



Research Department Statistics Seminar: 28 – 31 March 2011
“Towards statistics that make sense - closing the loopholes”

Practical statistical proposals

Linda Motsumi and Zeph Nhleko

Introduction

The purpose of the seminar was to find ways of improving data collection processes in the Research Department, assess the relevance of data disseminated and discuss ways of formulating strategies of adapting to the ongoing changes in the global economy. There is a general agreement in the department that better statistics should be accompanied by good analysis. As such, the issue of statistics quality has been seriously discussed for many years. Major meetings include the Statistics Workshop held in 2002, the Data Quality Working Group Workshop in 2009 and active participation in the International Statistical Institute (ISI) in 2009.

In view of the above, there is a need to move beyond agreeing on what the challenges are and action the recommendations. Thus the purpose of this paper is to provide pointers, in broad terms, of the possible actionable factors (actionables) that will be detailed in the **Post-seminar Action Plan Document**. These pointers are drawn from the seminar papers and previous discussions in the Department. The time frame from 2011 to 2013 is defined as short-term (3 months up to 2 years) and 3 years onwards as long-term. Similarly, a careful prioritization should occur when selecting issues to address.

Enabling environment

Certain, basic factors must be in place to enhance progress in addressing the statistical gaps raised at the seminar. The Research Department needs to have:

- a comprehensive strategy on methodology
- an understanding that each member has a role to play – statistics are a department-wide concern that requires an open-minded approach.
- structures to enhance understanding of work environment (both internally and externally)
- an understanding of its role in the economic information space (visibility)

- full support and provision of more responsibility to data quality initiatives
- a carefully crafted resource plan; and
- willingness to explore and embrace change while staying realistic about what needs to happen.

Short-term actionables

In the short term, the high level points are to:

- enhance and streamline the strategy for respondents (respondents management tools)
- review survey methodology (survey design and survey process)
- enhance and streamline the strategy for users (relevancy of what is disseminated)
- accelerate and broaden process of collaborating with other agencies, particularly at data collection level
- cultivate a culture of discussing the statistical methodologies regularly to unearth structural shifts and generate interest (departmental/inter-division)
- assess data quality measures (quality gates)
- close observable data gaps, such as the detailed analysis of mortgages
- create/enhance structures for internal knowledge and information sharing about our statistics, for example, a specific day in a month to discuss all data releases up to that point.
- enhance the strategy for keeping up with economic changes that impact on statistics (know your territory/target market)
- keeping abreast with existing electronic data contracts and their relevance

Long-term actionables

In the short term, the high level points are to:

- keep track and contribute to discussions to review regional convergence strategy to enhance regional statistics (Learning from the experience of Euro zone.)
- strengthen tools for early detection of errors/flaws in statistical process, for example enhancing data integration through the flow of funds
- enhance data quality measures (checks and balances)
- enhance strategy and structural organization for sectoral statistical analysis, ultimately the goal is to have a sectoral database
- understand that Equilibrium is not just IT exercise, but fundamental medium to enhance statistical environment, thus involvement is critical
- have a strategy to understand new manuals (simplified for better understanding)
- respond to G20 developments (dealing with gaps identified – see Robert Heath report); and

- maintain relationships established during the Outreach programme sessions for future statistical benefits.

Conclusion

The improvement of the quality of statistics and the level of analysis is an ongoing phenomenon. The actual implementation of proposals is the key factor for Departmental success. The Research Department is in the business of economics information and central to that business is economic statistics. The bottom line is that **“economic research and policy decisions based on flawed economic statistics are utterly meaningless”** and **“methodological relevance without good data is only half the solution”**