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COMTRADE: status, technical issues, EDP strategies and joint arrangements

Report by UNSD

Implementation of the joint UNSD-OECD data processing system

1. The new UNSD-OECD data processing system was implemented 1 January 2006 simultaneously at UNSD and OECD. The system had been tested during 2005. Staff at UNSD received hands-on training preceding the official introduction of the system and further training on SQL/DTS in the first quarter of 2006. A staff member of OECD also attended parts of the training session on SQL/DTS to learn about the approach to data processing at UNSD.

2. Due to initial technical difficulties and further agreements with OECD, UNSD started publishing 2005 data only in March 2006 (a delay of about one month) but got up to speed already by May. By end 2006, UNSD had published all valid data received during 2006, including all data sets for 2005 reported by 120 countries.

3. In accordance with the standing collaboration arrangements in data collection, OECD forwarded all data of OECD countries to UNSD in a timely manner. UNSD and OECD shared their processing reports and decks for almost all OECD countries and whenever requested. After a year of experience with the new shared system, both organizations plan to analyze and report any differences in data processing to ensure consistency in published data.

4. UNSD has started reprocessing of all data for the years 2000-2004 which were previously processed in the old mainframe application; in doing so it verifies the totals, creates tariff line data, incorporates information on the second quantity unit whenever

provided, checks the quantity information provided, makes estimates for missing quantity information whenever possible and in general, reviews and improves the quality of the previously processed data. Data sets for quite a number of countries have already been re-processed and published. However, full completion will depend on the availability of the required resources.

5. Data and metadata is currently shared with OECD via FTP which currently proves to be the most easy and reliable way of sharing information.

Update of the new processing system

6. Based on the experience gained during the first year UNSD intends, jointly with OECD, to update and further improve the new processing system. Part of this update concerns the integration of existing work flows and other elements at UNSD into the processing system (such as a data collection tracking system and the provision of specific publication notes). Some of these may be less relevant for OECD and could be optional. Most relevant for OECD is to foster harmonized data processing and consistency in disseminated data as far as OECD countries are concerned.

7. Impact and urgency are the main criteria for establishing the priorities for this update with the individual and relatively independent elements discussed and implemented one by one. Currently UNSD is working on a new registration page.

Introduction of the UN Comtrade Portal

8. UNSD established a UN Comtrade Portal at http://comtrade.un.org/ which establishes an entry point to all UN Comtrade related information and services such as the database, publications, web services, knowledge base, expert forum and community forum.

9. UN Comtrade Knowledge base is a repository of information about all aspects of UN Comtrade, including questions on how to operate the system, how to retrieve data, how to interpret the data and how to understand the methodological issues behind the numbers. To increase knowledge in this database, UNSD generally adds Q & A received via email or community forum to the Knowledge base. In time, most answers on user questions can be found in the Knowledge base.

10. The Expert forum is meant for trade statistics compilers as a follow-up to UNSD's technical workshops. These trade experts are be given username and password and are encouraged to participate in the Expert Forum to discuss issues of current interest.