



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

Regional Workshop for African Countries on Basic Economic Statistics
Jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division and
Statistics South Africa
Pretoria, 23-26 July 2007

Report of the Workshop

United Nations, New York

August 2007

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I Purpose and organization

1. The workshop was jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and Statistics South Africa (Stat SA) and was held on 23-26 July 2007 in Pretoria at Stat SA Headquarters. The main purpose of the workshop was to initiate the new phase of the review process of African country practices in compilation of basic economic statistics in order to build up country statistical capacity by identifying and promoting good data compilation practices and facilitating country-to-country cooperation.

2. The workshop was attended by 23 participants from the following nine countries: Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Tanzania and Zambia and from the United Nations Statistics Division and Economic Commission for Africa. Participation of country representatives from all countries (except for South Africa and Senegal) was funded by UNSD. Logistical support was provided by Stat SA.

II Summary of the opening statements

3. In his opening statement Mr. Vladimir Markhonko, Chief of Trade Statistics Branch of UNSD, on behalf of Mr. Paul Cheung, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, welcomed the participants and expresses his gratitude to Stat SA 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. He indicated that UNSD, as apart of its refocused work programme, has decided to make a special effort to enhance the statistical capacity of African countries in compiling basic economic statistics.

4. In the long term perspective UNSD is committed to provide assistance to national statistical offices of African countries on the basis of principles of a strong national ownership and monitoring the improvement process using agreed performance indicators. The strategic goal of this assistance is to significantly enhance availability and quality of basic economic statistics in African countries which are policy relevant, provide a solid basis for compilation of national accounts and meet data requirements for decision making in business community.

5. During 2007/2008 UNSD plans to conduct a review and assessment of practices of African countries in basic economic statistics in order to identify issues which need to be addressed, establish priorities and to formulate an action plan. It is expected that this initial assessment will address such major areas of capacity building as: (i) policy relevance - to link data requirements for macroeconomic and sectoral policy needs and other user requirements, (ii) adequacy of statistical frameworks the light of international agreed standards, (iii) effectiveness of data collection programmes - to ensure compilation and reporting of the agreed set of dissemination variables; and (iv) adequacy of institutional statistical framework – to review national statistical infrastructure in place for coordination purposes.

6. To ensure active country involvement UNSD will conduct in 2007 two regional workshops: the first workshop (in cooperation with Statistics South Africa) in Pretoria on 23-26 July 2007 and the second, (in cooperation with ECA) – in Addis Ababa on 16-19 October 2007.

7. The main purpose of the first workshop is to provide a forum for an initial exchange of views on current practices and challenges. This workshop was planned to comprise a rather limited group of countries with a mix of various experiences. The findings and conclusions of the workshop are to be used as an input for the second, and a larger, workshop to be held at ECA Headquarters. The main purpose of the second workshop will be to identify a list of key issues which need to be addressed, advise on priorities and to formulate recommendations regarding further actions.

8. Related UNSD 2007 outputs will be (i) a technical report on practices of African countries in basic economic statistics including economic census and economic surveys and (ii) action plan on improvement of basic economic statistics in Africa.

9. Statistician-General of Stat SA, Mr. Pali Lehohla welcomed participants of the workshop and stressed its importance for further development of economic statistics on African continent. He recalled the recent resolution of the UN Economic and Social Council regarding statistical capacity building in developing countries and emphasized that African statistical offices should seek more integration into the global statistical system. He indicated also that African countries possess a pool of high quality statisticians and should rely more on their expertise and knowledge of country circumstances. Country statisticians can contribute more not only to improvement of national statistical systems but also provide a valuable input into global statistical system.

10. In his opening remarks Deputy Director General and Head of Economic Statistics, Mr. Rashad Cassim, focused on the need to pay more attention to identification of good practices to implement existing international recommendations.

III Evaluation

11. 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 (see a table below).

Did you acquire at this workshop any substantive knowledge involving technical on how:	Yes/No ratio
to produce statistical data?	90%
to analyze statistical data?	63%
to disseminate statistical data?	90%

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:

Extend to which workshop objectives were achieved	4.3
Overall value of the workshop	4.4

12. It was a shared feeling of the group that similar workshops should be conducted more frequently and involves other African countries.

IV Findings and conclusions

The workshop:

A. *General*

- IV.1. Welcomed the UNSD initiative to undertake additional efforts to improve compilation of basic economic statistics in general and in African countries in particular.
- IV.2. Concluded that the workshop was successful in terms of setting stage for further improvement in compilation of basic economic statistics in African countries by providing a forum for sharing country experiences, identification of priorities for further work and establishing better country-to-country cooperation on numerous practical issues. The participants are grateful to co-organizers of the workshop – UNSD and Stat SA for their efforts in organizing the event.
- IV.3. Emphasized necessity to ensure involvement of as many as possible of African countries in the review and assessment process and suggests that the next workshop will have a broader sub-regional and multilingual representation.
- IV.4. Found that more clarity is needed with respect to the scope of “Basic Economic Statistics” (BES) including how BES can be defined in terms of work programme elements of national statistical offices (e.g., in terms of types of surveys and disseminated data) and be related to their organizational structure (e.g., what units are compiling BES).
- IV.5. While agreeing that the scope of BES should exclude macroeconomic statistics and selected specialized types of statistics (e.g., government finance statistics), advised that the status of some types of statistics should be further clarified; this includes, for instance, agricultural statistics.
- IV.6. Agreed that market activities are the main focus of basic economic statistics; however, indicated that for many African countries non-market economic activities remain important and their statistical treatment should be further discussed, agreed upon and implemented.
- IV.7. Concluded that compilation of statistics reflecting informal sector should be part of BES. In this connection agreed that the definitions of scope of informal sector, being provided by the Delhi Group as well as by the SNA93, Rev.1, be taken as guidelines while reviewing types of the units covered by BES and stressed that focus should be on developing appropriate compilation methods.

- IV.8. Stressed that the compilation and dissemination of quality indicators should be part of the regular work programmes in economic statistics; agreed that countries should use a minimum set of quality indicators for the purposes of international comparability and base those indicators on the existing international recommendations on data quality assurance frameworks.
- IV.9. Concluded that compilation and dissemination of metadata should be treated as one of the priority areas of work in view of the variety of sources/methods used and recognition of the need to be more transparent with respect to user community. Agreed that such standards as SDDS and GDDS should be followed. Emphasized, in this connection, that being more transparent requires preparation and has resource implications (to be more internally coherent, professional etc.).
- IV.10. Recognized importance of further work on concepts and methods relevant to basic economic statistics in the areas where they are not sufficiently developed and stressed that more attention should be given to practical issues such as description of good data compilation practices under different country circumstances, effective enforcement mechanisms.
- IV.11. Endorsed the UNSD plans to place on its website documents reflecting country practices in economic statistics and to prepare handbooks/manuals on good compilation practices including on economic census and surveys, use of administrative data and statistical business register.
- IV.12. Welcomed close cooperation between UNSD and ECA in provision of technical assistance to African countries and in development of websites and publications documenting and promoting good practices in economic statistics; requests ECA to prepare versions of such publications adapted to African context.
- IV.13. Found that NSOs need to improve their visibility and profile within the system of governmental agencies and sensitize those agencies with respect to usefulness of produced economic statistics for national policy making and need for more close cooperation between those agencies and NSOs including in funding of data compilation projects of mutual interest.
- IV.14. Urged NSOs to pay significantly more attention to dissemination of economic statistics and to improve its visibility among users. This includes making economic statistics more easily accessible to user community and considerably more user friendly; sustainable promotion campaigns should be launched to better educate users on benefits they can derive from available economic statistics. Educated and vocal user community is a necessary condition for raising the status of economic statistics on national agenda.

- IV.15. Concluded that producer-users cooperation has to be further developed as a tool for ensuring trust in statistical work, enhancement of policy relevance of the compiled statistics and improved image of the national statistical system; more attention should be given to more publicity of disseminated data, education of user community on benefits of using available data
- IV.16. Expressed appreciation of assistance provided by Stats SA to many African countries in improving their economic statistics and welcomes further strengthening of cooperation in this area between all African countries, UNSD, ECA and other international and regional organizations.
- IV.17. Stressed that additional efforts are needed to ensure better and more systematic staff training especially in view of its high turnover; in addition to reviewing and improving internal programmes run by NSOs this includes, country-to-country staff training to ensure exchange of good practices and holding regular regional workshops 'to train trainers' with active participation of international and regional organizations.

B. *Availability of data and policy relevance*

- IV.18. Recognized that availability of data has to be significantly improved including availability of policy relevant data and data meeting needs of society at large.
- IV.19. Concluded that a better monitoring of user needs is required to ensure more timely response to enhance relevance of the compiled statistics and improve image of the national statistical system.
- IV.20. In particular, recognized the need to focus more on:
- (i) Short term indicators required by policy makers and business community;
 - (ii) Provision of more detailed data in terms of activity/product and regional breakdowns;
 - (iii) Construction statistics (there is a clear need for further work in this area as in all African countries compilation of construction statistics is quite a challenge);
 - (iv) Service sector statistics, in particular distributive trade and ICT statistics;
 - (v) Employment statistics;
 - (vi) Agricultural statistics (e.g., measurement of output).
- IV.21. In this connections invited UNSD to review the status of international recommendations implementation and availability of description of good

practices in those areas of statistics; asks UNSD to cooperate with other international organizations (e.g., ILO and FAO) to ensure preparation of the needed guidelines.

C. *Legal and institutional infrastructure*

- IV.22. Concluded that the legal basis and institutional framework are mostly adequate. Many NSOs have a Statistical act/law as the basis of their operations. However, the authority of NSOs in many countries should be raised higher to be commensurate with the status of other government institutions. The issue is how to make the existing legal provisions to work. Continued exchange of experience in this respect is necessary.
- IV.23. Concluded that more effective use of the central position of NSOs in National Statistical Systems should be made focusing on their role as coordinators of statistical activities and promoters of the system wide statistical standards; delegation of certain data compilation/dissemination activities to other agencies should be seen as a resource saving device.
- IV.24. Agreed that strengthening the cooperation with other data producing organizations in countries (Central Banks, Revenue Authorities, Ministries of finance, economy, trade and others) is necessary for effective compilation of BES. This includes signing of memorandums of understanding which would clearly identify the responsibilities of different parties involved
- IV.25. Concluded that placing statistical units in other governmental agencies is desirable under condition that they provide statistical services to those agencies and collaborate on matters of application of statistical standards with NSO is a good practice to strengthen national statistical system and to improve data quality; emphasized that this placing should be done on incremental basis starting with the agencies most important for production of quality economic statistics.
- IV.26. Confirmed that establishment/reinforcement of statistical advisory committees to facilitate the harmonization and coordination of statistical activities across all governmental agencies involved in compilation of economic statistics is a proven good practice and should continue and be strengthened.

D. *Economic surveys*

- IV.27. Found that unavailability or existence of non-reliable and/or not-updated survey frames/lists are the most fundamental and common problem faced by countries in the region.

- IV.28. Confirmed that low response rates to statistical surveys are a common phenomenon and calls for identification and use of more effective measures to improve them (for instance, more systematic use of purposely trained interviewers) and, at the same time, recognizes the need in finding different ways of obtaining the necessary information.
- IV.29. Concluded that even though the area sample surveys are unavoidable in many cases and NSOs will continue to use them, efforts should be made to clearly identify their merits and drawbacks and reflect them in the relevant statistical metadata; handbooks on area surveys should be revisited and best practices identified.
- IV.30. Found that sharing experiences in survey design is very helpful (e.g., stratification criteria, sample size etc.); invites UNSD and ECA to provide assistance in facilitation of such experience sharing and identification of good practices and their applicability under different circumstances.
- IV.31. Concluded that the most efficient and reliable way of conducting economic surveys is to base them on business register and encourages countries to develop strategic programmes to establish/improve such registers preferably using unique register unit identifier; a handbook on relevant good practices is required.
- IV.32. Concluded that efforts should be made to use “establishment” as a unit for BES inquires to ensure compliance with the requirements of SNA93, Rev.1 and provision of more homogeneous activity data as well as more accurate regional breakdown.
- IV.33. Found that development of clear operational definitions of the collected data items in terms of existing accounting practices and periodical review them should be part of work programme of NSOs; assistance from UNSD and ECA would be helpful.
- IV.34. Recognized that more integrated approach to organization and conduct of the survey programmes is needed to improve their efficiency in terms of use of common classifications, more uniformity in definition of data items, avoiding duplication in collection arrangements, cutting data collection costs and reduction of the response burden.

E. *Economic censuses*

- IV.35. Confirmed that many countries have a clear need to continue conducting economic censuses in order to update their survey frames/lists and/or to establish/improve their business registers; this need is especially evident where

access to administrative data is very difficult and/or such data are fragmented and/or insufficient and of a poor quality.

- IV.36. Concluded that taking into account country needs, budgetary and other considerations censuses can be conducted as economy wide censuses or as a sequence of sectoral/industry specific censuses.
- IV.37. Agreed that it is practical to apply thresholds to maximize cost efficiency of censuses and develop methods to account for economic activities of units below the threshold.
- IV.38. Taking note of the intention of many countries to continue conducting economy-wide or sectoral/industry censuses, endorsed the UNSD initiative to prepare a Handbook on Good Practices in Economic Censuses and invites all interested countries to actively cooperate with UNSD in this project by providing a detailed description of their current practices and needs; requests ECA to coordinate implementation of good practices in economic census in close cooperation with other international and regional organizations including mobilization of financial and other assistance to countries

F. Administrative data and business register

- IV.39. Recognized that systematic and increasing use of administrative data (AD) should become over time an integral element of national programmes of economic statistics and encourages countries to develop a long term strategy in this respect.
- IV.40. Advised that such a long term strategy should include careful assessment of reliability of available AD and aim at establishment of good cooperation with the institutions - holders of AD. AD will be useful for statisticians if significant investments are made in developing capability to use them effectively.
- IV.41. Took note of additional difficulties in use of AD in African countries due to fragmented and/or insufficient administrative data, high degree of incoherence in conceptual frameworks/classifications used in administrative collections, absence (in many cases) of computerized administrative databases and continued resistance to grant NSOs access to such data.
- IV.42. Taking into account that all participating countries maintain or plan to establish/improve business registers as foundation of their economic surveys systems, emphasized the need in making special efforts to identify and apply the best available practices in this area and invited UNSD to consider this request as a matter of priority while developing its research programme and technical assistance activities (in cooperation with ECA).

G. *Basic economic statistics and compilation of national accounts*

IV.43. Confirmed that the provision of data required for national accounts should be one of the top priorities of basic economic statistics and, therefore, stresses that NSOs should develop their compilation procedures in such a way as to ensure the best possible approximation of the SNA concepts.

IV.44. Advised that BES statisticians and national accountants should work together and review regularly their practices and problems; in particular the estimation of national accounts aggregates as residuals should be avoided; benchmarking of NA should be made at least every 5 years, preferably in conformity with the economic censuses or household surveys cycles; issues relevant to the use of different financial and calendar year should be tackled in a coordinated manner by NA and BES.

Annex I

Regional Workshop for African countries on Compilation of Basic Economic Statistics

United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)
Statistics South Africa (SSA)

23-26 July, 2007, Pretoria, South Africa

Agenda

Monday, 23 July 2007

- 9:00-9:30 Registration
- 9:30-10:00 Opening ceremony
- UNSD
Statistics South Africa
- 10:00-10:40 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 An overview of economic statistics in African countries: what data series are available and how relevant they are for policy making?
- Country presentations
- 12:30-14:00 *Lunch break*
- 14:00-15:30 [*cont.*] An overview of economic statistics in African countries: what data series are available and how relevant they are for policy making?
- Country presentations
- General discussion
- 15:30-15:50 *Coffee break*

15:50-17:00 Legal and institutional foundations of economic statistics in Africa: issues and policy options; role of international experience

UNSD overview of international experience

Round table discussion of country experiences

Tuesday, 24 July 2007

9:00-10:40 Issues of organization and conduct of economic surveys in the African context

Stat SA presentation on its system of economic surveys.

Round table discussion

10:40-11:00 *Coffee break*

11:00-12:30 *[cont.]* Issues of organization and conduct of economic surveys in the African context

Country presentations

General discussion

12:30-14:00 *Lunch break*

14:00-15:30 Main problems and possible ways to improve economic surveys.

Round table discussion

Conclusions and recommendations

15:30-15:50 *Coffee break*

15:50-17:00 Economic censuses and their role in compilation of economic statistics

UNSD presentation on the recent survey on country practices

General discussion

Wednesday, 25 July 2007

- 9:00-10:40 Economic census in the African context: when it is needed and how to organize it; problems and possible solutions.
- Stat SA presentation on Large Sample Surveys
- Country presentations
- Round table discussion
- 10:40-11:00 *Coffee break*
- 11:00-12:30 Advantages and disadvantages of economic census; plans of African countries to conduct economic censuses in future
- General discussion
- Conclusions and recommendations
- 12:30-14:00 *Lunch break*
- 14:00-15:30 Can African countries make more progress in use of administrative data in compilation of basic economic statistics?
- UNSD presentation on international experience in use of administrative data
- Stat SA presentation on Business register
- General discussion
- 15:30-15:50 *Coffee break*
- 15:50-17:00 Strengthening national statistical infrastructure and interagency cooperation to support more effective data compilation
- Stat SA presentation
- General discussion

Thursday, 26 July 2007

9:00-10:40 How to make basic economic statistics more useful for compilation of national accounts?

Stat SA and SA Reserve Bank presentations

A round table discussion

Conclusions and recommendations

10:40-11:00 *Coffee break*

11:00-12:30 Towards improved compilation of basic economic statistics in African countries: follow up-actions

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

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