



United Nations Economic
Commission for Africa

Subregional Office for West Africa

Report **Harmonization of Data Collection and Economic Forecasting Methods in West Africa**





Economic Commission for Africa

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

WAMA	West African Monetary Agency
AFRISTAT	Economic and Statistical Observatory of sub-Saharan Africa
WAHO	West African Health Organization
AfDB	African Development Bank Group
BDSM	UEMOA Multilateral Surveillance Database
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa s
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
CILSS	Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel
CSMCS	Common Minimum Framework for Statistics Comparability
HCPI	Harmonized Consumer Price Index
IHSN	International House Survey Network
NSI	National Statistical Institute
IGO	Inter-governmental Organization
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
ICP	International Comparison Programme
AMCP	African Monetary Cooperation Programme
REP	Regional Economic Programme
PROSMIC	Common Minimum Statistics Programme
NAS93	National Accounts System 1993
NSS	National Statistical System
SYSCOA	West African Accounting System
TOFE	Financial Operations Tables
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union

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1. Introduction: Preparing the Future

The drafting and monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programmes call for reliable, available and timely statistics. This unending call for reliable statistics by decision makers and other analysts in developing countries grew with the creation of regional economic blocs at the same time as issues of available data comparability arose.

West Africa's new development agenda, which focuses on regional integration, with the drafting of economic programmes such as the Regional Economic Programme (REP) of the UEMOA Commission, the ECOWAS Commission's Economic Partnership Agreement Development Programme (EPADP) and the more recent Community Development Programme have highlighted the need for comparable data as well as raised the issue of harmonization of economic forecasting methods. All these requirements pose a challenge to Africa's already weak and vulnerable National Statistical Systems (NSS), which have to deal with new requirements and constraints as well as with bodies such as the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and inter-governmental organizations.

However, issues of harmonizing data collection methods are not that new. At the global level, the United Nations has been working for decades to promote harmonized national accounts among its member States; the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been making efforts toward unified balance of payments in all its member States; for Africa, the African Union Commission (AUC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) have set up the common minimum framework for harmonized and comparable statistics in Africa. The framework is an integrated programme that builds on the gains of ongoing initiatives to address the crucial shortage of data and statistical information on all aspects of development, to guide policy decision making based on objective data and facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of related actions and measures. Other no less major stakeholders also intervene directly or indirectly in comparable data collection and dissemination in West Africa.

The last few years have seen some progress, since the African Union and ECA launched their initiative to set up an African Statistical System (ASS). The purpose of this report is to assess the work done thus far in harmonization in West Africa and make proposals for setting up a harmonized statistical system for data and forecasting methods.

This work is useful for two main reasons: (a) While many initiatives had been started in the past few years at the continental and subregional levels, the actual extent of these interventions are not clear, making it necessary to take stock of the situation and (b) make an assessment of ongoing interventions

to ascertain what remains to be done and what role ECA can play at the subregional level to contribute to the statistics harmonization effort.

Apart from the above reasons, this work is original in that it also tackles issues of harmonization of economic forecasting methods. Indeed, even when the issue of data comparability in the subregion has been tackled, that of the use of these data to carry out economic forecasts will not really be solved because the forecast results obtained by countries and non-national institutions may differ immensely depending on the assumptions and techniques used. Sound macroeconomic management in the subregion will not only call for making statistics comparable but also ensuring that the tools for economic forecasting are comparable as well. The study was conducted on the basis of secondary data collected on the websites of organizations involved in the subregional statistics system and on working documents and publications. The information obtained was complemented with meetings with various statistics stakeholders in the subregion during the data collection missions organized to this effect. West Africa's statistical system comprises data providers, producers and users. The production of comparable data mainly targets second category bodies, which are the data producers, while the harmonization of forecasting methods should rather have more to do with data users. This study will primarily target the two categories of stakeholders, namely data producers and data users.

The study's geographical scope is the 15 ECOWAS countries covered by SRO-WA. The target institutions were central banks, census offices, international governmental and non-governmental bodies, as well as other data users or non-users but which intervene in the financing of harmonization initiatives.

This report is divided into four main sections: the first gives an introduction of the West African statistics system as we know it today; the second takes stock of ongoing initiatives in the subregion in harmonization of statistics and forecasting methods; the third part provides a succinct account of harmonization initiatives in the West Africa subregion and the fourth deals with the tools for measuring convergence within West Africa and facilitating international comparisons. Lastly, early conclusions have helped in making a few proposals based on the study.

2. Introduction of the Statistical System in West Africa

It is important to introduce the stakeholders of the statistical system in the West African region and then focus on the organization of the activities of external stakeholders of the West African statistical system. Quite apart from the system, another important feature is a networking and complementarity approach aimed at pooling all the synergies needed for the future.

2.1 Stakeholders of the West African statistical system

The West African statistical system may be described as a set of 15 national systems connected to external stakeholders at the subregional, continental and international levels.

2.1.1 *National statistical systems*

In the West Africa subregion, the national statistical system is generally made up of three types of stakeholders: data suppliers, data producers and data users.

Statistics producers consider data suppliers as targets. They are statistical units for data collection. They may be actual individuals, households, companies or non-profit administrations.

Data producers are public and private profit-making or non-profit bodies, which collect data and render them usable for themselves or other users or decision-makers. They may be the statistics department at the central bank, the statistics directorates of sector ministries, the statistical services or departments of non-profit associations, consultancy firms, the national statistical institute, and sometimes, the census office. This category also includes the statistics training centres and research institutes that can also be considered as users.

In the users category, we have various levels of decision-makers as well as citizens and all manner of analysts. Users of statistics may thus be the central Bank, sector ministries, private sector, civil society, the media, independent State agencies and the general public.

There are also institutions that play a coordination and/or regulatory role. For most francophone countries in the subregion, these stakeholders may be the supreme statistics board. The supreme statistics board is generally close to the Burkina model shown in box 1.

Box 1: Structures of the National Statistics System of Burkina Faso

The national statistics system comprises: the national statistical board, the national statistical and demographical institute, other specialized public statistics institutions and statistical training and demographical institutions.

The bureau of the national statistics board comprises ministers responsible for statistics, territorial administration and decentralization, basic education, health, the permanent secretary of the national statistics board, the director general of the national statistics and demographical institute and the director general of the national statistical and demographical institute and the director general of the agricultural economy promotion institute. The other members of the national statistics board are representatives of institutions that produce or use statistical data.

The Board has the following permanent organs: a permanent secretariat, a technical secretariat (INSD) and five specialized commissions.

INSD is the official State body for statistical information. The other specialized public statistics institutions, which depend on ministries, local authorities, public institutions and public enterprises, are responsible for collecting, processing, analyzing and disseminating statistical information in their areas of activity that is not produced by the National Statistical and Demographical Institute. They comprise:

- The statistics directorates (DGISS, DGPSE, DSIP, DSPSE);
- The research and planning directorates of ministries;
- The central technical directorates of ministries (DGPSE, etc.);
- Institutions (BCEAO, SONABEL, SONABHY, etc.);
- Regional economy and planning directorates.

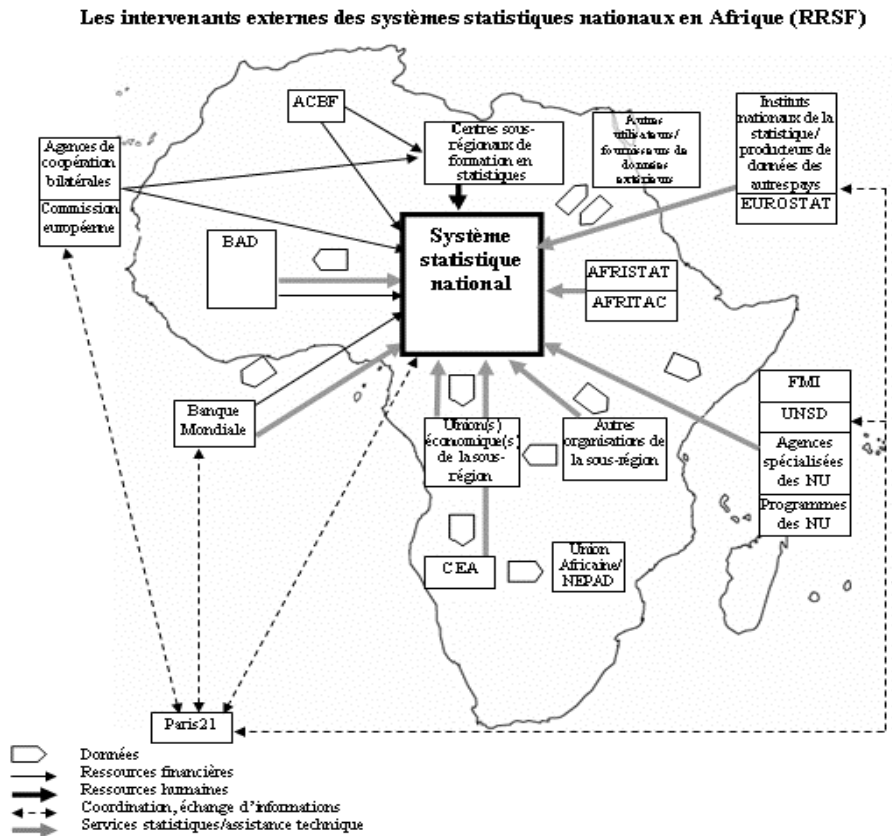
The institution responsible for middle-level statistician training is the *Ecole nationale des régies financières de l'Etat*.

Source: Ministry of Economy and Finance, Burkina Faso. (2009). Diagnosis of the national statistical system, Government of Burkina Faso.

2.1.2 External stakeholders of national systems

The national statistics system interacts with external stakeholders as shown in Graph 1. This is the configuration for most African countries and is the same across the board for the countries of the subregion. The external stakeholders of the national statistics system in West Africa may be grouped into three major categories: the subregional institutions, the external stakeholders of the national statistical system in West Africa: the subregional institutions and international institutions (see Graph 1 below).

Graph 1: External stakeholders of national statistics systems in Africa National statistical systems in Africa



Source: ECA, 2006

The subregional institutions are the regional economic communities (the ECOWAS Commission, the UEMOA Commission, the Mano River Union); the specialized subregional institutions (the Economic and Statistical Observatory of sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT), the Central Bank of West States (BCEAO), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), the West African Health Organization (WAHO) and the West African Monetary Agency (WAMA)); intergovernmental organizations (the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and ABN) and the subregional representations of some institutions of the United Nations System (ECA SRO-WA, ASECNA, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)).

The regional institutions involved in the national statistical system in the subregion are the AfDB, the African Union (AU) and the ECA African Centre for Statistics and the subregional training centres (CEFORP and CAPOD).

At the international level, we have all the cooperation agencies such as the European Union, the Paris21 Consortium, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and specialized United Nations Agencies and United Nations programmes such as UNDP, FAO and WFP.

2.2 Organization and activities of external stakeholders of the West Africa statistical system

The external stakeholders maintain technical or financial relations or both, with the State statistical system. Technical interventions may be in the form of technical assistance for specific projects or technical capacity building for the staff of internal stakeholders; they may also be in the form of exchange of information or direct intervention for data production or use. In any case, the nature of involvement varies according to the specific circumstances of the institution.

2.2.1 Interventions of bilateral cooperation agencies

Bilateral cooperation agencies provide financial resources to the national statistical system and to the subregional statistical training centres.

The European Commission provides financial support to national statistical systems through the European Development Fund. The French Development Agency provides financial support to statistical institutes to carry out occasional data collection or capacity building. Other bilateral cooperation agencies also intervene at various levels. They include the Canadian International Development Agency, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Belgian Technical Cooperation and the Danish Development Cooperation Agency.

Countries use financial assistance mainly to meet short-term data needs. Furthermore, an ECA (2005) report states that the assistance provided is in an ad hoc and uncoordinated manner.

2.2.2 Interventions by the United Nations system and other international institutions

The specialized agencies and divisions of the United Nations, the IMF and the World Bank intervene at all levels of the statistical system of the countries and in the subregion.

The United Nations Statistics Division is committed to the advancement of the global statistical system. It compiles and disseminates global statistical information, develops standards and norms for statistical activities and supports efforts by countries to strengthen their national statistical systems. The division supports the functioning of the United Nations Statistical Commission as the apex entity of the global statistical system. The division provides technical assistance to ensure understanding of standards and their implementation. The United Nations specialized agencies provide both technical and financial support to the statistical system. They also contribute directly to the production of

statistics and their use. In this respect, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has contributed to the financing of population censuses in most countries. The Fund also supports population training schools such as the Centre for Population Research and Training in Benin. UNICEF contributes to the production of data on children and UNDP contributes to producing data on economic and social conditions in general and social indicators in particular. In Benin for example, the first survey on the impact assessment of information and communication technologies on the economy was carried out by UNDP-Benin. The International Labour Organization intervenes specifically in the area of labour statistics, either directly or indirectly by providing financial assistance to private research institutions or the statistical institute for data collection.

The IMF is responsible for preparing and promoting balance of payments data collection methods. It drafts the principles and builds the capacities of statistical institutes and Central Bank experts.

The World Bank, just like the IMF and other institutions, is active in the production and use of data. On the continent, it supports major initiatives in the production of statistics and their comparability.

Also worthy of note are the interventions of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), which drafted the guidelines for countries to produce their national statistical development strategy.

2.2.3 Interventions of subregional institutions

At the subregional level, the activities of the RECs, their specialized bodies and some sectoral organizations may be mentioned. The convergence programmes of the two Commissions place them at the heart of a mechanism that still cannot be termed as the subregional statistical system, but which is gradually taking shape.

To assess the UEMOA convergence criteria in a harmonized manner, efforts have been made to produce comparable statistics. The same is true for the ECOWAS Commission. The two institutions have set up a data collection and processing mechanism, which will be examined later on. For now, we shall dwell on the fact that the two institutions produce as much national accounts and statistics on trade as on sectoral statistics. Their relations with the national statistical systems have to do with both technical assistance and consumption of the data produced to feed the regional databases.

Apart from these direct statistical interventions, the ECOWAS Commission hosts the African Capacity Building Foundation's ECOWAS Statistical Capacity Building (ESCAP) project, which is designed to develop the capacities of the Commission's department of research to promote statistics harmonization in member countries.

With regard to UEMOA, the role of AFRISTAT is to advise national statistical institutes of member States and support their action. It has regulatory powers in the area of harmonization of concepts, norms and statistical methods in francophone States in the sub-region. The activities of AFRISTAT cover 18 countries, including the eight under UEMOA.

The RECS have excellent relations with ECA, the AU and AfDB. The substance of these relations with respect to the statistical system will be assessed in the study of ongoing initiatives in the subregion for statistical harmonization and economic forecasting methods.

In terms of sectoral statistical data, CILSS plays an important role in the collection of agricultural data and monitoring of the agricultural status of the subregion, including Chad. CILSS also coordinates a surveillance mechanism, which sends out alerts on food crises and other forms of crises, such as migratory locusts, that threaten the region.

3. Status of Ongoing Harmonization Initiatives in the Subregion

While we do not seek to be exhaustive, we must still highlight both past and ongoing comparable statistics and initiatives for harmonizing forecasting methods. It is thus necessary to make an assessment of the scope of the interventions.

In recent years, many initiatives have been undertaken for the development and harmonization of statistics in Africa. Most of these initiatives have had a direct or indirect impact on the West African statistical system. The objective, in most cases, was capacity building and the development and harmonization of statistics to ensure the production of comparable and quality data for a good assessment and conduct of development policies. The area of harmonization of forecasting methods does not seem to have been given much attention.

3.1 Initiatives for comparable statistics

3.1.1 *The Marrakech Plan*

The Marrakech Plan of Action was adopted in 2004 at the second international round table on results-based management. The Plan set up an actions agenda designed to improve the availability and use of data to support poverty reduction strategies. The Plan recommended that every country should have a national strategy for the development statistics (NSDS) and that in 2010 all countries should organize a general population census. At the international level, the Plan focused on the need to improve data on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) the establishment of an international house survey network (IHSN).

To date, several West African countries have obtained the financing needed to prepare their NSDS. Specifically, only Guinea Bissau has no statistics development strategy, per the last PARIS21 report, an excerpt of which is shown in Table 1 below. Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Guinea's NSDSs have been drafted and are awaiting adoption by the appropriate bodies before implementation.

Table 1: Status of implementation of national strategies for the development of statistics

Implementa- tion	Existing NSDS			NSDS II under prepara- tion		Duration of PRSP or nation- al development plan
Implementa- tion	Status	Name NSDS	Period	Status	Period	
Benin	Implementa- tion	National Strategy for the De- velopment of Statistics	2007-12	Not planned		2007-09
Burkina Faso	Implementa- tion	Statistics master plan	2004-09	Planned	2009-12	Under review
Cap Verde	Implementa- tion	Plano Estatistico	2008-12	Not planned		2005-07
Côte d'Ivoire	Pending adoption	National Strategy for the De- velopment of Statistics	2009-13	Not planned		2009-13
Gambia	Implementa- tion	Master Plan for the Statistics System of The Gambia	2007-11	Ongoing	2008-11	2007-11
Implementation	Pending adoption	Ghana Statistics Development Plan	2009-2013	Not planned		2006-09
Guinea	Pending adoption	National Strategy for the De- velopment of Statistics	2009-13	Not planned		2007-12
Guinea-Bissau	No NSDS	-		Ongoing	2009-13	2006-08
Liberia	Implementa- tion	National Strategy for the De- velopment of Statistics	2009-2013	Not planned		2007-11
Mali	Implementa- tion	National statistics master plan	2006-10	Planned		2007-11
Niger	Implementa- tion	National Strategy for the De- velopment of Statistics	2008-12	Not planned		2008-12
Nigeria	Implementa- tion	Statistical Master Plan for the Nigeria National Statistical System	2007/8-11/12	Not planned		2003-07
Senegal	Implementa- tion	Statistics master plan	2008-13	Not planned		2006-10
Sierra Leone	Implementa- tion	National Strategy for the De- velopment of Statistics	2008-12	Not planned		2005-07
Togo	Pending adoption	National Strategy for the De- velopment of Statistics	2009-13	Ongoing	2007-12	I-PRSP 2007

Source: PARIS21. (2004). *A Guide to Designing a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS)*, October.

PARIS21. (2010). *National Strategy for the Development of Statistic (NSDS)*, Progress Report, February.

3.1.2 African Development Bank international comparison programme

The International Comparison Programme (ICP) is a global statistics initiative for producing purchasing power parity (PPP) estimates to facilitate comparisons of price levels and real value economic aggregates between countries.

The current ICP cycle in Africa, called phase 2005, is jointly carried out by AfDB and the World Bank. Its aim is to optimize synergy between the ICP and national statistics programmes. ICP-Africa has expanded its mandate to other goals that have to do with building the capacities of national statistics and assistance to regional member countries for the full implementation of the 1993 national accounts system NAS93. In line with the global strategy, the regional African framework aims to integrate poverty-related PPPs into general ICP activities. Forty-nine participating countries have been visited since December 2002. For each of the countries, a report showing the features of the national statistics system was prepared. Following the recommendations of the Yaounde workshop, contained in the Yaounde Declaration on statistics development in Africa, there was an urgent need to facilitate monitoring of statistics development and post the updated conclusions of the evaluation and all related documents on a special AfDB website connected to national and international websites on statistical systems and data in Africa (ADB, 2010).

3.1.3 The monetary cooperation programme of the Association of Central African Banks

The intention to create a single African currency led African governments to establish the Association of Central African Banks in 1965. The African Monetary Cooperation Programme (AMCP) has put forward the adoption of collective measures for a harmonized monetary system and the establishment of a joint management body. In this respect, it envisages the harmonization of monetary cooperation programmes of various subregional groups toward achievement of the creation of a single monetary zone by 2021, with a single currency and the creation of a common African central bank.

Six major stages should lead to this goal. The second goal has to do with focusing on issues of harmonization and coordination of monetary and macroeconomic policies as well as concepts.

AMPC will also deal with harmonization of monetary integration programmes and the setting up of a convergence framework comprising the standardization of concepts and macroeconomic definitions aimed at making monetary and financial performance-related statistical data comparable.

In the West Africa subregion, the West African Monetary Agency (WAMA) and the ECOWAS Commission see to the compatibility of convergence programmes implemented by member States. There will also be a national coordination committee to assist WAMA in collecting and processing data provided by member States.

3.1.4 Interventions of the Economic and Statistical Observatory for sub-Saharan Africa

Nine of the 18 members of AFRISTAT are from the West Africa subregion. That means all the countries of UEMOA and Cape Verde.

AFRISTAT was created in the context of an economic and financial crisis marked by the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, backed by the international community that led to an increasing demand for relevant statistics, which could hardly be satisfied by the national statistical offices.

In September 2000, the Council of Ministers of AFRISTAT adopted the Common Minimum Statistical Programme (PROSMIC), as the yardstick for developing statistics in member States for the period 2001-2005. PROSMIC has six priority areas, namely: statistical coordination; national accounts; economic and social short-term analysis and forecasting; data dissemination; statistics for monitoring household living conditions and poverty and agricultural statistics. PROSMIC has defined the basis on which the NSSs should be built to help them emerge from the stupor most of them have been in since the late eighties. AFRISTAT is now in the second phase of its development, which entails replenishing the AFRISTAT Fund that would provide most of the financing for its activities from 2006 to 2015. The first 10 years' report drawn up by Balepa et al (2006) shows that immense strides have been made in all of PROSMIC's the areas of intervention.

In the area of statistical coordination, statistical tools are being put in place with the adoption in September 2000 of common nomenclatures of activities and products in AFRISTAT member States. Most of the member States have also tried to update their statistical laws and regulations.

In the area of national accounts, the observatory has made major gains with the introduction of the ERETES software for preparing national accounts as part of the UEMOA PARSTAT project. This system was used for harmonizing production of the national accounts of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger. The national accounts preparation guide in AFRISTAT member States was published in 2001 and is used as reference tool in this area.

In the area of economic and social short-term analysis and forecasting, all UEMOA member States, except for Guinea Bissau, seem to be in the process of renewing their producer price index (PPI), as part of national or regional programmes. Harmonization of the consumer price index (CPI) has been relatively successful with the introduction of the Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) and its implementation in member States. AFRISTAT has also set up a short-term data collection system where data is collected by the national statistical institutes at biannual workshops on the situation in which they are analyzed. Before holding the seminars, AFRISTAT experts prepare work on the international environment and send them to countries, which tailor them to their own needs.

3.1.5 Statistical programmes of the regional economic communities

3.1.5.1 UEMOA

The first UEMOA Commission statistical programme called the Regional Statistics Support Programme Multilateral Surveillance (PARSTAT) dealt mainly with priority needs of multilateral surveillance, focusing on national accounts, consumer prices, contribution of the informal sector to the economy and short-term economic indicators.

In a bid to renew the HICP, the UEMOA Commission entrusted AFRISTAT with the implementation of the HICP renewal project in UEMOA member States, under a convention signed between the two parties. This project has three technical components, including conducting major and complementary surveys on household expenditure in the capitals of UEMOA member States, to determine the HICP fixed and seasonal weighted ratios.

The rationale for this renewal project is that, since 1998, this index has always been calculated in UEMOA countries to provide prompt reliable information on consumer price trends in each of the member States, to users. The HICP was implemented in 1996 and it became necessary to adapt it to developments in the economies of UEMOA member States.

The CHAPO software was designed in 1996 to implement and calculate the HICP. It helped to ensure sustainability of harmonization among HICPs. Rapid methodological and technological developments also made it necessary to have a new tool. As part of the efforts to devise this new tool, AFRISAT prepared specifications for a new application to meet user needs and take new functionalities into account. This new computer tool is being set up.

3.1.5.2 ECOWAS

The general goal of the ECOWAS statistics policy, adopted at the 19th Conference of Heads of State and Government held in Abuja in July 1996 is to ensure the development, analysis and dissemination of information to determine, conduct and assess the economic, social and environmental policies of the Community within the subregion.

Three of the specific goals of the ECOWAS statistics policy that contribute to the introduction of a subregional statistical system: use standards, methods and organizational structures to ensure the production of reliable and good quality comparable statistics within the Community and build the capacity required to ensure regional self-sufficiency in the production of statistical information for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of community policies and programmes.

In this respect, ECOWAS supports the development of national statistical systems in three areas: (a) enhancing the coordination of national statistics under the regional statistics programme; (b) ongoing

projects on building national capacities in statistics and (c) mobilizing partners to support statistical activities.

As part of enhancing statistical coordination, the Commission prepared and tabled the regional statistical programme (2006-2010) before the directors general of national statistical institutes or offices of ECOWAS member States for adoption.

The programme's prime objective is to create appropriate conditions to enable the countries of the region to produce the statistical information needed for decision-making by national and international public authorities and social and economic stakeholders.

The programme is broken down into eight priority intervention areas: legal framework and coordination of statistical systems; national accounts; short-term economic and social forecasting; dissemination of statistical information; statistics for monitoring household living conditions; agricultural statistics; public finance statistics; central bank statistics and balance of payments and external trade statistics. The specific objectives for each of the eight priority areas are outlining a collaboration framework among the various national statistical institutes, proposing joint actions aimed at improving statistics production in the countries of the region; proposing actions designed to promote harmonization of conceptual and methodological approaches and proposing a capacity building and equipment plan.

For 2010, each country should have gone beyond the preliminary stages of introducing statutory instruments and the statistics organizational framework (national statistical councils, statistical master plans or medium-term statistical development national plans).

3.1.5.3 ECOSTAT Project

The ECOWAS Statistical Development Programme (ECOSTAT) started activities in January 2003. The programme's activities are: regional statistical programming; harmonization of national accounts; harmonization of the consumer price indices; publication of detailed and updated data on external trade; enhancing the region's statistical systems (connectivity of NSIs, computer equipment and coordination of statistical activities).

The major expected outcomes of this project were assistance to statistical planning for the region, gross domestic product, and more comparable consumer price indices, detailed trade statistics for the entire region, easily accessible statistics for multilateral surveillance and strengthening regional statistical coordination.

The tangible outcomes of this project are the capacity building interventions of the statistical institutes of member States. The Commission also produces and publishes subregional statistics on a dedicated website, which is well appreciated by many users.

3.2 Initiatives for the harmonization of forecasting methods

While there are several initiatives for carrying out comparable data in the subregion, the same is not true for the harmonization of economic forecasting methods. However, all the regional economic communities of the subregion have realized the need for harmonization for monitoring regional economic policies.

The reason for this lack of interest is rather trivial, according to the experts of integration institutions responsible for studies and statistics. Indeed, how can we begin to harmonize forecasting methods when the methods for data collection, calculation and aggregation still vary from country to country despite all the efforts made? Can forecasting methods be harmonized when data to be used as inputs for forecasting are not that comparable? It is thus not surprising that the only initiative in this respect, at least, what the study identified, comes from the area of the subregion which seems to have made the most gains in statistical harmonization, that is, the AFRISTAT member countries.

AFRISTAT, which started the initiative, organizes a workshop every half year on a given theme in each of the two geographical areas of its member States. To take into account the diversities of the level of development of member States in terms of short-term economic forecasting, a new approach to these workshops was outlined in 2009. According to the authorities, the impact of these meetings should begin to be felt, in terms of the progress made by each country. For 2008 for instance, the criteria was the level of progress of economic trend publications that countries produced under AFRISTAT supervision. For States that are late with their publications, the workshop focused on the establishment and management of databases and for States that were more up to date, the focus was on accelerated publication production techniques. The two seminars for the first half of 2008 were held from 21 to 25 April 2008, Bamako, for West Africa, and from 19 to 23 May in Bangui, for Central Africa, with the theme: Short-term diagnosis: purpose and method. The theme for these workshops (which gathered 35 national officers in West Africa, is in line with the need to strengthen the link between short-term analysis and the preparation of short-term growth prospects.

3.3 Assessment of harmonization interventions

The West Africa subregion has made major gains by harmonizing statistics.

Implementation of decision A/DEC.11/7/96 1996 by the conference of Heads of State and Government on the adoption of the 2006-2010 regional statistics programme is ongoing, with the updating of data from member States and the harmonization of statistical tools and the regional statistics policy.

Ongoing work has to do with the implementation of harmonized frameworks and national accounts programmes, IPCs, external trade statistics (with EUROTRACE software, which was used to update statistics) and the 2006-2010 regional programme.

A publication on the “ECOWAS Poverty Profile” was launched in 2007. It lays the ground for the harmonization of concepts and methods for the preparation of statistics and poverty indicators and the regular dissemination of these statistics. In terms of poverty indicators and the MDGs, the ECOWAS Commission embarked on work for the introduction of an appropriate database to sustain the preparation of future publications of the “ECOWAS Poverty Profile”.

The technical framework of the multilateral monitoring surveillance (ECOMAC), which can be assessed on the web, was validated and the quarterly updating of the database started in September 2007, under the national coordination committees. Moreover, a transition table between the ECOMAC database and the UEMOA multilateral surveillance database was also prepared to facilitate exchange of data between the two institutions.

Furthermore, the database for disseminating statistical information, StatBase, which is the outcome of the active cooperation with ECA, now has a harmonized framework for its indicators. This framework should be deployed in all the regions.

With regard to UEMOA States specifically, since 2001, they have had joint nomenclatures for activities and products. These classifications are the major international harmonization and comparability tools for data collection (surveys and censuses) and preparation of national accounts. These two nomenclatures were designed from the United Nations international nomenclatures: the typical international industry classification of all aspects of economic activity and the central classification of products. Since 2009, these countries have also had a common method for preparing the poverty line.

AFRISTAT interventions for UEMOA also led to a series of methodological notes compiled in a manual on: new ideas introduced by the NSA93, agricultural accounts, livestock accounts, public administration accounts, external assistance, balance of payments and the accounts for the rest of the world, the informal sector, corporate accounts, financial and non-financial accounts and miscellaneous (mining research, public multinationals and cost of services).

Harmonizing accounts preparation methods in this part of the subregion has today been facilitated by the harmonization of accounts or statistical frameworks that have already been carried out. These include the adoption of revision V of the Balance of Payments Manual and harmonization of the balance of payments methods, the adoption of a common accounting plan by all member States (the SYSCOA plan, which was implemented on 1 January 1996; the launch of the harmonization the financial operations table (TOFE); the adoption of harmonized methods for price statements and calculation of household consumer price indices (CHAPO software); a common framework for processing external statistics since January 1998, using the EUROTRACE software.

All these harmonization efforts are designed to improve the comparability of national accounts.

With financial and technical support from several institutions, UEMOA member States embarked on renewing their national accounts and migrating to the NSA93 using the ERETES system. ERETES offers an excellent computerized system for storing and analyzing economic information, using routine national accounts working tables, namely: branch accounts, resource-employment balance and intermediate consumption matrices. It also guides national accountants in their work by enabling them to visualize the chain of tasks and roles of every stakeholder and it provides technical assistance in national accounting (concepts and methods) via a hypertext link (AFRISTAT, 2006).

The gains made by all 15 countries are quite substantial. To date, the GDPs of ECOWAS countries are largely comparable and the last consumer price index assessment conducted by AFRISTAT indicates that only Liberia is lagging behind. However, ongoing harmonization work is only on a small portion of statistics under the convergence programme (WAMA, 2006). Statistics on public finance and the external and monetary sectors are not yet covered. This is a cause for concern as nine of the 10 ECOWAS convergence criteria are related to these sectors. Moreover, in preparing the database tables of the multilateral surveillance (ECOMAC), major differences were seen in the compilation of these statistics. These differences generally have to do with the scope, the processing methods and sometimes the presentation itself.

4. Preparing Tools for Measuring Convergence and Facilitating International Comparisons

Convergence measures that are based on statistical harmonization assume that, in the long run, every country will have a common statistical portal, which also has a regional aspect. This calls for avoiding differences and rather adopting the vision of the African Charter on statistics. The approach must therefore be based on interdependence in the development of statistics, dissemination at the national, regional, continental and sectoral levels. Indeed, the idea is to veer toward democratization of statistics, if we are to have direct and positive impacts on democratization of the economy.

The concept of harmonization of data collection and economic forecasting methods cannot be understood if there are no prospects for achieving unity among African States, where statistics comparability among African countries will no suffer undue disparities. This comparability should automatically allow for international comparisons and provide better visibility for the strategic positioning of Africa's competitiveness at the national, regional, continental and sectoral levels.

To achieve this goal, the approach adopted should facilitate comparisons among African countries as well as between Africa and the rest of the world. The first step in statistical harmonization should naturally lead to the convergence of economies. It is therefore important to have a continental vision of the African Charter on Statistics. This should in no way limit ongoing efforts by countries to map out an inter-dependent development statistical strategy at the national and sectoral levels, while avoiding any idea that would separate these regional and continental approach strategies. It is therefore this four-pronged approach to harmonizing African statistics as part of multipolar interdependence, which is proposed as the African alternative.

Despite the difficulty, commitment by every country and clear willingness to accept a certain form of supranational subsidiarity in the methods adopted could help make money, save time and accelerate the convergence process as well as help achieve unification of African statistics. To this end, the option to change methods may not necessarily be the best one for data collection or economic forecasting.

4.1 From statistical harmonization to convergence: toward a common statistical portal

We can no longer refer to statistical harmonization or convergence without referring to international comparison. However, this long process will depend on more reliable national accounting. For a region like West Africa, this means that harmonization of statistics is not simply a choice but an obligation.

Statistical harmonization should be part of a general effort to build the African economic community, which assumes that the intermediate stage of regional integration should be successful. The success of this stage assumes that integration of the productive and trade system and the harmonization of fiscal and budget policies and programmes should all be part of a convergence effort, which will be subject to regular checks with harmonized statistics. These statistical indicators are several and comprise all forms of information on population, national and extra-national/regional trade, prices, incomes and employment and national accounts with methodological approaches that take African and regional circumstances into account, as well as prevailing international standards. It is therefore clear that we should not reinvent the wheel, if we can help it. We should rather rely on partnerships in order to advance methodological approaches and forecasting calculations.

At another level, making reliable statistical information available assumes that a new form of institutional “capabilities” should be developed and maintained at a high level of quality. It is these high-quality institutions that will be responsible for seeing to the comparability of the various indicators among countries.

The problem, however, has to do with the budget allocation for production, maintenance and dissemination of statistics in Africa. This poverty, coupled at times with lack of commitment and prioritization by countries, leads to dispersal of efforts. There are therefore no resources or reliable institutions to provide all the statistics needed to facilitate comparability and forecasting of Africa’s economy. With the advent of information and communication technologies, it seems that real-time availability of raw statistics or reports from analysis work based on the processing of statistics has become a prerequisite for performance and efficiency for all the economic stakeholder at the country and regional levels. The impact on the competitiveness of the economy and reactivity of economic operators is quite obvious.

While we cannot do everything at the same time, it is important to ensure that the major basic aggregates for the fundamentals of economics are harmonized. To this end, it is important to refer to the very important initiative by the African Development Bank, called, *International Comparison Program for Africa* (ICP-Africa). The focus here is on the international comparability of aggregates on prices, income and expenditure statistics, the GDP and several other sub-aggregates in real terms

or which take into account exchange rate distortions. Clearly, the complexity encountered should not prevent such an initiative to contribute to the harmonization of statistics in the area of prices and national accounts statistics (Mouyelo-Katoula & Nshimyumuremyi, 2007: 10).

The production of data and metadata for statistics harmonization should be accompanied by a validation process, using the principle of peer approval at periodic, regular and institutionalized meetings. These meetings may be in the form of training and information sharing workshops. The meetings must involve:

- » Users from very diverse sources: national/regional, non-national/non-regional, public and private sectors and knowledge centres such as universities;
- » Peers, where exchange of information is regular, transparent and free, with easy access by the public;
- » National and regional experts specialized in statistics, who will serve as resource persons both in their capacity as individuals or representing official statistics production institutions.

The main purpose of these meetings is to review and validate the harmonization process of selected statistics and the streamlining of metadata or consistent data.

This approach was successfully used by AfDB under the International Comparison Programme for Africa (Mouyelo-Katoula & Nshimyumuremyi, 2008: 17-18). However, the programme would stand to gain if countries would agree on real-time creation and updating of a common portal for statistical information and data and the presentation and accessibility of methods used, including for data collection, forecasting and projections. Besides the electronic portal, there should be a manual showing common definitions, the classifications adopted, the list of methods, product indices and formulas adopted and the selected sampling with a system that helps to show regional variations, weightings and other factors that disrupt adjustments or margins of error. Clearly, this manual can only contain information on the section of the economy that cannot be seen, namely the informal sector. Suggestions should therefore be made to understand this important component of Africa's economy. African institutions, especially those in West Africa, are called upon to provide statistics. Most African institutions lack the human, financial and at times technical resources needed to answer this call in real time. Harmonization of statistics and an electronic platform backed by a statistical manual for consistency and harmonization could be used to streamline the flow of data and significantly reduce redundancies and loss of energy. This coordination should be designed as a dynamic system involving development partners and must be based on a core process for compiling African statistical information. The request must come from African governments, especially as since 2010, some international institutions like the World Bank Group have decided to put most of their statistics, including the statistics series, on line.

It is vital to cooperate with this institution in the area of statistics. It is recommended that the ECO-WAS region should approach the World Bank group and the AfDB group to enable it to have an operational platform with a base for harmonizing statistical methods, within a period of at least, 12 months. Moreover, this international comparison approach can only sustain the economic convergence process and enhance the process of producing and making statistical information available, as part of brokered, standardized, regular and cyclical institutionalization. The gains made by reducing duplications will allow for devoting time to the harmonization process between countries as well as between African regions and the continental process, structured under the African Charter on Statistics.

4.2 Owning the vision of the African Charter on Statistics

The African Charter on Statistics promotes quality statistics comparability that reflects Africa's specific circumstances. Beyond the Charter, what is key is the reliability and real-time availability of these statistics and their comparability over time, especially historical statistics and comparability within space, in structuring governance in Africa at the national, regional, continental and sectoral level levels. Irrespective of the differences in the methodologies used, it is not possible to settle on consistencies, which bring about problems in time and space.

The African Charter on statistical information is a necessity, taking into account the four major factors that impede statistics comparability in Africa:

- » The variable, volatile and unpredictable level of financing of statistical activities;
- » Difficulties in measuring statistical events in the African context;
- » Africa's low level of participation in meetings on international standards and methodologies;
- » The many different methods and instruments used to collect, compile and process data (African Union, 2009:1).

The lack of appropriate financing and budget contributes to reducing the quality of indicators and as a result, impacts comparability and maintenance of statistics at all levels, especially when the non-monetary economy accounts for a major portion of human and economic development. However, the general level of education of the people, coupled with the poor central and decentralized administration, plus the mobility of the population makes measuring and the quality of observations and extrapolations even more difficult.

That should not be reason for not doubling efforts to improve the comparability and convergence of statistical information in Africa in general, and in West Africa in particular. Harmonized statisti-

cal information is in fact, the memory of all past economic and monetary developments such as the harmonized comparable time series, which are often sorely lacking in aggregates, considered as the basis in industrialized countries.

Apart from statistical data, indicators and harmonized short-term and strategic analyses help to forecast events, support economic and political arbitrations and open new horizons and opportunities for socioeconomic and human forecasting, modeling and prospects (Yeo and Adou, 2008:92).

Clearly, training workshops and seminars to improve statistical capabilities, information technology tools and networks of experts should increasingly be considered within the framework of harmonization of methods, data collection and economic forecasting. The pilot experience between the African Centre for Statistics, ECA North Africa region and Google Inc. on the introduction of data management statistical tools and dissemination techniques is worthy of note. A “Train-the-Trainers workshop on Innovative Tools and Techniques for Statistical Data Management and Dissemination was held in Rabat, Morocco from 1 to 4 June 2010¹ on:

The ECA statistical data and dissemination management Platforms; - New ideas in statistical data management such as statistical data discovery, special and temporal time-series, community mapping and mobile platforms, statistical data discovery, temporal time series, mobile and modular platforms, etc.; - Google technologies for statistical data management such as Google Map Maker; Google Maps; Google Earth; Fusion Tables; and Public Data Explorer Earth, Fusion Tables, et Public Data Explorer.

Considering all these innovations, the principle of statistical harmonization in West Africa must be based on an *ex ante* approach rather than an *ex post* one. *With the ex ante approach, “concepts, nomenclatures, common sources and methodological approaches must be defined as part of a process where the entire “procedure for formulation of materials for data collection and the data collection itself as well as the entire data processing until production of the statistics are identical for all producers of statistical data”.*

Statistical harmonization may be obtained in two ways: *ex ante* or *ex post*. The *ex post* approach is not reliable, does not allow to provide real-time information and essentially does not lead to underlying regular harmonization. The *ex post* approach should only be used from time to time. The *ex ante* approach makes for ongoing improvement with peers.

1 The first workshop was organized from 23 to 26 March 2010 in Abuja, Nigeria for the Anglophone countries including Nigeria, Uganda and Lesotho with the participation of the African Union Commission, Swaziland. The second one was organized for francophone countries, including Morocco, Senegal, Cameroon, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the francophone members of the Arab Maghreb Union.

4.2.1 AFRISTAT: *The essential partner*

The important work carried out by AFRISTAT in ex ante harmonization and the infallible financial support it provides its member States must be lauded. These member States are mainly 19 francophone countries with major work on concepts, standards and methods, with focus on the economy, national accounts, prices, agriculture, employment and the informal sector (African Union 2009:4). Of prime concern is adapting the nomenclature of products to the actual circumstances of member States. The methodological guide for compiling statistics on the sectors mentioned above follows a harmonization process in conjunction with national accounts experts. Successful operations in the francophone area are regularly duplicated and improved, under a fruitful partnership with the regional economic communities such as ECOWAS. However, ties with the ICP Africa programme of the AfDB Group can only enrich the different levels of densification of West Africa's statistical system.

The harmonization of data collection and economic forecasting methods in West Africa should take place in close partnership with AFRISTAT. It is important to be part of initiatives such as PROSMIC, which was adopted in 2000 and its 2006-2010 strategic plan adopted in 2006, which is its action plan for that period (Yeo and Adou, 2008). The goals are as follows:

- » Improve and harmonize statistical information for decision taking and strengthening integration;
- » Build the statistical capacities of member States as part of monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction strategies and achievement of MDGs;
- » Prepare information systems for managing results-based development.

4.2.2 ECOWAS: *Focal point in West Africa*

The priority set by ECOWAS in its 2006-2010 programme is the harmonization of monetary statistics and balance of payments, in addition to efforts already deployed in the harmonization of external trade statistics, poverty indicators tied to the MDGs and public finance statistics. The focus is on identifying a common method and setting common rules to help reach a consensus on the shaping of comparable monetary aggregates and balance of payments statistics. This is all part of a wider and interdependent programme, a minimum integration programme, streamlining of the regional economic communities and revision of the Abuja Treaty, in close cooperation with the African Union Commission (Yeo and Adou, 2008: p.97). The ultimate aim is to pave the way for the African Monetary Union.

In actual fact, the major strides made in statistical harmonization stem from efforts made by UEMOA, which had been shared with ECOWAS. Indeed, UEMOA received financing from the European Union under the multilateral surveillance framework for the implementation of the UEMOA Treaty. In view of the major advances made by the UEMOA zone in diverse areas of statistics of public finance such as the harmonized household consumer price index, national accounts (comparable GDPs) and external trade with the introduction of EUROTRACE (a specialized software) in all member States,

ECOWAS will stand to gain by forging a partnership with UEMOA to participate in new areas of statistical harmonization for industrial production, regional short-term analysis and sectoral statistics in at least four major areas: agriculture, mining, energy and transport. **4.2.3 The African Charter on Statistics: meeting the needs of users** The AUC has observed that Africa's statistical system did not always meet the needs of users and that data is produced and disseminated haphazardly and hardly ever in real time. Moreover, statistics produced in the past did not take into account the specific circumstances of Africa, such that the methods used often did not allow for credible comparisons between countries. The main reasons for this are:

- » The low budget allocation for statistical activities;
- » The weak institutional capacities and few number of networked statistical institutions;
- » The poor level of coordination and alignment with international standards.

The AUC therefore made a strategic decision to contribute to the provision of harmonized statistical information to users. This process is in line with the timetable of Africa's integration process. In this respect, Africa's statistical harmonization strategy was adopted in February 2009 with the decision to implement it in July 2009 at the African Union's² regular sessions. However, the implementation of the African Statistical Charter is considered differently by some African governments. Some see it as a priority, while others see it as a mere need; this implies that there will be delays in its implementation.

What is original in this effort is the idea that the AUC considers that quality statistics on all the continent's political, economic, social and cultural issues should be used to facilitate decisions and quality arbitrations in governance. The challenge is to produce quality statistics and introduce a "*culture of statistics*" on the continent. All these strategies are organized around four major strategic areas and divided into three strategic objectives:

- » Strategic area 1: Produce quality statistics in Africa
 - Strategic goal 1: Increase the statistics information base;
 - Strategic goal 2: Transform existing statistics in order to improve their comparability ;
 - Strategic goal 3: Harmonize standards and methods of statistics production.
- » Strategic area 2: Coordinate production of quality statistics for Africa
 - Strategic goal 1: Strengthen cooperation between institutions within the African statistical system;
 - Strategic goal 2: Establish an effective coordination mechanism;

² African Union, "African Charter on Statistics", in *The African Statistical Journal*, Volume 8, May 2009, see also African Union, on <http://www.africaunion.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/text/Charter_on_statistics%20-%20EN.pdf>; see also the African Union July 2009, "Decision on the Implementation of the African Charter on Statistics, Doc. Ex.cl/586(xvii) », see <http://www.who.int/pmnch/events/2010/excdec_e.pdf>

- Strategic goal 3: Define statistical priorities to implement the African integration agenda
- » Strategic area 3: Build a sustainable institutional capacity of the African statistical system
 - Strategic goal 1: Ensure independent statistical production;
 - Strategic goal 2: Build sustainable statistical capacities;
 - Strategic goal 3: Set up a sustainable technological environment.
- » Strategic area 4: Inculcate a culture of quality in the decision-making process;
 - Strategic goal 1: Influence evidence-based decisions by using statistics;
 - Strategic goal 2: Improve dissemination and communication on statistical information (African Union, 2009:8-14).

All these objectives should be integrated into the implementation of national strategies for the development of statistics, while the independent aspect should prevail if the credibility of the information provided is to be ensured.

The African Charter on statistics is based on the six core principles per article 3 of the Charter:

- » Principle 1: Professional independence: This independence vis-a-vis the political authorities is based on four interdependent concepts, namely: scientific independence, impartiality, responsibility and transparency;
- » Principle 2: Quality: This is based on the willingness to align with international standards. To this end, African statistics must meet the needs of users and must therefore be relevant. Future generations should be able to use them; they must therefore be sustainable, come from multiple sources, be accurate and reliable, coherent and comparable, disseminated in good time according to a pre-determined calendar, reflect current and topical events and trends, take African peculiarities into account and build awareness about the importance of statistics for the public;
- » Principle 3: Mandate for data collection and resources: Statistics authorities shall be endowed with a clear legal mandate empowering them to collect data for the production, and the request must come from the institutions. The statistical system should be adequately resourced with priority to the State. In return, the statistical authorities should be able to use the resources as efficiently and effectively as possible;—
- » Principle 4: Dissemination: African statistics shall not be made inaccessible to the public in any way whatsoever. To this end, access must be guaranteed and dialogue with users must be ongoing without discrimination. It is therefore important that statistics are presented in a clear and comprehensible form, with explanatory tables and the correspondence needed to democratize their accessibility. Lastly, statistics shall be disseminated in a manner that ensures that all users are able to use them simultaneously,

where statistics authorities receive the mandate to correct errors and omissions and even abusive practices;

- » Principle 5: Protection of individual data, information sources and respondents: The entire protection process relies on observance of confidentiality. To this end, the statistics authorities must provide assurances to data suppliers. Data concerning individuals shall not be used for judicial proceedings or punitive measures. The process should be based on rationality.____
- » Principle 6: Coordination and cooperation: Nothing can take place within the general framework of Africa's economic integration without coordination between statistical authorities, so as to promote harmonization and utilization of statistics provided by Africans. Cooperation with non-African institutions under bilateral or multilateral arrangements should be based on the willingness to encourage upgrading and transfer of expertise and knowledge in the production of a harmonious statistical system._

The originality of the African Statistical Charter is that the implementation, management and evaluation mechanisms of statistical harmonization should be able to occur at the same time at the national, regional and continental levels. The principle of subsidiarity as stated in article 8 of the Charter is thus very relevant. The mission of the Charter, per Article 10, is to facilitate the development of statistics by providing or improving at least the following 10 points:

- » Statistical legislation
- » Statistics advocacy actions;
- » Harmonization of statistical information gathering, production and dissemination methods;
- » Human and financial resource mobilization for statistics activities development and for effective operation of the African statistics system;
- » Establishing and updating definitions and concepts, norms and standards, nomenclatures and methodologies;
- » Coordination of statistical activities;
- » Data gathering, processing, management and archiving;
- » Dissemination and use of statistical information;
- » Statistical analysis and research;
- » Statistics training and human resource development.

In light of the above, it is not surprising that Dr. Jean Ping, Chairman of the AUC, invited all statistics stakeholders in Africa to *"take ownership of the African Charter on Statistics"* so as to avoid duplication of efforts, ensure their responsibility and adequate financing for statistical activities (African Union, 2009).

4.3 Toward interdependent development of statistics: national, regional, continental and sectoral

In terms of pushing forward the customs union and regional integration, the political authorities cannot ignore harmonization of statistics, especially if economic, monetary and fiscal unions are on the ECOWAS agenda. There is a need therefore, to consolidate what already exists in terms of statistics, while ensuring that methods are upgraded and comparable, accurate, reliable and timely data is made available to facilitate decision-making and arbitration and control of information for citizens. To this end, we must:

- » Maintain a statistical database that covers all socioeconomic sectors of the West Africa region;
- » Ensure the availability of comparable data under a regional statistical harmonization programme.

Harmonization of statistics should first be promoted and implemented at the national level by the major entities responsible for supplying the data, namely: the appropriate line ministries, public financial institutions and authorized production centres.

A conference should be organized with all structures and entities that supply data, including international institutions, so as to significantly reduce duplication and reassign budgets to local and regional production from primary sources. This should help distinguish between data obtained from primary sources and data from projections and extrapolations, whose neutrality may be called into question by national and regional authorities. National statistics production agencies should be involved in this effort.

A major effort should be made to promote understandable and electronic publications of African statistics, free of charge, in order to reach a wide public and increase awareness about the statistics situation in West Africa, through arbitration based on tangible facts. Analyses and publications from primary data must have wide publicity and distribution. It will be useful to facilitate this whole approach to communication and dissemination of information by setting up focal points at all institutions, including the ECA subregional offices, to network to promote information dissemination and improve their approaches by working on the same African statistics dissemination electronic platform.

Given the limited budget allocated to the promotion of statistics in Africa, most of the effort should come from coordination among stakeholders, who should meet regularly to exchange information and promote novel approaches.

Lastly, training and all forms of awareness programmes, including comic strips should not be excluded. The role of statistics promotion in the budgets of companies that practice social responsibility should be a credible option for finding innovative financing so as to sustain implementation of the African Charter on Statistics and harmonization of data. Africa's private sector is increasingly requiring reliable statistics from primary sources. It should be involved in the process of statistics production and dissemination in West Africa.

Lastly, the sharing of knowledge and exchange of information and complementarities among institutions responsible for statistics should be based on novel proactive approaches.

Unless all these recommendations are implemented, the harmonization and improvements of methods for preparing statistical operations will lag behind, especially at the level of national statistics systems. In actual fact, by improving the credibility of statistical data producers and their methods of work, taking into account Africa's peculiar circumstances, statistics produced in West Africa will become more reliable.

The idea of organizing meetings, workshops and other fora to identify and notify anomalies or flaws in the production of data should lead to more initiatives. These initiatives of statistical harmonization in Africa should:

- » Offer proposals for organizing homogeneous statistics that are tailored to Africa's peculiar circumstances, while complying with international norms and standards at the same time; Promote the metadata of major indicators contained in statistical databases at the national, regional and continental levels;;
- » Strengthen national and regional statistics boards by organizing regular meetings to share knowledge and upgrade skills;
- » Promote sectoral indicators and improve their comparability and reliability;
- » Introduce a statistical approval and rating system for statistics institutions, in line with criteria for granting statistics authorization so as to classify the institutions and ensure that upgrade programmes do not rule out some countries and favour others;

The wide disparities in compilation and calculation methods are a great impediment to the harmonization of the statistical system in West Africa. Priorities must therefore be set and implementation should be done using a modular approach and according to pre-established phases as suggested by the African Charter on Statistics. However, the following are priority sectors in terms of harmonization, forecasting, budgeting and financing. These are statistics on population and social affairs, national accounts, agriculture, education, foreign direct investments and generally, debt-generating and non-debt generating resources, currency and finances, prices, trade and production, ICTs, transport, construction and infrastructure in general, balance of payments, tourism and the environment.

Clearly, analyses should systematically be made in comparison with the regional and/or sectoral average, so as to assess progress in terms of that average. Trends must take their rightful place in order to facilitate strategic analyses, which have often been lacking in forestalling events and crises in Africa.

4.4 Democratization of statistics: democratization of the economy

The harmonization of data collection methods and economic forecasts presupposes convergence, discernment and innovation. Real-time reliable statistics guide the public authorities in decision-making. The complexity of African problems implies that empirical data should override reductionist theoretical models which are often far from the reality. Erroneous statistics can lead to serious errors in decisions of all kinds over the long and short terms and even in emergency situations.

There is therefore a need to be equipped in institutional capacities and specialized human resources. Indeed, Africa cannot afford to pay the price for errors that have to do with refusal to understand economic and social factors from a general and non-reductionist viewpoint, as is the habit of some institutions. These reductionist approaches in the economic sciences have opened up various avenues in the development economy. With the 2008 financial crisis, most of the economic theories based on obsolete models that are remote from Africa's situation were the cause of the crises that took a heavy toll of many African people. Reliable statistical data are an essential basis for knowledge formation if part of the knowledge prescribed from outside Africa often crumbles before the reality check.

The multi-polarity of the economy ought to be recognized and public authorities in West Africa in particular should ensure not to delay too much in implementing statistical harmonization and convergence; otherwise in the long run, public actions and related arbitrations may lead to marginalization of local and regional data.

African institutions must overcome their rigid approach, which requires that data should come from African institutions, with statistics authorities in West Africa becoming more open and flexible so as to expand opportunities for strengthening institutions of the region while entering into partnership which favour African interests.

To this end, more attention should be given to the contribution of the private sector, especially when the statistics concern them directly. The risks and vulnerabilities of statistics coming from a private source may be corrected by a control and validation structure. The notion of "statistics passport or visa" should serve as guarantee for the quality and reliability of information provided by the private sector..

The role of the State becomes key in the wider process of democratization of information, which, in actual fact, contributes to democratization of the development economy as part of an afro-centric approach (Amaizo, 2010). The regional and national institutions responsible for statistics must agree to the principle that statistics produced in West Africa should be made available to all and should be questioned by the public if the data is far from the reality. This effort at transparency is a sign of democratizing and demystifying statistics. These can no longer be limited to an elite group; indeed, statistical information must be available to all and used by all.

As part of the innovation and partnership effort, the World Bank decided in the spring of 2010 to provide the public with all its data and statistical methods accumulated over many years. This was the World Bank's *"Open data initiative"* which provides free access to over 2000 indicators on more than 200 countries, including those in West Africa. These indicators are on key development areas like finance, the economy, enterprise, health, human development, over several decades. According to the World Bank President *"We are working to make data analysis tools and modeling tools more user-friendly, so that researchers, civil society and local communities can come up with their own findings and double-check ours ..."* (Zoellick, 2010 : 46 et ss.).

The World Bank also launched the ***"Apps for Development Competition"*** that will challenge the developer community to create tools, applications and mash-ups using world bank online data.

The World Bank has also introduced *"Povcalnet"*, which is a web application that provides data on poverty and inequality to allow users to replicate the World Bank's global poverty measures. What is interesting about this platform is that the World Bank allows users to replicate the Bank's calculations and methods and make their own estimates based on different assumptions.

Lastly, the World Bank has also introduced the *"ADePt"* software to generate tables and graphs for economic analysis. This software can be downloaded freely by all users worldwide.

For economic forecasting, the World Bank has made its electronic economic forecasting platform available to over 100 countries. It is called *"ISimulate"* and also provides access to the World Bank's forecasts. The platform is interesting for West African countries as they can formulate and make their own projections and simulations and share them with those who share know-how and knowledge on this data exchange network.

The notion of harmonization and convergence cannot take place in future without the willingness and commitment to ensure democratization of statistics. It is therefore necessary

to propose an in-depth feasibility study on the establishment of a common statistics portal, which will have free access to all the important statistics of the World Bank. The future of harmonization of data collection methods and economic forecasting in West Africa will depend on increased use of the Internet in the form of a network architecture designed to move toward democratization of statistics to promote the economies of West Africa.

Statistical information providers should show humility, especially when data comes from the outside and is out of sync with Africa's realities.

The authorities of West Africa should contribute to building institutional capacities and human resources in the area, by showing unflinching commitment, to make real-time reliable statistics available. To this end, in conjunction with the private sector, the State and regional institutions must contribute to accelerating and preparing tools and instruments for measuring convergence and facilitating international comparisons.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations: Harmonization, Convergence and Comparability

The conclusions and recommendations focus on calling for an end to fragmentary approaches. The introduction of a common and electronic statistics portal could greatly help in finding a permanent solution to the problem.

5.1 Major study findings

The main observation of this report is that definite efforts have been made and continue to be made to harmonize data collection methods in West Africa. Specifically:

- » Immense technical and financial efforts have been made in West Africa for statistics comparability;
- » These efforts have enabled about 50 per cent of the countries of the subregion to make significant progress in the production of certain macroeconomic aggregates in terms of national accounts;
- » The issue of harmonization of economic forecasting methods has not had much attention;
- » While several initiatives by the international community and integration institutions of the subregion have experimented with and are still experimenting with different harmonization approaches, their actions are not coordinated. This has led to a two-tiered harmonization process. On the one hand, there are eight UEMOA-member countries, which benefit from AFRISTAT interventions and UEMOA Commission interventions as well as ECOWAS Commission interventions, and on the other hand, we have the countries of the second area. While there is awareness about the need for harmonization in the two areas mentioned earlier, to our knowledge, no major efforts have been made in this respect. Indeed, UEMOA member countries have made some strides, which have been taken into account by the ECOWAS Commission whose activities cover the 15 countries. The progress made by UEMOA countries is also taken into account by WAMA, which has been trying to place all the countries of the region at one level under a project implemented in 2009.

- » WAMA has implemented a harmonization programme designed to cover public finance and monetary statistics, the balance of payments and the real effective exchange rate. Other statistics like national accounts, consumer prices, external trade, population statistics and sectoral statistics (agriculture, mining, and fishery) have been left out in the ECOWAS work programme, under a cooperation agreement between the two institutions. The goal here is to accelerate the harmonization process and at the same time pool efforts and resources around common goals for the two institutions. Also, under this project, the expertise and achievements of AFRISTAT and the UEMOA Commission will be put to use.
- » Also under the ECOWAS Commission programme, AFRISTAT's intervention capacities will be built in the Anglophone countries of ECOWAS, where two statisticians will be recruited to work on the harmonization of national accounts and the consumer price index. This initiative will be a good start for the institution's work in the subregion..

5.2 Recommendations

As we end our analysis, we deem it important to make proposals for bringing an end to the rift between UEMOA and WAMA, which continues to be observed in the area of harmonization of statistics in West Africa.

5.2.1 Bringing an end to the two-tier process: A few proposals

Current activities by ECOWAS and WAMA, as mentioned earlier, are indicative of the fact that these subregional institutions are now fully aware of the need to work together, as most ongoing projects (at least, their design) involve the UEMOA Commission and AFRISTAT.

In line with its mandate, the ECA Subregional Office for West Africa has initiated efforts to bring together subregional institutions working in the area of integration. These initiatives, which have been owned by the UEMOA Commission and ECOWAS Commission, has led to the setting up of the Forum of West African Intergovernmental Organizations, aimed at pooling interventions for effective regional integration. Statistical harmonization is an essential component for the achievement of this process. We are thus proposing that harmonization of statistics should be considered as a priority area of cooperation among intergovernmental organizations in West Africa. There are currently cooperation agreements between institutions in the area of harmonization. These include the agreement between ECOWAS and WAMA as well as between ECOWAS and CILSS, and several others. However, this does not help end the rift. Making harmonization a priority area should help institutions working in one area or another in West Africa's statistical system to formulate joint projects and mobilize resources to implement them. These projects should take into account the gains and expertise of each one of them.

How can non-members of UEMOA that are lagging behind in certain areas catch up? It is important to outline a framework that will help them to advance in their harmonization efforts without compelling others to delay a process that has gone on for several years and is bearing fruit. An assessment should be made of the levels reached by each country. This is already ongoing under the WAMA/ECOWAS project and as part of the revision of convergence criteria started by AfDB, WAMA and the ECOWAS Commission. Ongoing studies cover all areas of statistics and extend to the assessment of areas such as institutional frameworks of public finances and public debt management. These studies and projects should help define a minimum framework for harmonization based on the assessment of the situation. It is hoped that outlining this framework will take into account the gains made by UEMOA member countries as indicated in most project documents. This should be facilitated with active involvement by all stakeholders in the entire process.

5.2.2 Bringing an end to the two-tier process: Role of ECA

For now, ECA interventions in the area of statistics in the subregion are limited. However, the SRO is a major player in regional integration and the pooling of IGO interventions in West Africa. The Office is also a major user of data produced by national statistical systems and thus has special interest in bringing an end to the conflicting figures presented in reports on economic and social conditions and prospects – an annual reference publication by the Office. However, at the continental level, ECA plays a major role in the statistical system with its African Centre for Statistics, in collaboration with the AUC and AfDB.

To ensure strong cohesion between the continental approach recommended by the regional institutions and that of the subregion, we suggest that the Reference Regional Strategic Framework for capacity building (RRSF) outlined by ECA and AfDB should be implemented, with the support of the World Bank and PARIS21 to help and improve development outcomes and establishment of good governance in Africa by guiding and accelerating sustainable statistics capacity building.

The RRSF, whose general goal is to strengthen national statistics systems, is three fold: (a) meet user needs; (b) improve the management of national statistics systems and (c) guarantee the viability and irreversibility of statistics development.

Box 2: The Reference Regional Strategic Framework for capacity building in Africa

RRSF was designed to improve development and governance by strengthening national statistical systems in Africa and guiding and accelerating statistical capacity building activities. These were measures taken by African countries with the help of the international community to meet data-related challenges for policy outcomes by 2005.

1. What is proposed?

RRSF is more of a general framework than a specific set of activities and recommended guidelines. It also recognizes that most actions should be carried out at the national level and that problems and priorities vary from country to country..

RRSF, whose general objective is to strengthen national statistics systems, is based on three themes: meet user needs; improve management of national statistics systems and guarantee viability and irreversibility of statistical development.

The major actions under the first theme are as follows:

- Encourage all countries to prepare and implement a national statistics development strategy (NSDS);
- Develop key data areas, with focus on monitoring of poverty reduction strategies and the MDGs, and on better use of current data sources;
- Invest in the basic statistics infrastructure needed to support efficient statistical systems;
- Make efficient use of new technologies in the collection, compilation and dissemination of data;
- Strengthen data analysis by producers and users alike, so as to ensure that the findings are relevant to the development process;
- Improve the dissemination of data and ensure that it is in line with systems such as the General Data Dissemination System;
- Under the second theme, the RRSF focuses on the following:
 - Update the legal and regulatory framework and ensure that it is in line with the fundamental principles of the United Nations and best practices on official statistics;
 - Strengthen coordination and communication among all stakeholders such as data suppliers and users;
 - Focus on development and more rational use of human resources in the area of statistics;
 - With regard to the third theme, the focus is on: integrating statistics as a determinant of the development process and cornerstone for strengthening governance and accountability;
 - Improve financing and viability of statistics, in particular to support the implementation of NSDS.

2. How will the framework be implemented?

National statistical systems must first implement the framework, while the national statistics institutes will be the main driving force. These institutes must focus on raising awareness and seek support for the framework in general. The countries must see to it that the importance of statistics is recognized and that it is sufficiently resourced. Data users must be aware of the importance of statistics for obtaining results in terms of development and see to it that their needs are taken into account and that the data available is used to improve policies and service provision. Subregional and regional organizations also have an important role to play in promoting the development of statistics, monitoring its implementation and organizing meetings aimed at pooling knowledge, experiences and skills. For the framework to be efficient, it will be essential for development organizations and donors to participate fully in its implementation. It will be necessary to set up sustainable programmes that ensure that the external support required is available, that it is supplied in a timely manner and complements coherent national development statistical system programmes, so as to lift some of the burden off these systems.

Source: www.uneca.org

The framework stipulates that subregional and regional organizations have an important role to play, in promoting the development of statistics, monitoring its implementation and organizing meetings to pool together knowledge, experiences and skills. Setting up this framework in partnership with ECOWAS, UEMOA, AFRISTAT, WAMA and all the IGOs involved in statistical systems with the SRO-WA and under the technical supervision of the African Centre for Statistics should increase the chances of success of statistics harmonization.

In terms of forecasting methods, we believe that there is no need to wait to obtain fully harmonized statistics before thinking about setting up a harmonization mechanism for economic forecasting methods. We suggest that ECA, together with ECOWAS and AFRISTAT should experiment the holding of half yearly workshops in UEMOA member countries, so as to help spread this good practice by francophone countries throughout the ECOWAS area. The SRO could play a major role in setting up this committee and working with AFRISTAT on the content of the initial workshops. These workshops could be used as opportunities to identify economic forecasting methods used by Anglophone countries and to study the mechanisms for harmonizing them with the prevailing practices in the francophone countries.

This approach will help to safeguard the gains made and build on the experiences of different countries. It will also help the Office to have all the elements needed for preparing the report on economic and social conditions in West Africa by limiting the risk of protests against the assumptions and methods.

However, the willingness by the major statistics institutions to open statistical data and methodologies and variable adjustment possibilities to the general public paves the way for a new era in harmonization and rapid convergence of statistical data. This would not happen soon unless an electronic statistics platform at the national, regional and continental levels is put in place. This common statistics portal should facilitate convergence and be based on the vision of the African Charter on Statistics. It is only then that an interdependent strategy can enable independent statistics strategies to emerge as innovations and in-depth efforts that will open the way to democratization with access to a large amount of data. Implicitly, it is democratization of the economic democratic process that would carry the day.

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