



Mission Report

SACU Secretariat Visit to the African Development Bank, 29-30 January 2009

Background

On 29-30 January 2009, the Director Trade Facilitation and Revenue Management, Mr. Dumisani Mahlinza and the Economist, Ms. Motselisi Matsela visited the African Development Bank in Tunis, Tunisia. The objective of the visit was to explore possible assistance in establishing a SACU database. The visit provided an opportunity for the Secretariat to explore other areas of collaboration with the African Development Bank.

The Secretariat was met by the Chief Economist, Dr. Louis Kasekende, who handed over the coordination of the Secretariat's visit to the Chief Statistician, Mr. Maurice Mubila. Meetings were subsequently arranged with the Economic and Statistics Division (ESTA) of the AfDB, the IT Department and the Statistical Capacity Building Unit.

The AfDB Database

The AfDB uses a database that was developed by the World Bank. Through the assistance of the World Bank, the AfDB has customised the database for its purposes and is constantly improving it. The database handles time series data and is used to maintain economic, social and financial data relating to the Bank's clients. It also stores information on the Bank's operations. The database facilitates information dissemination within and outside the bank. The database is web-based and allows Bank staff easy online access both on and off-site.

Database Set-up

Data entry and management is done on a system called Data Collection System (DCS). This is a back office system that allows processing of data from different sources including cleaning and verification.

The DCS operates on SQL and allows for creation of customized indicators and reports which can either be aggregate or derived indicators. The DCS consists of six satellite

databases in the key areas in which the Bank operates: Social; Macroeconomic; Agriculture; External Sector; Private Sector and Infrastructure; and Bank Operations. The satellite databases are managed by the different area specialists.

Linked to the DCS, is the main AfDB database, which is based on Oracle. Data get transferred to the oracle database, once it has been cleared by the Division Manager. At this stage, the database becomes available to all Bank staff through the intranet and selected indicators are posted on the internet. It should be noted that, not every data is published on the internet. From the working databases, users can customize reports, maps and charts and share them in different formats. Query results can be saved as web pages and can be refreshed.

To support the database, the AfDB statistics division provides training to all Bank staff on a monthly basis. The IT department helps the different departments at the Bank by evaluating the software packages proposed for installation against the requirements/specifications prepared by the technical departments.

Sources of Data

Data is mainly collected from Member States during missions as well as through a dedicated data collection service, where the Bank has employed national data correspondents. Data is also sourced from secondary sources such as the IMF and World Bank databases. The Bank has designed a standard questionnaire that is administered by national data correspondents and filed back to the Bank periodically.

Capacity Building Programme

The Bank's capacity building programme was established in 2004 and was previously coordinated by EUROSTAT. This programme was initially focused on collecting price statistics to facilitate the compilation of purchasing power parities. When the Bank took over the Eurostat programme, they expanded into the area of national accounts. The first phase of the Bank's programme has been completed and the Bank is preparing the second phase, which will begin in 2009.

The second phase of the capacity building programme will focus on national accounts and social statistics. Member States will also be assisted in the design of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS).

In the area of national accounts, the programme will assist Member States with the methodologies for undertaking Household Budget Surveys. In the area of prices, the programme will assist member states in data collection including the provision of transport for purposes of collecting statistics.

Conclusion

The AfDB database is comprehensive and user friendly and can accommodate huge data files. It would serve the Secretariat's database needs as far as macroeconomic data is concerned. However, the database is weak on trade data. It will be necessary

to define the requirements with respect to trade data and explore with the World Bank whether a trade module can be developed.

There will be need to look at the COMESA database with a view to assess its trade module. This will assist in the specification of the requirements for the SACU database.

Way Forward

In mapping the way forward, the following was agreed between the Secretariat and the AfDB:

- The Secretariat will develop its systems requirements and share this with the Bank. The Bank will assist in reviewing this document. This will be used to approach the World Bank. The World Bank can then decide on the basis of the specification, the assistance that could be extended to the Secretariat. The contact person at the World Bank is Mr. Vilas Mandlekar.
- The Secretariat needs to spend more time developing the trade data module in detail (as part of the requirements document), as SACU is a trading arrangement.
- The AfDB indicated its willingness to assist SACU with technical support in the installation of the system. Since it may be costly to obtain technical support from Washington, it may be cheaper for the AfDB to assist where it can. The AfDB was agreeable to hosting the SACU IT Manager in order to discuss the technical specification of the database and compatibility with the SACU system. This will also provide the IT Manager with hands-on experience on customization that the Bank is currently undertaking on their database.
- The AfDB showed interest in providing assistance on the methodologies for conducting Household Budget Survey (HBS) to SACU Member States. This could be very helpful given that SACU is in the process of harmonizing GDP compilation. The Secretariat agreed to share its work programme on the harmonization of GDP with the Bank.