



**Economic Commission for Africa
African Centre for Statistics**

**WORKSHOP ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRIBUTIVE TRADE
STATISTICS (IRDTS) IN AFRICAN CONTEXT:
"CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES"
(Addis-Ababa, 27-30 May 2008)**

Opening Statement

Ben Kiregyera
Director, African Centre for Statistics

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**Workshop Facilitators,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I would like to welcome you all to this workshop on “**Implementation of International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics in African Context: Challenges and Good Practices**”. I am particularly delighted to see so many senior staff from National Statistical Offices here. This shows the importance that our respective governments attach to the improvement of distributive trade statistics in support of the compilation of national accounts statistics 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. We should note that in many African countries, retail trade, gross 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.

The collection of quality distributive trade statistics (DTS) is recognized as the first step in compilation of national accounts and quality DTS are essential for balancing the GDP production side at basic prices as well as the GDP expenditure side at consumer prices. We, therefore, need to be very concerned that a number of assessments of statistical development in

Africa have highlighted serious problems and challenges with compilation of distributive trade statistics including the following:

- out of date and incomplete business registers,
- inefficient use of administrative prices 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 on the various components of prices, notably basic prices, VAT, trade levels and trade margins.

There are also institutional constraints 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 of data and to translate them into national accounts.

As a result of these problems and constraints, there is inadequate statistical information on distributive trade. And this impacts on the compilation of GDP by expenditure and by industry.

This workshop has been convened with the following objectives:

First: To review current practices in the development of distributive trade statistics, including surveys on price components, and the creation and maintenance of business registers and administrative records in order to share best practices and to develop a strategy to improve the quality of surveys and administrative records, to achieve greater compliance of

survey methodology with the IRDTS concepts and to increase the relevance and complementarities between administrative records and surveys.

Second: To understand and address the institutional issues, which are hindering the efficient use of administrative data, and to explore ways in which we can increase collaboration between relevant national ministries, the NSOs and associations of consumers and producers.

And Third: Our over-riding aim is to help African countries to integrate data on distributive trade into the compilation of national accounts so as to measure the contribution of retail trade, gross trade and transportation to the national economy. We are keen to hear your ideas as to how the international agencies might assist with this important work.

We would like to thank the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) for their contribution to the organization of this series of workshops in terms of technical support as well as provision of financial support. The UNECA, in collaboration with UNSD, will scale up assistance to countries in a number of ways. Let me take this opportunity to commit the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) to support national statistical developments in relation to economic statistics, national accounts, trade statistics and the informal sector. This commitment will be effected in full collaboration with UNSD, sub-regional, regional and other international organization and will involve preparation and adaptation of manuals, the organization of expert group meetings, group training, and the conduct of pilot studies. Together with UNSD, we are planning two workshops, one on International Economic and

Social Classifications, planned for September and one on Industrial Statistics, planned for October. This cross-agency collaboration in support of economic statistics in Africa will be enhanced.

I should place these developments in context. In the recent past, African countries and development partners have increasingly recognized the need for better statistics to design public policies informed by evidence and for decision-making. Statistics are an essential support for public policy implementation as well as for monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes in order to understand the impact of development initiatives.

As a result, 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. An African Centre for Statistics (ACS) with Division status was established in August 2006 to implement the statistics programme of the UNECA. These indeed should be exciting times for professional statisticians in Africa. The first Statistical Commission for Africa was held earlier this year, an African Statistician is chairing the UN Statistical Commission; the African Union Commission in collaboration with the other regional partners has produced an African Charter for Statistics, which was considered by the first joint AU/ECA Conference of Ministers in April 2008. Statcom-Africa, which I just mentioned, has established an African Working Group on National Accounts. In addition, an African Statistical Coordination Committee was

established last year to harmonize statistical development in Africa using the Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity Building in Africa (RRSF) as the overarching framework.

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. We need to turn the rhetoric into reality and we look to you for concrete proposals as to how we do this. This meeting is an important step in such a process.

**Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am confident that the workshop will achieve objectives I have outlined. I hope that your deliberations in this workshop will result in recommendations to improve the quality of distributive trade statistics so necessary for the compilation of national accounts.

Before I conclude my remarks, let me once more express the sincere gratitude of the African Centre for Statistics to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) for their support in the organization of this and other workshops, and to each of you for devoting your precious time to attend this workshop.

I wish you an enjoyable and fruitful meeting.