

**THE GENERAL DATA  
DISSEMINATION SYSTEM  
(GDDS)**

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## **THE GENERAL DATA DISSEMINATION SYSTEM (GDDS)**

*The GDDS is a structural process through which IMF member countries commit voluntarily to improving the quality of the data produced and disseminated by their statistical systems over the long run to meet the needs of macroeconomic analysis. Kenya became a participant in GDDS in January 2002 with the Director of Statistics, CBS, formally being appointed the National Coordinator.*

### **1. Introduction**

Following the 1994-1995 international financial crisis, there was recognition that timely availability of economic and financial data to the public could facilitate the formulation and implementation of sound macroeconomic policies and investment decisions. In turn, this could reduce the frequency and the severity of episodes of unusual turbulence in financial markets.

More recently, it has been recognised that statistical needs by users, coupled with uncertainties about the direction, manner and the rate at which these needs evolve, pose special challenges for the development of statistical systems. As the user community finds its analytical practices being shaped to an ever-greater extent by globalisation of the world's economies, those charged with responsibility for statistical systems must in turn find new and innovative ways to accomplish their mission of serving user needs.

In mitigation against such challenges, standards needed to be established to guide countries in the development of their overall statistical systems so as to place their systems in the boarder

context of emerging trends in the international statistical community and to share their own experiences with other interested countries and the international user community.

In 1995, the IMF's Board of Governors requested the Fund's Executive Board to focus on the development of standards to guide member countries in the provision of economic and financial data to the public. Later in the year, the interim committee endorsed the establishment of a two-tier standard, that is, the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) and the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS). Member countries of the IMF were encouraged to participate in one of these standards. Best practices prescribed for participation in the SDDS are more demanding than those for GDDS. The standard is meant for those countries which had or might seek access to international capital markets. A number of developed countries, including South Africa and Tunisia in Africa signed for the SDDS and started to prepare monthly information on the same. For these countries, their metadata have already been posted to the website while their Plans for Improvements formed the basis of strategic plans. The rest of the African countries are in various stages of the GDDS.

## **2. The nature of the GDDS**

The GDDS is a structural process through which IMF member countries commit voluntarily to improving the quality of the data produced and disseminated by their statistical systems over the long run to meet the needs of macro-economic analysis. The member countries determine the priorities they will pursue guided by a set of statistical development plans that reflect migration towards full realisation of the objectives of the GDDS. Prioritisation should take into account a country's resources and other constraints which in

turn determine the speed and hence the location on the migration path. The Fund supports these efforts by providing technical assistance in areas in which it has expertise and by catalysing assistance from other sources.

The GDDS recognises that participating countries differ in their stages of statistical development and the capacity to improve their statistical system over time. Therefore, GDDS emphasises long-run statistical systems development. The GDDS:

- ◆ Contains objectives that are designed to promote orderly development of statistical systems;
- ◆ Provides tools to diagnose areas of the statistical system that require priority attention; and
- ◆ Establishes processes to aid in the formulation and implementation of short-run and longer-run development plans which permit dynamic adaptation to changing circumstances.

In January 1998, the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) document was first issued and it constituted the primary reference source on what GDDS is and how it should be implemented. GDDS is funded by DFID and other multi-lateral agencies like the World Bank, OECD, United Nations. The project is managed by the Statistics Department of the IMF and covers five sectors including, the real sector, financial, external, fiscal and socio-demographic sectors.

In June 1998, preliminary version of the GDDS document was distributed to the member countries. Since June 1998, IMF has

organised regional seminars/workshops where the GDDS has been discussed and explained to officials representing the national statistical agencies of the 131 member countries. There are 14 Anglophone countries participating in the GDDS project. For the 14 Anglophone African countries, the first workshop was held in Gaborone, Botswana in December, 2001.

### 3. **GDDS objectives**

The GDDS is a structural process with an overarching objective addressing, in an orderly manner, statistical needs that have emerged from globalisation of the world's economies and the attendant intensification of the demand for a wide range of economic and other data to underpin the task of macroeconomic management. GDDS addresses three key areas: data quality, data dissemination and development of plans for improving statistical systems. These areas constitute the basis on which to formulate long run policies for statistical development.

### 4. **Participation/Membership to GDDS**

The participation in GDDS is voluntary for the member countries. Member countries which choose to participate in the system initiate the process by indicating their intention in a communication to the Director of Statistics Department of the IMF. A member country is required to undertake three actions and participation depends on completion of these actions as follows:

- a) Commitment to using the GDDS as a framework for the development of national systems for the production and

dissemination of economic, financial, and socio-demographic data.

- b) Designation of a country coordinator to work with the Fund staff on all the aspects of participation and implementation of the GDDS; and
- c) Preparation of metadata to be disseminated by the Fund on the Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board (BSBB) on:
  - i) Current statistical production and dissemination practices.
  - ii) Plans for short-term and longer-term improvements in the dimensions of the GDDS system given below:
    - ◆ The Data - Coverage, Periodicity and Timeliness.
    - ◆ Quality - In the GDDS system, quality is an attribute of statistical data. As such, this dimension deals with the information which is available to users to be able to access quality and quality improvements.
    - ◆ Integrity - In this dimension, GDDS requires that users are given information enough to build their confidence in the professionalism and objectivity of the agency producing the statistics.

The metadata is organised into three tables A, B and C:

Table A: Presents a comprehensive framework that encompasses, the analytical framework, concepts, definitions and classification; scope of data; accounting conventions; nature of basic data sources; compilation practices and plans for improvements.

Table B: Gives data categories and indicators the specific areas as data characteristic; data quality; dissemination including use of modern IT such as websites and CD ROMs; and plans for improvements.

Table C: This is on data integrity and access to public. It focuses on data produced and disseminated; data categories; data integrity and access by the public and plans for improvements.

## **6. Conclusion**

The metadata for Kenya was completed and posted on the DSBB and can be viewed by opening <http://dsbb.imf.org/> and looking for links to GDDS metadata by country. The Central Bureau of statistics (CBS) has published a booklet that contains details on the GDDS project for Kenya and other 13 Anglophone African countries under the title “The General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) and Plans for Improvements”. The CBS plans to post the same material on their website [www.cbs.go.ke](http://www.cbs.go.ke)

Participating countries in the GDDS are obliged to revise their metadata annually.

## **RESEARCH DEPARTMENT**

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