practical issues in the compilation of distributive trade statistics.

IV. Findings and conclusions of the workshop

The workshop:

A. General

18. Fully agrees with the new recommendations for compilation of distributive trade as contained in the *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (IRDTS 2008)*, adopted by the thirty-ninth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

19. Strongly supports the development of statistical capacity in African countries aimed at the compilation of high quality and internationally comparable distributive trade statistics in accordance with the concept, definitions and compilation methods recommended in the *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (IRDTS 2008)*.

20. Recommends that the IRDTS 2008, being not prescriptive, should be implemented by national statistical offices of African countries in a way appropriate to their own circumstances, including identified user needs, resources, priorities and respondent burden.

21. Acknowledges the fact that serious difficulties are encountered by African countries in their efforts to compile distributive trade statistics. These issues are not only related to the lack of resources, both human and financial, but also to the organization of statistical work as a whole which include the lack of up-to-date frames for statistical surveys, lack of regular surveys of distributive trade units, low response rates affecting the accuracy of the obtained estimates; unsatisfactory coverage of the informal sector units engaged with distributive trade activity, etc.

22. Recognizes the importance of distributive trade statistics in their own right and encourages countries that do not compile such statistics or have them only as part of national accounts compilation to include them in their strategies for the improvement of basic economic statistics compilation. In this connection, development of a statistical infrastructure, such as the appropriate data sources and statistical techniques for collection and compilation of distributive trade statistics should be considered a priority area of work.

23. Strongly supports the implementation of an integrated approach to compilation of distributive trade statistics for various types of economic units and activities for the achievement of: (i) greater harmonization of the recommendations for distributive trade statistics with the other recently updated international statistical standards such as the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008, the System of National*

Accounts 1993, Rev.1, ISIC, Rev.4, and CPC, Ver.2.; (ii) greater standardization of concepts and definitions, methods and procedures utilized for the common features in economic surveys; (iii) reduced financial and response burden.

24. Welcomes the preparation of the two follow up manuals namely: *Distributive Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual* and *Indices of Distributive Trade: A Handbook of Good Practices*, to complement IRDTS 2008 by providing practical guidance to compilers of distributive trade statistics. Invites countries to actively cooperate with UNSD and ACS in their preparation by providing necessary information on their practices and challenges in the compilation of distributive statistics.

25. Invites UNSD in collaboration with the ACS and in close consultation with national statistical offices to continue its technical assistance programme for the practical implementation of the IRDTS 2008 recommendations.

B. IRDTS 2008 recommendations

26. While agreeing that the scope of distributive trade statistics should be defined according to ISIC, Rev. 4 as including all units classifiable in section G - Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, acknowledges that the implementation of ISIC, Rev. 4 in African countries practices will need time and should be done in accordance with the overall strategy of national statistical offices in a coordinated manner for all statistical domains and surveys. Therefore, requires UNSD to include a transition key from previous versions of ISIC to ISIC, Rev. 4 in the forthcoming *Distributive Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual*.

27. Supports the recommendation that establishment should be the most appropriate statistical unit for distributive trade statistics ensuring maximum homogeneity and geographical distribution of data. However, the choice of a statistical unit may be guided also by other factors such as purpose of the study, the availability and quality of requested data etc. Therefore the enterprise can also be used as the statistical unit. In the majority of cases the establishment and the enterprise in distributive trade are the same except in the case of multi-establishment enterprises that need to be profiled.

28. Encourages African countries to thoroughly review the list of data item for collection and compilation in distributive trade statistics and use it as a reference for developing their own lists of data items in accordance with the existing national circumstances, respondent load and available resources. Those countries which are in the process of conducting distributive trade surveys or censuses are encouraged to undertake immediate steps for its implementation.

29. Agrees that compilation and dissemination of performance indicators should be part of the regular work programmes in distributive trade statistics and advises countries to identify the most important ones and compile them for the purposes of monitoring the performance of the distributive trade sector.

30. Strongly supports the recommendation that the economic surveys, or in some cases economic censuses, in combination with the information from administrative data sources should be the foundation for the successful compilation of distributive trade statistics in the region. Agrees that sound statistical techniques in sampling and data processing should be applied.

31. Fully appreciates the importance and policy relevance of short-term distributive trade statistics. However, considers that the compilation of short-term distributive trade statistics at this stage would be very challenging for the majority of African countries. Lack of resources and adequate infrastructures hinder countries efforts for compiling timely short-term statistics.

32. Advises countries to develop their own data quality assessment frameworks for the measurement of distributive trade statistics quality in accordance with the quality assessment frameworks proposed in IRDTS 2008 and to undertake steps for its enhancement and regular measurement. Encourages countries to compile and disseminate on a regular basis a minimum set of quality indicators for measuring the quality of distributive trade statistics.

33. Advises that the compilation and dissemination of appropriate metadata should be part of the regular work programmes in distributive trade statistics in order to facilitate interpretability of the data produced and also to ensure transparency with respect to the user community.

C. Administrative data

34. Acknowledges the importance of the use of administrative data in the compilation of distributive trade statistics as a tool for compensating the relative lack of survey data and resources in most of the African countries and also as a tool for reducing respondent burden.

35. Advises however, that use of administrative data must be handled with care due to the possibility of potential bias of the reported information. As an example, businesses often tend to underestimate their revenues for tax purposes.

36. Recommends the use of administrative data for measurement the activity of small businesses (for example those operating on a licensing regime) which usually form a significant part of distributive trade sector but contribute less to the generated value added.

37. Strongly encourages and supports an extended collaboration of national statistical offices with line ministries, other government institutions and organizations who are producers of administrative data, in order to facilitate the access to available information and harmonize, to the extent possible, statistical with administrative requirements.

D. *Business register*

38. Stresses the fundamental importance of statistical business register for the compilation of distributive trade statistics, in particular, in providing the necessary tools for identifying statistical units and preparing sampling frames for the conduct of distributive trade surveys.

39. Acknowledges that the majority of African countries face problems in compilation of economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics in particular due to the outdated business register.

40. Strongly recommends to African countries to use all possible means for strengthening the existing, or establishing a new, statistical business register such as the information from the latest economic censuses, available administrative registers and feedbacks from statistical surveys. Development of systematic updating programmes should be considered first priority and a necessary precondition for the efficient organization of economic statistics programmes and implementation of the integrated approach to economic statistics by African countries.

E. *Improving the response rates of DTS surveys*

41. Acknowledges that low response rates of statistical surveys conducted by the national statistical offices is a common issue hindering the capabilities of African countries to produce timely and reliable basic economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics in particular.

42. Advises that national statistical offices should develop long-term strategies for improving the low response rates from statistical surveys. This includes among others, strategies for improving their work with respondents through establishment of personal relationships between NSO staff and units, organization of explanatory campaigns before conduct of significant surveys like economic censuses, organization of regular user-producer conferences, announcement of the purposes of forthcoming surveys on the statistical offices websites, etc. Building trust and personal relationship, sensitizing businesses on the importance of economic statistics along with creating a true partnership with the respondents are the most efficient ways to deal with the low response rates.

43. Concludes that reliability and accuracy of estimates derived on the basis of DTS surveys will be improved if sound sampling and processing techniques are applied and encourages countries to work towards them; requests that UNSD takes into account the needs of African countries and include these in the *Distributive Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual* description of good sampling practices and strategies for improvement of the low response rates.

F. Informal sector

44. Acknowledges the importance of informal sector units engaged with distributive trade activities especially in African countries and more specifically the issue of collecting adequate, reliable and nationally representative data for them.

45. Strongly supports further work on the identification and implementation of good practices in collection and compilation of data for informal sector units engaged with distributive trade. Invites UNSD and ACS to continue their assistance to African countries in this area.

46. Advises countries to use the existing and recently updated international standards and recommendations (1993 SNA, Rev.1 Volume 2, ILO regulations and Delhi Group provisions and handbooks) while designing their national strategies for the measurement of informal sector and informal employment.

G. Distributive trade indices

47. Concludes that the lack of capacity and appropriate price and survey data are the main obstacles for African countries in compiling distributive trade indices on a monthly or quarterly basis.

48. Welcomes first attempts of some African countries to compile distributive trade indices using information from the VAT register. Due to the fact that indices will be compiled for a limited number of DTS units fulfilling the requirements for VAT registration, recommends development and dissemination of accompanying metadata explaining the limitations of these data.

49. Asks UNSD to investigate further and include in the forthcoming publication *Indices of Distributive Trade: A handbook of good practices* practical guidance on the use of VAT information for compilation of distributive indices.

Annex I

Workshop for African countries on the Implementation of International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics in African context: challenges and good practices

Jointly organized by:

United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)
African Centre for Statistics of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

27-30 May, 2008, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Agenda

Tuesday, 27 May 2008

9:00-9:30 Registration

9:30-10:00 Opening ceremony

ACS/UNECA
UNSD

10:00-10:30 Objectives and organization of the meeting
Administrative matters and introduction of participants
Adoption of the agenda

10:40-11:00 *Coffee break*

11:00-12:30 Role and importance of distributive trade statistics, recent trends,
users, challenges of compiling distributive trade statistics and
UNSD work programme in this area

UNSD presentation

*International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics
2008* – reasons for revision, revision process, recommendations of
the 39th session of the Statistical Commission on their
implementation

UNSD presentation

- 12:30-14:00 *Lunch break*
- 14:00-15:30 *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008*
- Overview of the main changes
 - Scope of distributive trade statistics
 - Statistical units and their characteristics
- UNSD presentations
General discussion
- 15:30-15:50 *Coffee break*
- 15:50-17:00 *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (continued)*
- Data items and their definitions
- UNSD presentations
General discussion

Wednesday, 28 May 2008

- 9:00-10:40 *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (continued)*
- Performance indicators
 - Data sources – statistical surveys and frames for them, administrative data sources
- UNSD presentations
General discussion
- 10:40-11:00 *Coffee break*
- 11:00-12:30 *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (continued)*
- Data compilation methods
 - Data collection strategy
- UNSD presentations
General discussion
- 12:30-14:00 *Lunch break*
- 14:00-15:30 *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (continued)*

- Short-term distributive trade statistics – indices of distributive trade, necessity of seasonal adjustments and reconciliation of short-term with annual data

UNSD presentation
General discussion

15:30-15:50 *Coffee break*

15:50-17:00 *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (continued)*

- Enhancing data quality of distributive trade statistics
- Dissemination – recommended list of data items for international reporting

UNSD presentation
Round table discussion

Thursday, 29 May 2008

9:00-10:40 Compilation of distributive trade statistics in African context: challenges and good practices in the system of data collection, periodicity, coverage of units, data items and level of details, dissemination, policy relevance, etc.

UNSD overview of distributive trade statistics in African countries

ACS experience in collection of distributive trade data

Country presentations

10:40-11:00 *Coffee break*

11:00-12:30 Compilation of distributive trade statistics in African context: challenges and good practices (continued)

Country presentations
General discussion

12:30-14:00 *Lunch break*

14:00-15:30 Challenges in surveying the informal sector enterprises engaged with distributive trade – approaches, coverage, quality of data

Country presentations
General discussion

15:30-15:50 *Coffee break*

15:50-17:00 Compilation of distributive trade indices by African countries – national experiences and issues for the future

Country presentations
General discussion

Friday, 30 May 2008

9:00-10:40 Main problems and possible ways to advance the compilation of distributive trade statistics in African countries

A round table discussion
Conclusions and recommendations

10:40-11:00 *Coffee break*

11:00-12:30 Towards improved compilation of distributive trade statistics and implementation of International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 in African countries: follow up-actions

UNSD presentation on the follow-up manuals

A round table discussion

Conclusions and recommendations

12:30-14:00 *Lunch break*

14:00-16:00 Conclusion of the workshop

Evaluation of the workshop

Annex II

List of participants

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