UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

Regional Workshop for African Countries on the Implementation of International Recommendations on Distributive Trade Statistics

Jointly organized by United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT)

17-20 June 2008, Bamako, Mali

Report of the Workshop

United Nations, New York

June 2008

Contents

I. Purpose and organization

1.   This workshop is the second of a series of two regional workshops on the implementation of the *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (IRDTS 2008),* recently adopted by the thirty-ninth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. Devoted to Francophone African countries, it was jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT) and was held, on 17-20 June 2008 at AFRISTAT's Headquarters in Bamako, Mali. The first workshop already took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 27-30 May 2008. It was organized in collaboration with the African Center for Statistics (ACS) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and was devoted to Anglophone African countries. The organization of this series of workshops is part of the UNSD initiative to enhance the knowledge and use of good practices in the compilation of basic economic statistics in general and distributive trade in particular, in African countries. The main purposes of these two workshops were: i) to present and discuss the IRDTS 2008; ii) to review the state of distributive trade statistics compilation in African countries; and iii) to identify the challenges and good practices in their collection, compilation and dissemination. The conclusions from the workshops provided a valuable input to UNSD, UNECA and AFRISTAT in their work programmes in distributive trade statistics, technical assistance and cooperation with other international and regional agencies. Also, these conclusions will contribute to the preparation of future manuals that will provide guidance to compilers of distributive trade statistics.

2.   The workshop was attended by 18 participants from 12 francophone countries (Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Mauritania, Morocco, Senegal and Togo), 2 regional and sub-regional organizations (African Union and AFRISTAT) and 1 international organization (UNSD). All the country participants (12) were funded by UNSD. The remaining participants were funded by their own organization (3 participants from AFRISTAT, 2 participants from UNSD and 1 participant from the African Union). Logistical support was provided by AFRISTAT.

II. Summary of the opening statements

3.   In his opening statement Mr. Thierno Aliou Balde, statistician at the Distributive Trade Statistics Section of UNSD, welcomed the participants and expresses his gratitude to AFRISTAT for hosting the workshop and providing both substantive and logistical support. Further he outlined the UNSD strategy in assisting African countries to improve compilation of basic economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics in particular. The workshop is part of UNSD efforts to enhance the knowledge and use of good practices in the compilation of basic economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics in African countries, in order to meet more effectively the needs of policy

makers and the business community and also to support the implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts and statistical development in general.

4.   The workshop is also the outcome of a joint work and fruitful collaboration between UNSD and AFRISTAT geared towards the advancement of statistical capacity-building for African countries. This collaboration is expected to grow and sustain for the mutual interest of the two agencies. UNSD is strongly committed to assist African countries and as such, will cooperate closely with AFRISTAT in order to create as much synergy as possible and use their resources in the most efficient way.

5.   Distributive trade plays an important role for both developed and developing countries as it ensures the principal link between producers and end consumers. Also, increasingly it provides a link between producers and buyers operating on the global markets as exporters and importers. The contribution of distributive trade activities to the general value added and to the employment in economies is steadily growing. At the same time the demand for high quality, timely and internationally comparable data on distributive trade statistics is growing even more. The organization of distributive trade has evolved a lot in recent years and statistics must reflect these changes. To this end, the responsibilities of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) as producers of distributive trade statistics are considerable. In fact, NSOs are faced not only with compiling DTS from scarce data sources but also with disseminating these statistics to a very heterogeneous community of users. UNSD and AFRISTAT are strongly committed to provide assistance to African countries to enable them to meet these challenges.

6.   One of the main objectives of the workshop is to present and discuss with the participants the new IRDTS 2008, which provide a comprehensive methodological framework for the collection and compilation of DTS in all countries irrespective of the level of advancement of their statistical systems. As such, the workshop can be viewed as a forum of discussion on the general applicability of the recommendations, having in mind that they are not intended to be prescriptive but rather, should be implemented by NSOs by taking into account their own circumstances which include identified user needs, resources, priorities, etc.

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. The IRDTS 2008 represent the outcome of this process but are not the end of the road. In fact, in its 37th session, the Statistical Commission advised UNSD to prepare and develop practical guidance on the compilation of distributive trade statistics including a description of good country practices with the aim of improving international comparability and enhancing capacities of developing countries. In accordance to this advice, 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*. As such, the workshop is also seen as a forum that can constructively contribute to the preparation of these manuals by identifying special circumstances of the organization of distributive trade in Africa and the challenges and

good practices in the collection, compilation and dissemination of distributive trade statistics. It is delightful to see that the workshop has brought together experts from African countries with diverse experiences and needs, which shows the importance that their respective governments attach to the improvement of basic economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics in particular.

8.   In his opening statement Mr. Martin Balepa, Director of AFRISTAT welcomed the participants and thanked them for kindly accepting the invitation to attend this workshop on the implementation of the International recommendations on distributive trade statistics. The importance of distributive trade in relation to economic analysis, national accounting and monitoring of economic conjuncture, and to the evaluation of exchanges within and between nations, cannot be over-emphasized. Distributive trade ensures the link between producers and end consumers. African countries and other partners for development are aware of the necessity of reliable statistics for public policy making and development planning. These data represent an essential tool for decision making and the implementation and assessment of policies. As such, they are a corner stone for the analysis of impacts on development as a whole.

9. However, in spite of their important role, serious problems and challenges have been associated with the production of these statistics in African countries. In fact, they are often non reliable -when they exist- and suffer from inadequate concepts and lack of sound statistical techniques. Also, existing data sources are often under exploited. As such, the challenges faced by the NSOs are considerable as they have to improve the availability and quality of these data, analyze and disseminate the data to a wide range of users both locally and internationally.

10.   By accepting the invitation from Mr. Paul Cheung, Director of the UNSD, AFRISTAT has intended to answer favorably to an institution which works tirelessly for an international cohesion in statistics. The positive response from AFRISTAT to host this event should be seen as a message of gratitude to Mr. Paul Cheung for his considerable and unconditional support to African countries. This workshop is an opportunity for AFRISTAT to get involved in an area for which it has given only a secondary priority in the past. The objectives of the present workshop are in line with AFRISTAT's strategic programme for the 2006-2010 period, which include the capacity building for member states in the area of trade statistics. The workshop gives also the opportunity to NSOs to have the necessary tools to achieve this goal by implementing these new International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics, recently adopted by the 39th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

11.   These new recommendations provide a comprehensive methodological framework which can be adapted to the circumstances of each individual country. They are not a rigid directive system but rather a general framework for international harmonization of methods and practices in the area of distributive trade statistics. They ensure an internal coherence in relation to the System on National Accounts and guarantee also international comparability and transparency.

III. Evaluation

12.   The participants of this second regional workshop on the implementation of IRDTS 2008 in African countries expressed their appreciation of the conduct of the workshop. They also acknowledged the complexity of the task of organizing such meeting and congratulated UNSD and AFRISTAT for the particular effort made to reach the Francophone Africa in their own official language.

13.   All participants expressed their appreciation of the good preparation of the workshop and valued very positively its outcome as confirmed by their answers to the questions posed on the evaluation (please see the table below)

Did you acquire at this workshop any substantive knowledge involving technical on how:	Yes/No ratio
to produce statistical data?	100%
to analyze statistical data?	88%
to disseminate statistical data?	100%

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	4.4
Overall planning and organization of the workshop	4.4

14.   It was a shared feeling in the group that similar workshops should be conducted more frequently in French, along with training seminars on technical issues in the compilation of economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics in particular.

IV. Findings and conclusions of the workshop

The workshop:

A.   General

15.   Strongly welcomes the organization by UNSD and AFRISTAT of this workshop on the implementation of International Recommendations on Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (IRDTS 2008) in African countries, which provided participants, in their own official language (French), with substantial knowledge on the collection, compilation and dissemination of economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics (DTS) in particular;

16.   Strongly welcomes the establishment of a close cooperation between UNSD and AFRISTAT and the harmonization of their assistance programmes in DTS, for the advancement of statistical capacity building in African countries;

17.   Encourages the establishment of a greater collaboration between NSOs of African countries (South-South cooperation) in order to share experiences and exchange ideas on how to deal with issues and challenges related to their statistical work programme;

18.   Encourages an enhanced collaboration between all institutions involved in the collection and compilation of statistical data in general, which include NSOs, line ministries and other government agencies, in order to achieve greater efficiency and make sure that the relevant statistical information is collected only once so as to avoid unnecessary waste of time and resources due to duplication and overlapping of statistical projects;

19.   Concludes that institutional frameworks are adequate for most countries, in providing a legal basis for activities related to the compilation and dissemination of DTS (all NSOs have a Statistical act/law as the basis of their activities); Encourages, however, a strengthening of the authority of NSOs in order to make the existing legal provisions to work;

20.   Acknowledges the fact that most participant countries do not compile DTS as such and serious difficulties are encountered by countries in their efforts for the compilation of these statistics. The 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 coordination of the different agencies responsible for the production of statistical data;

B. IRDTS 2008 recommendations

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

22.   Recognizes the importance of DTS in their own right and encourages countries to include the compilation of DTS in their work programme and not only having them as part of National Accounts compilation;

23.   Advises countries to take into account their own circumstances in setting their work programme in DTS and in implementing IRDTS 2008; The recommendations are not prescriptive and as such must be implemented in accordance with countries' needs and priorities; Recommends countries to adopt a forward-looking attitude in implementing these recommendations and working step-by-step towards achieving these goals in a long term perspective;

24. Agrees that the scope of distributive trade should be defined using ISIC Rev.4 and as such should include all units classifiable in section G - Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; Acknowledges however, that the implementation of ISIC, Rev. 4 by African countries will need time and should be done in accordance with the particular circumstances of countries. In this regard, requires UNSD to include correspondence tables between previous versions of ISIC and ISIC, Rev. 4 in the forthcoming *Distributive Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual*;

25. Supports the recommendation to use the establishment as the most appropriate statistical unit in order to ensure the compilation of homogeneous and geographically distributed data; Recognizes however, that the choice of statistical units reflects the trade-off between data availability and the homogeneity of the economic activity and as such agrees that the enterprise can be also chosen as a statistical unit in some cases; Acknowledges also the fact that in African context, most enterprises have a single establishment and hence coincide with their establishment;

26. Advises countries to use the list of data items as a reference to develop their own list in accordance with their own circumstances including respondent load and available resources;

27. Advises countries to include the compilation and dissemination of performance indicators as part of their regular work programmes in distributive trade statistics; Agrees that countries should use the recommended indicators according to their own circumstances for the purposes of monitoring the performance of the distributive trade sector and also for international comparability;

28. Advises countries to use the quality assessment framework (QAF) proposed in IRDTS 2008 to develop their own QAF and use it as part of their regular work programmes in distributive trade statistics; Agrees that countries should compile and disseminate on a regular basis, a minimum set of quality indicators for the purposes of monitoring the quality of their data and also for international comparability of these data;

29. 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 access and interpretability of the data produced and also to ensure transparency with respect to the user community;

30. Acknowledges the challenges faced by African countries in the compilation of short-term statistics which however, should be part (at least in the long term) of work programmes in distributive trade statistics for the sake of business cycle analysis with respect to the short-term dynamics in the DTS sector; Issues in this area includes the lack of resources (human, financial and technical) and/or inadequate infrastructures which hinder the efforts of compiling timely short-term statistics; Advises countries to establish a medium-to-long term plan for an effective compilation of short-term distributive trade

statistics; Highly welcomes the fact that some countries are planning to compile indices in the near future and include this practice into their regular work programme in DTS;

31.   Advises that countries' practices, needs and challenges in the compilation of economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics in particular, should be documented and used in the preparation of the forthcoming manuals in distributive trade to help building a core set of standards and good practices for the improvement of the compilation of these statistics;

C. Business register

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

33.   Acknowledges the fact that most countries lack of a comprehensive and up-to-date business register for their surveys' programme; Welcomes however, the fact that most countries do maintain at least 'in-house statistical frames' for the conduct of their surveys, and encourages them to use these frames as a basis, along with existing administrative records, for building comprehensive and up-to-date statistical business registers which in turn will enhance the whole statistical data production process;

34.   Encourages countries with no business register to start with existing administrative records/registers and develop their own statistical register which will be used for the conduct of subsequent statistical surveys and to establish a sound updating and maintenance policy using the feedback received from statistical surveys;

D. Use of administrative data

35.   Acknowledges the importance of the use of administrative data in the compilation of basic economic statistics as a tool to reduce respondent burden and also for most African countries, as a tool for compensating the relative lack of resources for conducting appropriate surveys in number, coverage and frequency; Finds also, administrative data highly suitable for covering the segment of units of the population which contributes relatively little to the estimates but makes up a substantial percentage of the number of units in the population;

36.   Welcomes the fact that the use administrative data is a common practice for most countries and encourages countries to make an extensive use of the available data for their work programme in distributive trade statistics;

37.   Strongly encourages and supports an extended collaboration between NSOs and other government agencies and line ministries in order to harmonize the practices in the

compilation of administrative data and take adequate measures to broaden the scope of these data sources and reach a greater coverage of the units;

38.   Advises, however, that use of administrative data must be handled with care as these data were not compiled for statistical purposes at first; Also the possibility of potential bias from the reported information (for example, businesses often tend to underestimate their revenues for tax purposes) calls for more caution in using such data;

39.   Recommends NSOs to identify and review all available administrative data sources in their countries and use the most appropriate of them for compiling DTS; Recommends also, to include explanation notes on the disseminated data or on accompanying metadata, about the limitations of such data obtained from administrative data sources;

E. Improving the response rates

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

41.   Advises that a great deal of work must be done with the respondents (who usually relate trade information to tax purposes) in order to improve the response rates of these surveys. As such, building trust and personal relationship, sensitizing businesses on the importance of economic statistics, along with creating a true partnership with the respondents, are among the most recommended ways for the improvement of response rates;

42.   Encourages countries to use sound sampling and data processing techniques (including imputation and weight updating techniques) to take into account the effects of non response and ensure the reliability and accuracy of estimates derived from their DTS surveys;

F. Informal sector

43.   Acknowledges the importance the informal sector not only for its significant share with respect to the whole distributive trade sector and by extension to the GDP, but also for its socio-economic role as a provider of employment and income to a large portion of the population; Acknowledges also the issue of capturing the activities of these informal units involved in the distributive trade, especially in African countries;

44.   Acknowledges also the importance of the issue of collecting reliable distributive trade information from the informal sector, as in most households surveys respondents tend to underestimate their earnings and overestimate their expenditures;

45.   Welcomes the use of the "1-2-3 method" in AFRISTAT member countries, as a good approach for capturing informal sector units involved in distributive trade activities; Encourages however, to extend the coverage of this type of surveys to rural areas too and not limiting the program to urban areas only;

46.   Advises countries to use also existing international standards and recommendations (Delhi Group and other standards) on informal sector to broaden their "tool box" in this area in order to achieve a greater coverage of informal units; This issue will be also dealt with in the forthcoming compilers manual on distributive trade;

G. Follow up actions

47.   Agrees on the necessity to plan follow-up actions to this workshop, including the evaluation and assessment of countries implementation of IRDTS 2008; Acknowledges the fact that an effective achievement of improved compilation of DTS in the region require technical assistance activities which include among others, practical training seminars/workshops (in French);

48.   Invites UNSD and AFRISTAT, eventually in collaboration with other regional partners, to organize follow-up events along with the preparation and dissemination to countries of follow-up manuals which will provide more guidance on the implementation of these new recommendations on distributive trade statistics; Stresses the importance of providing countries with manuals (including the IRDTS 2008 document) written in French so that Francophone countries will not lag behind the Anglophone countries during the implementation phase;

49.   Strongly welcomes the plan from UNSD to prepare follow-up manuals to complement IRDTS 2008, providing more detailed technical and practical guidance on the compilation of distributive trade statistics, namely:
   - *Distributive Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual*;
   - *Indices of Distributive Trade: A Handbook of good practices*;

50.   Advises that conclusions of this series of workshops along with countries' practices and challenges in the compilation of distributive statistics should represent key inputs for the drafting of these follow up manuals;

Annex I

**Regional 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)
Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT)

17-20 June, 2008, Bamako, Mali

Agenda

Tuesday, 17 June 2008

9:00-9:30	Registration
9:30-10:00	Opening ceremony

> AFRISTAT
> 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, 18 June 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, 19 June 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
	AFRISTAT experience in National Accounting (Implementation of SNA 1993 and new strategy for production of National Accounts in AFRISTAT member states)
	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, 20 June 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

A.   Country participants

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