



Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL ACCOUNTING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN
PUBLIC LIFE**

CONCEPT NOTE

June2020

1. Background and rationale

The Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT) was set up by a treaty signed on 21 September 1993 by 14 Franc Zone member countries. It currently has 22 Member States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal and Togo. AFRISTAT's headquarters are in Bamako (Mali). Its activities effectively started on 2 January 1996.

AFRISTAT's role is to advise the national statistical systems of its Member States and support their action. It has regulatory powers in the area of harmonization of statistical concepts, standards and methods. In addition, as an Observatory, it is empowered to compile statistical data as well as economic and social analyses on Member States.

In order to provide Member States with reliable and up-to-date data for the formulation, implementation and monitoring & evaluation of development strategies and policies, AFRISTAT works towards harmonization of statistical concepts, standards and methods for a better comparability of information in the perspective of regional economic integration.

AFRISTAT's areas of intervention have evolved over time. Initially focused on institutional organization and economic and financial statistics, the Observatory gradually broadened its scope by working on dissemination and social and environmental statistics. Since the start of its activities, national accounts and price statistics have been the two areas in which the Member States have been most heavily solicited. For this reason, these two topics are generally the only ones where the Observatory has several practising experts.

In the area of national accounts, AFRISTAT has, since 1996, successively supported its Member States in:

- The consolidation of their national accounts according to the 1968 SNA;
- The migration of their national accounts to the 1993 SNA;
- Modernising their national accounts by bringing them into line with the 2008 SNA;
- The extension to satellite, regional and quarterly accounts.

At each of these stages, the objective of harmonisation has remained constant despite the specificities that may exist within Member States. It should be noted that the ERETES national accounts compilation software has greatly contributed to the achievement of the previous objective with the gradual generalisation of its use in all these countries.

Beyond harmonisation, results can also be seen in the registers of the production of quality and up-to-date national accounts aggregates, in accordance with the international standards in force. In this respect, it should be stressed that the importance of national accounts data is recognised by its main users, i.e. the economic and financial administrations of the States, technical and financial partners, as well as some players of the private sector and civil society.

However, here and there, there is a fringe of potential users who criticize the accuracy of national

accounts, on the one hand, and its relevance in describing economic activity, on the other. On the other hand, another more demanding category of users is increasingly demonstrating the need for more refined analyses of national accounts results. These particular user needs will increase following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new demands will be mainly oriented towards measuring the impact of this health crisis on economic growth. It is also timely to note that the producers of national accounts also face major challenges in continuing to publish their accounts regularly despite the disruptions caused by the presence of COVID-19.

It is for all these reasons that it is timely to better understand the importance of national accounts aggregates, their various uses, as well as their implications in economic and social life, particularly in achieving a number of objectives defined at the national, regional and international levels.

In this respect, the holding of this major conference makes it possible to enhance the value of national accounts statistics at the continental level.

2. Objectives of the Conference

The overall objective of the Conference is to highlight the usefulness of national accounts in everyday life by presenting, as far as possible, the efforts made to ensure the relevance of the construction methods and the accuracy of the results.

Specifically, it aims to:

- Popularize knowledge of national accounts to the general public;
- Show the importance of national accounts as a decision-making tool;
- Reassure users about the technical precautions taken upstream to produce the most realistic national accounts possible;
- Show the ingenuity of the national accountant in capturing the most unlikely activities;
- Show the methodological adaptations that are made over time (1968SNA, 1993SNA; 2008SNA) to capture the socio-economic, technological and environmental changes that are taking place.

3. Themes of the Conference

Without being exhaustive, the topics that will be discussed during this Conference will relate to:

- Theme 1: *The Problem of Accuracy of National Accounts Data*

Under this theme, the papers will aim at sharing concrete experiences on the initiatives carried out in the process of compiling national accounts so that the aggregates calculated best reflect the phenomenon, relationship or situation they try to describe or assess. Also relevant here are efforts of all kinds and ingenuity to be as comprehensive as possible in the coverage of activities and other behaviours.

In this theme, the expected contributions can cover topics such as the inclusion of the informal sector in national accounts, precautions to be taken for migration from one SNA to another, changing the basis of the accounts.

- **Theme 2: *National accounts and the 2030 and 2063 Agendas***

In view of the strong media coverage of the agendas on SDGs and the aspirations of the African Union by 2063, this theme aims to show the contribution of national accounting in the effort to provide information on the various recommended indicators. Since the calculation of a SDG indicator or an indicator of the 2063 Agenda depends on the prior determination of an aggregate or figure from the national accounts, this relationship deserves to be highlighted. The inverse relationship can, where it exists, also be documented and presented.

- **Theme 3: *Evolution of national accounts frameworks: necessity or fantasy?***

Changes appear regularly in everyday life and also in the relationships between individuals and between individuals and other physical and moral entities. Added to this, the technological means that are evolving even more rapidly are also having an impact on the nature of interactions between economic agents. All these mutations inevitably bring about changes in behaviour which in turn lead to changes in the choices made at the socio-economic, financial, technological, environmental and cultural levels.

Wherever possible, the national accountant has always tried to adapt his frameworks in order to better reflect the changes that have taken place in his results matrix. The successive updates of the national accounting systems are part of this perpetual desire for modernisation. Any evidence that helps to give concrete expression to this desire to provide accurate information on the changes that are emerging deserves to be proposed under this theme.

Furthermore, the discussions may also be extended to the prospects for migration to a more recent SNA than the one adopted in 2008. Subjects that suggest changes in approaches, methods or otherwise will be discussed and probably a consensus can be reached.

4. Organization of the Conference

The International Conference on National Accounts and its Implications in Public Life is organized by the Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT) in collaboration with INSEE, the WAEMU Commission and UNECA.

The main activities of the Conference are summarized in the organization of sessions around the proposed themes. For each session, one or several papers moderated by a personality are planned. At the end of the presentations relating to a session, discussions and exchanges will follow with a view to making relevant proposals and recommendations for the advancement of national accounting on the continent.

5. Registration modalities and profile of participants

Participation in the Conference is free of charge and open to all interested persons provided that they register on AFRISTAT's website (www.afristat.org). Three types of participants are expected:

- Ordinary guests, composed of both producers of national accounts and users;
- Speakers presenting papers or moderating sessions;
- And the organizers.

Persons wishing to present a paper during the Conference are requested to prepare an abstract of their paper (one page maximum in pdf, word format) to be sent to AFRISTAT at the following address: conference_cn@afriostat.org with the subject line: "Theme X¹". The abstract to be attached to the message should include distinctly at the beginning: (i) the title of the paper, (ii) the name and title of the author(s) and (iii) the e-mail address and telephone number of the author(s).

A Scientific Committee composed of experts from the organizing institutions and academics will be responsible for the selection of the papers.

Authors who will have submitted the abstracts of their presentations before 15 August, 2020, will receive a notification of acceptance or not of their project at least 45 days before the beginning of the Conference (i.e. by the end of August 2020 at the latest) to allow them to finalize the drafting of their paper.

The final versions of papers as well as any PowerPoint presentations will be communicated to AFRISTAT no later than 14 October 2020 (i.e. one week before the start of the Conference).

6. Funding

The financing of the material organisation of the Conference is the responsibility of the organisers. The participants' expenses are not guaranteed, a priori, for all those who wish to take part in the Conference. However, depending on the details that will be provided in the registration form and the opportunities that will arise, arrangements can be made.

It should be noted that should the coronavirus-related health crisis persist, AFRISTAT does not rule out the possibility of organizing this activity by videoconference. In this case, financial constraints would be irrelevant.

7. Publication

Authors of the best papers identified will be offered the opportunity to publish them in Statéco, the UNECA Journal, or in the AFRISTAT Newsletter.

8. Place, dates and contact persons

The International Conference will probably take place in the second half of October 2020 at a location to be specified. The contact persons for all relevant information, both for technical matters and administrative and logistical aspects, are listed below.

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¹Number to be specified depending on the theme to which the paper refers