



UNITED NATIONS  
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Workshop on Compilation of International Merchandise Trade Statistics  
Abuja, 30 August - 2 September 2005**

**PROVIONAL REPORT**

With an overall purpose of improving the quality and availability of international merchandise trade statistics of African countries, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in cooperation with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has organized a workshop on the compilation of International Merchandise Trade Statistics in Abuja from 30 August until 2 September 2005. UNCTAD participated in the workshop as special attention was devoted to the implementation of ASYCUDA in ECOWAS member countries and because UNCTAD is a very intensive user of trade statistics.

The workshop was opened officially by Mr. Mame Cor Sene, Deputy Executive Secretary of ECOWAS in charge of Policy Harmonization. He invited all delegates to make the workshop a success by sharing each other's experience in this field. Participants in the workshop include representatives of national statistics services and customs offices of ECOWAS Member States, as well as representatives of the international organizations. The list of participants is attached.

**Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

Many topics were discussed in the course of the workshop. They could be grouped and summarized as follows:

- ▶ **ASYCUDA.** A majority of the ECOWAS member states uses ASYCUDA 2.7 or a combination of ASYCUDA 2.7 and ASYCUDA ++ (spread among the different customs offices). Given that UNCTAD announced that it will stop the support for ASYCUDA 2.7 in the very near future, member states are pushed to migrate to ASYCUDA++. The concerns which have been raised with this migration come both from Customs and from Statistics. Customs' concerns are:
  - Interruption of work due to technical problems with the migration
  - Necessity of additional telecommunication infrastructure (e.g. fiber-optic land line, telephone line or wireless lines)
  - Training of staff and declarants

Statistics' concerns are:

- Different data export on ASYCUDA 2.7 and ++
- Technical problems which lead to interruption of work.

- ▶ *EUROTRACE Windows.* All member states which currently still use EUROTRACE DOS are required to move to EUROTRACE Windows. In fact, the ECOWAS Secretariat has installed or is in the process of installing EUROTRACE Windows at all statistical offices. This migration mostly involves the concern that training is lacking and that migration will lead to interruption of work.
- ▶ *Collaboration between Customs and Statistics.* In most countries there is a good working relation between Customs and Statistics. However, in some countries, an improvement in the current situation is needed.
- ▶ *Reconciliation of Imports and Exports between ECOWAS member states.* Studies done by the ECOWAS Secretariat and some observations made by individual countries during the workshop indicate that (1) there exist clear differences between reported imports and exports of bilateral trade between ECOWAS member states, and that (2) trade in certain products among member states is missing or under-reported. It was agreed that efforts can be made to reduce those differences.
- ▶ *Non-registered trade.* Several member states have undertaken independently studies on estimating the size of the non-registered cross-border trade. Comparing of reports could be useful. The trade involves pedestrian and other low-value trade, but also illegally unregistered trade.
- ▶ *Quantity registration and estimation.* Questions were raised during the workshop on how to improve the quality and availability of quantity information (both weight and supplementary quantity). Some recommended making the quantity field mandatory for completion of the Declaration at the Customs office. Others claimed that training of declarants was more important. In conclusion, it was agreed that separate study of this topic is necessary.

# Recommendations

In the following recommendations the National Statistical Offices are indicated as Statistics and the offices of the Customs administrations as Customs. Further, wherever member states are mentioned this also includes Mauritania. The ECOWAS Secretariat is abbreviated as ECOWAS and the United Nations Statistics Division as UNSD.

## General recommendations

- ▶ Recognizing a need for building capacity in the new applications both at customs as well as in the statistical office with the aim of becoming more self-reliant, it is recommended that training and equipment will be strengthened.
- ▶ Given the current situation at Statistics and Customs in Liberia and Sierra Leone, it is recommended that a major effort will be undertaken to help these member states in reducing the gap in development of production of trade statistics in comparison to the other member states.
- ▶ It is recommended that Customs officers are made aware of the importance of registering all trade operations no matter what customs procedure for the transaction of goods is used.
- ▶ Recognizing that a good cooperation between Customs and Statistics is essential for the production of timely and good quality trade statistics, it is recommended that good relations should be maintained between Customs and Statistics, and that problems between the two offices be resolved as soon as possible and where necessary.

## Specific recommendations

### *ASYCUDA++*

- ▶ It is recommended that all member states which currently use ASYCUDA 2.7 move to ASYCUDA ++ in next 2 years.
- ▶ It is recommended that ECOWAS (in consultation with UNCTAD) will outline the best practice for migration from ASYCUDA 2.7 to ASYCUDA ++ taking into consideration that (a) for countries with no experience so far in ASYCUDA ++ a pilot site will be setup for training purposes, (b) a full version of ASYCUDA ++ will be setup in main offices, and (c) where the telecommunication network in the country is not sufficiently advanced, a stand-alone (reduced version) of ASYCUDA ++ will be setup in remote offices.
- ▶ It is recommended that ECOWAS jointly with Statistics Divisions of UNCTAD and UN will approach the ASYCUDA team of UNCTAD to stress the importance of keeping developments regarding the ASYCUDA system in line with infrastructure and feasibility in the developing countries.

- ▶ It is recommended that activities of UNCTAD regarding ASYCUDA in the ECOWAS region will be coordinated with ECOWAS.
- ▶ It is recommended that there be a Helpdesk – coordinated by ECOWAS - to assist at short notice with problems that may arise in the migration to ASYCUDA++.

#### *EUROTRACE Windows*

- ▶ It is recommended that all member states work with EUROTRACE Windows (in the Statistics office and at Customs where applicable) by January 2007.
- ▶ It is recommended that in-depth training in EUROTRACE Windows will be provided by the ECOWAS Secretariat with help of UNSD.
- ▶ It is recommended that there be a Helpdesk – coordinated by ECOWAS - to assist at short notice with problems that may arise in working with EUROTRACE Windows.

#### *NON-REGISTERED TRADE*

- ▶ It is recommended that ECOWAS - in cooperation with one or more of its member states and with UNSD - collects, compares and analyses surveys and estimation methods for non-registered trade in the African region.
- ▶ It is recommended that ECOWAS jointly with UNSD will produce a manual of best practices of surveys and estimation methods for non-registered trade.

#### *RECONCILIATION STUDIES*

- ▶ It is recommended that member states – where deemed necessary and feasible – conduct bilateral reconciliation studies to reduce differences in reported imports and exports. If requested, ECOWAS (with help of UNSD) will provide guidance.
- ▶ It is recommended that reconciliation studies follow the guidelines set out in the International Merchandise Trade Statistics, Compilers Manual.