SADC economic integration and statistical framework: issues of definition, measurement and statistical improvement

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1.0 Introduction

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) was established with the ultimate objective of achieving economic integration featuring Customs Union in 2010 and Monetary Union by 2016. Generally, economic integration derives relevance from the potential to achieve common goals more effectively by joint actions and efforts. The amalgamation in the SADC region strive to facilitate effective utilisation of regional resources for faster and sustainable economic growth unilaterally and in the SADC region altogether. This endeavour looks forward to achieve a common front in fighting poverty and human life miseries and promotion of regionally supported sustainable development plans and socio-economic inter-dependence of the Member States.

It is evident from similar arrangements found elsewhere around the globe that, if managed properly, integration arrangement benefits the region and the partners primarily from aspects such as increased market size, enhanced intra-regional trade, intra-regional investment flows, technology and experience transfers, and more correlated economic growth cycles. Studies on regional growth cycle convergence in the EU exhibited that deeper trade integration had strong direct positive effect on the synchronisation of regional growth cycles in the Euro area.[2]

To facilitate attainment of the SADC integration agenda, a convergence framework based on selected common key macroeconomic variables was developed and adopted by the SADC Member States, the thrust being to create necessary conditions and environment to allow monitoring, assessment and acceleration of the convergence process. Selected primary indicators (based on the best judgement of the SADC macroeconomic environment) include, single digit inflation rate, budget deficit not exceeding 5.0 percent of GDP, nominal value of public and publicly guaranteed debt less than 60% of GDP and current account deficit of less than 9.0 percent of GDP.

A regional statistical program that was instituted by SADC to support the regional integration process through provision of requisite statistical information forms one of the key elements in the attainment of the SADC regional objectives. The implementation of the SADC Statistical Programme is generally overseen and guided by the SADC Statistical Committee.[3] The SADC through the Committee has undertaken various initiatives in respect of the operationalisation of the statistical framework that include training (jointly financed by EU and SADC), special work on price statistics with objective of generating harmonized CPI for the region, capacity building in analysis of poverty reduction and millennium development goals

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[1] Bank of Tanzania.

[2] See G. Tondl and I. Traistaru-Siedschlag (2006).

[3] See SADC RISDP.

in the member state.[4] The subsequent sections examine issues of definitions, measurement and statistical improvements on the selected SADC macroeconomic convergence variables.

2.0 Definition of Key Variables

This section provides definitions of macroeconomic variables which have been selected as primary indicators for convergence in SADC. In particular, the coverage summarizes the concepts, definitions and classifications that have been developed under the SADC paradigm to guide statistical practices in the Member States.

2.1 Inflation

In the SADC region, inflation is defined as the general increase in consumer prices of goods and services over a specified period of time. Inflation is generally categorised into headline inflation and core inflation, where the former is a measure of general level of inflation and the latter measures the level of inflation excluding certain items that face volatile price movements, e.g. food and energy.

In the region, it is the headline inflation that matters for a typical household because it measures the rate at which the cost of living is rising. The structure of the majority of SADC economies, distribution of economic activities and the rural urban superstructure confirms the use of headline inflation in assessment cost and standards of living. Thus for purposes of monitoring the macroeconomic convergence programme, the recommended measure is headline inflation, i.e. the all-items Consumer Price Index (CPI), with the exception of interest on mortgages. This is the measure of inflation that is likely to be most consistently available across all countries.

However, in the interest of achieving monetary policy objectives, Central banks in the region also measure underlying (core) rate of inflation that is less influenced by exogenous factors. The relevance and application of the core inflation in the convergence process compared to use of the headline inflation is that, the former exclude some items whose prices are considered unpredictable and less under the control of monetary policy.[5] Deciding on the items to exclude from the general inflation constitute main challenge for using core inflation in the region.[6]

2.2 Fiscal Balance

In the SADC region, budget deficit/surplus is as defined in the Government Finance Statistics (GFS) manual of the IMF. The balance comprises total Central Government Expenditure[7] and Net lending[8] less total revenue (including external grants), but excluding extraordinary financing items such as privatisation proceeds, other asset sales, etc. For purposes of monitoring the macroeconomic convergence programme in the region, budget deficit/surplus

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4 See SADC Regional Statistical Programme.

5 Supply related.

6 Tanzania, food group which include all food items is excluded. Exclusion of energy sub-group is under consideration.

7 Central government includes budgetary accounts, extra-budgetary accounts, and social security funds.

8 Lending for public policy purposes less repayments of such lending, and acquisition of shares and other equities for public policy purposes less sales of such equities.

as a percentage of GDP shall imply overall deficit/surplus, calculated after including external grants as part of revenue. Analysis of performance of government fiscal operations includes indicator(s) to assess the level of Member States' dependence on grants and other forms of external financing and sustainability.

2.3 Public Debt

In the SADC the public debt is defined the sum of public and publicly guaranteed debt where public debt is the sum of all domestic and external obligations of public debtors which include the central government and its agencies; states, provinces or similar political subdivisions including their agencies; and autonomous public bodies such as state enterprises and subsidiaries in which they have joint ownership with the private sector and a major shareholding. Publicly guaranteed debt is the sum of all domestic and external obligations of the public or private sector that is guaranteed for repayment by a public entity.

2.4 Current Account Balance

The current account of the balance of payments is the sum of net sales from trade in goods and services, net factor income (such as interest payments from abroad) and net unilateral transfers from abroad. Positive net sales to non-residents correspond to a current account surplus; negative net sales to non-residents correspond to a current account deficit. In the SADC region, the calculation of the current account deficit/surplus is guided by the Balance of Payments Manual 5 (BPM5).

3.0 Measurement Issues

Measurement of the macroeconomic convergence variables represents unresolved challenges in view of the diverse economic backgrounds and methodologies inherent in SADC countries. There is wide evidence of statistical inconsistencies in the statistical data generated in the region and used in comparative assessment across the member states and policy guidance. Against this background, the main initiative in the SADC integration process has been to harmonise these diverse procedures and methodologies towards achieving a standard and consistent framework of statistical measurement.[9]

Much attention in measurement focuses at attaining consistency in qualitative and quantitative assessment of the key variables to enable comparative evaluation and harmonisation across countries to create measurement equivalence (using the same instruments and equality of measures) and functional equivalence (involves different instruments but addresses same concepts). However, since measurement equivalence may not necessarily imply similar measurement instruments, the best way to attest that they measure the same in all countries. Thus, functional equivalence is more precisely what is required. The arisen situation in the SADC region attests to application of statistical concepts and methodologies that are a mix of local and international standards. More so, statistical superstructures inherent in the member states have not been revamped or overhauled to accommodate statistical challenges. It is evident in the existing systems of failure to generate high frequency statistics that are necessary in assessment of recent macroeconomic challenges.[10]

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[9] See SADC Regional Statistical Programme.

[10] Tanzania is still unable to generate quarterly GDP numbers.

3.1 Inflation

In practice, a number of approaches have been put forward to measure developments in levels of prices. Widely, the variable inflation is measured by use of indices generated from price developments of a chosen basket of consumption goods or by use of GDP deflator. There exist credible volumes of work on the measurement aspects of this variable and standard frameworks are put forward on the basis of the use of the outcome.

In line with the long term strategy of a Monetary Union in the SADC region, convergence in price stability features as a key priority. To that effect, the region adopted a consensus on the approach to measure inflation, by focusing on consumer price index generated using a basket of selected consumed goods and services. In practice, the member states generate inflation numbers based on CPI baskets developed from household budget surveys.[11] However, the CPI baskets are unique country wise in terms of coverage and composition, largely influenced by the structure of the respective economies. In essence, the implied disparities in composition of country CPI baskets constitute the main source of differences in inflation drivers in the member states. Technically therefore, the existing CPI baskets that are used to generate inflation numbers mirror the structures of the respective economies and may be more useful in prescribing country specific inflation-related policies than for the region. In fact, there is no internationally agreement on composition of the CPI baskets other than the general framework of measurement including the famous Laspeyres and Paasche formulations. The measurement methodologies are customarily country specific reflecting the fact that such indices are generally used for national purposes, such as wage arrangements and price stabilization policies, and are frequently subject to heated discussions and social and political negotiations (C. Frale and J. Mortensen – 2008). ***Table 1*** presents the basis of computation of the CPI used in measurement of inflation in selected SADC countries.

Table 1

Selected SADC Countries: Basis of Consumer Price Indices

Country name	CPI Coverage and Base Period	Items Covered
Angola	Luanda Province – 2000/01 HBS	224
Botswana	Whole Country – 2002/03 HBS	384
Congo, Republic of	Kinshasa, Income group – 1995	–
Malawi	Whole Country – 1997/98 HBS	–
Mauritius	Whole Country – 2001/02 HBS	194
Mozambique	Whole Country – Dec. 2004	–
Namibia	Whole Country – 1993/94 HBS	–
South Africa	All Provinces – 2000 HBS	1500
Tanzania	Mainland Urban Towns – 2000/01 HBS	207
Zambia	Whole Country – 1993/94 HBS	300
Zimbabwe	Whole Country – 1995	337

Source: IFS.

[11] Available data show differences in reference periods.

CPI Basket Coverage and Item Weights

As shown in table 1, the coverage of the CPI basket varies across countries. This has implications on the structure and levels of inflation across these economies. For example, in agriculture dominated economies, a basket that exclude rural areas will tend to record relatively high inflation levels driven by developments in food prices. In another dimension, coverage of the basket items may also differ significantly on case by case basis. In their review, C. Frale and J. Mortesen observe that, even after the harmonisation process in the EU region, the reference price index in Europe is based on a basket of goods and services and weights that are not homogeneous in all member states.

However, for purposes of calibrating monetary policy in the region, consensus exists to focus on core inflation to be generated using inflation-excluding-shocks approach. The approach shall involve exclusion of items whose prices are considered to be uncontrollable in the short run from the comprehensive measure of inflation. Literature indicate however that, within the inflation-less-shocks approach, variations in the efficacy of the results may occur because of the structural differences in the individual economies that determine/underlie composition of CPI baskets and the items defined as shocks or volatile.

Due to existence of various methods and alternative formulations to measure core inflation, empirical country studies do not present consensus on the choice of optimal approach. Proposals exist to base choice of method to generate core inflation to be data driven-tailor-made to empirical realities and needs of countries[12] and for the region. However, as it has been the case elsewhere, adoption of this approach is foreseen to improve the calibration and estimation of the relationship between inflation and monetary policy in the region.

3.2 Fiscal Balance

Measurement of budget balances raises conceptual and practical issues, which are compounded by lack of uniformity in usage among countries. For instance, the conventional budget balance can be measured on a cash basis or accrual basis. In the first case, the balance equals the difference between total cash flow expenditure and fiscal revenue. In the second case, the balance reflects accrued income and spending flows, regardless of whether they involve cash payment or not. As such, accumulation of arrears on payments or revenue result to higher balances when measured on accrual basis compared with a cash-based measure.

According to economic literature and practices by institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, a couple of different ways to measure the conventional budget balance exists. The most commonly accepted measure used by government's world wide to define the conventional budget balance is the resources utilized budget balance. From a balance sheet perspective, the fiscal balance (net lending or borrowing) equals the difference between transactions in the financial assets and transactions in the financial liabilities.

For purposes of monitoring the macroeconomic convergence programme in the region, the overall deficit/surplus as a percentage of GDP is calculated after including external grants as part of revenue. This general practice in some instances is prone to generate incomparable fiscal aggregates due to factors including timing and form of recording transactions that is influenced by sophistication of frameworks supporting fiscal operations in the member states – mode of payment (real time or by cheque), accrual v/s cash, and financial or calendar year

[12] See Mick Silver - IMF Staff Papers (2007) 54.

accounts (***Table 2***). In economies[13] where government payments are made by cheques results into huge expenditure floats or adjustments to cash.

Table 2

Fiscal Years in Selected SADC Member States

Country	Financial /Fiscal Year
Tanzania	July – June
Botswana	April – March
Democratic Republic of Congo	January – December
Mauritius	July – June
South Africa	April – March
Swaziland	April – March
Zambia	July – June
Zimbabwe	July June

Source: IMF IFS.

3.3 Public Debt

Classification of debt and the eventual categorisation constitutes sources of divergence in measurement of public debt. Albeit achieving standardisation on categories of debts that qualify to be public debt, to include public and publicly guaranteed debt, there are factors profoundly driven by policy and operational frameworks found in the member states that are likely to generate differences in measurement and choice of assessment criteria. To avoid this inconsistence, there is a general consensus among SADC members to adhere to the structure of public and publicly guaranteed debt stipulated in the relevant manuals.

The choice of indicators to be used in the analysis of country debt positions lies in the discretion of a country, often driven by data availability and the objective of the assessment. On the basis of the acceptable framework or guidelines on measurement of this variable[14], a range of indicators are commonly generated grouped into nominal stock-of-debt indicators and net-present-value-of-debt indicators. In absence of a harmonised approach to the debt sustainability analysis countries are likely to base debt assessment on indicators favourable to their situation. For example a country with booming exports sector is bound to assess debt positions using exports based indicators.

Timing and recording of the national debts constitute potential source of incomparability in measurement outcome. Practically, debt recording follows a specific pattern that is rooted in the nature and treatment of debt categories. This situation would require harmonisation of debt declarations that shall stipulate when a debt should be declared as a debt. What should exactly go into the debt assessment indicators? What form of debt should constitute the public debt – total debt stock or total disbursed outstanding debt or total committed debt? Debts of what maturities should be considered in the assessment of the public debt position?

[13] Tanzania fiscal operations are reported on cheques issued and cheques cleared basis.

[14] The IMF External Debt Statistics, Guide for Compiler and Users.

Large debt ratios that involve long term debt spreads are likely to have less damaging impact on economic performance than a concentrate of short term debts.

Exchange rate developments in the individual countries impacts differently on the debt positions. While depreciation of the reporting currency would contract the country's domestic debt position in all aspects – reduce the total debt figure, improve debt service through implied export competitiveness, and improved current account balance through reduced imports – appreciation shall imply worsening debt positions. This presupposes that, if not taken into account during the assessment, exchange rate developments could lead into misleading judgement of country total debt positions.

The combination of different approaches and other country specific factors means that public debt indicators will tend to be inconsistent among the SADC member states, notwithstanding the attempts to abide to the standard procedures. To avoid this shortcoming there has been considerable efforts to adopt a common approach for measuring the public debt indicators.

3.4 Current Account balance

A good starting point is to ask what a current account deficit or surplus really means and to draw insights from the many ways that a current account balance is measured. First, it can be expressed as the sum of balances from goods, services, income and current transfers' accounts. Since balances from income and current transfers accounts are usually a small fraction of the current account balance, the current account balance can be taken as difference between the value of exports of goods and services and the value of imports of goods and services. A deficit then means that the country is importing more goods and services than it is exporting.

Second, the current account can be expressed as the gap between national (both public and private) savings and investment. Thus, the current account balance mirrors the saving and investment behaviour of the economy. A current account deficit may therefore reflect a low level of national savings relative to investment or a high rate of investment – or both. For capital-poor developing countries, which have more investment opportunities than they can afford to undertake with low levels of domestic savings, a current account deficit may be natural. A deficit potentially spurs faster output growth and economic development – although recent research does not indicate that developing countries that run current account deficits grow faster (perhaps because their less developed domestic financial systems cannot allocate foreign capital efficiently).

Third, the current account can be viewed in terms of the timing of trade. We are used to intratemporal trade – exchanging cloth for wine today. But we can also think of intertemporal trade – importing goods today (running a current account deficit) and, in return, exporting goods in the future (running a current account surplus then). Just as a country may import a certain good and export another under intratemporal trade, there is no reason why a country should not import goods of today and export goods of tomorrow.

Although the current account workings rests on the rigorous work by reputable sources such as IMF and World Bank, the measurement process and the outcomes are susceptible to inconsistencies based on level of sophistication of the relevant systems in terms of capacity to classify and capture transactions falling under the balance of payments of a country. Besides, timing and recording of the transactions exacerbates the situation. The balance of payments statistics for Tanzania, for example are reviewed throughout the year in attempt to improve data capture, recording and revisions, hence the positions reported within a period of a year remains subject to significant changes. This in inherent in the efficiency and capacity of the systems used in classification and recording of balance of payment transactions.

Cross boarder trade represent practical experience on varying country capacities and initiatives to capture and record balance of payments transactions. Notwithstanding the

substantive magnitude of cross boarder activities, in some of the countries, records are scant and particularly on the source, and such information is rarely included in balance of payments. To the extent that countries have adopted individual frameworks to capture and record cross boarder activities, it impacts differently on the balance of payments positions. There are practices that may be supported qualitatively that relate to undervalue or overvalue balance of payments which add to distortions on country statistics – such are associated with overheads of doing business in different countries.

However, measurement of the current account balance in the SADC countries is done in accordance to the principles set in the BOP Manual 5 of the IMF and the SNA 93. The current account balance (deficit/surplus) is measured as the sum of balances on trade in goods and services, balance on income and balance on current transfers account as a ratio of GDP.

4.0 Statistical Improvements

In view of the divergent economic backgrounds, there are efforts to develop frameworks and mechanisms with a view to improving the standard and reliability of statistical information and make them comparable across the SADC member countries. This has been the trend particularly under considerations for regional integration efforts that require integrated assessment and evaluation of member countries performances against selected convergence targets. On individual basis, countries generate statistics in the context of standard statistical frameworks but hardly comparable substantively between countries. Over time, there have been initiatives to improve statistics motivated by increased demand for the quality of statistical data for use in analysis and decision making in the wake of developments in social and economic interactions both in the individual countries and in the region.

Generally, statistical improvement, especially those related to key macroeconomic variables is based on frameworks and guidelines/manuals developed by renowned institutions in the respective disciplines such as the IMF and World Bank. In addition to the application of the standard frames, countries undertake processes to generate statistics considered ideal for particular cases or occasioned by specific requirement. Estimation of inflation provides a typical example of a common practice where individual countries work within the standard frame of definition and measurement to generate statistics that fits best and explains country specific phenomenon. Statistics used by countries to generate core and non-core inflation present vivid cases of disparity in terms of items that are removed from the general index or items considered volatile.

Similarly, SADC countries utilize standard statistical frameworks and methodologies to generate data that is used to facilitate assessment and evaluation of regional integration efforts. However, these frameworks offer a range of methods for collection, presentation and analysis of data, which culminates to incomparable structures. Sequel to this, there has been initiatives focused at achieving significant and ongoing improvement on the suitability, availability and quality of data in the SADC countries. At the same time, there is a concern that generation of statistics in the region should address the new challenges from both country and regional information needs.

In the wake of the new economic challenges in the region associated with the ongoing global financial and economic crisis, the need for credible assessment of the convergence efforts has received high priority in order to develop neat basis to prescribe realistic and workable rescue plan for the individual countries and for the region. Provision of quality and reliable statistics on the key macroeconomic variables constitutes the basis for the needed informed policy decisions and interventions. This is to be achieved through engaging into execution statistical programme that shall ensure timely availability of harmonized and comparable

statistics in the economic and social areas as well as provision of assistance to the member states in implementation of standard statistical procedures, development of customized procedures commensurate to the statistical structure and classifications found in the region. To consolidate achievements and the on-going efforts to improve on generation and quality of statistics in the region, following interventions are contemplated.

4.1 Legal Framework in Statistics

This intervention should target at creation of a legal framework in the SADC region that shall define the legal and economic bases of the functioning of regional statistics and regulate the legal relations associated with compilation, processing, dissemination, processing, dissemination, use and storage of statistical information.[15] The legal statistical framework shall include provisions to commit and subject the member states to comply with its operationalisation. The SADC should also spearhead strengthening of the statistical frameworks and policies in the member countries to guide statistical operations. The statistical frameworks found in some of the member states are unable to cope with statistical challenges calling for phase out or upgrade.

4.2 Harmonization

Notwithstanding adherence to the application of standardized statistical procedures by individual countries in the SADC region, there has to be a process to ensure consistency and uniformity in generation of macroeconomic statistics and indicators. The essence of harmonization rests on the rules of inclusion and exclusion. Globalisation brings a need from harmonisation of statistical practices across countries, as much as within countries (Len Cook, 2005). Through the harmonization process, countries have to calibrate approaches and methods used in generation of statistics to achieve comparable sets of data especially in the key convergence areas. The process encompasses a range of considerations including definition and measurement criteria. As it has been the case in other regional integration initiatives, this process has started in the SADC and definitions and measurement of the key variables has been adopted. However, much need to be done to achieve consistent sets of data across countries that shall facilitate achievement of the ultimate goals of economic and financial integration.

It is through this process that a solid basis shall be developed to facilitate development of effective policies for the region that shall address adequately the regional interests. At the moment the assessment based on statistics reported on the key variables may or may not paint a true representative scene of the situations in the reporting countries mainly on account of classification, categorization and measurement inconsistencies. Studies on assessment of debt and current account as feasible convergence variables underpinned potential possibilities of inconsistencies in reported numbers that is associated with classification, measurement and country specific issues. The analysis on debt underscores the need to iron out differences in defining and measuring this variable as it is potentially prone to distortions as it involves key aspects of national interest such the implementation of fiscal and monetary policies. Countries that have different and divergent public and publicly guaranteed debt will make it difficult to coordinate monetary and fiscal policies in the integration arrangement (CCBG Macroeconomic Convergence Research Paper – Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, November 2008).

[15] See SADC Regional Statistical Programme.

Similarly, the study on current account balance as a convergence variable underscores the potential and justification for divergent country positions that is rooted in structural differences as well as the inter-temporal considerations. The reported current account positions of countries potentially reflect a future stream of flows to the economy, negative or positive, that makes it more appealing to develop framework that shall facilitate judgment of current account positions of countries through inter-temporal solvency. The envisaged framework will generate current account positions that are consistent with the inter-temporal solvency (CCBG Macroeconomic Convergence Research Paper – Bank of Tanzania, April 2009).

Equally, literature presents evidence for significant differences in generation of inflation statistics associated with definition and the specific economic situations. As it has been the case in other regional integration efforts, benchmarks have to be reached for development of harmonized price statistics where a stylized formulation will be developed to guide compilation of a comparable estimates of inflation across the member states.[16] This process in the SADC shall encompass synchronization of all practices surrounding approaches and methods of measuring and generation of inflation statistics.

4.3 Technical Assistance

It is imperative to embark in programs to assist the member states to implement statistical operations in accordance with the standard frameworks with a view to achieving consistency, while taking into account economic and structural differences inherent in the countries. This has become possible in the IMF member countries where surveillance and assessment of the impact of the reforms and recovery program is made possible by adherence to prescribed methods of data classification and reporting. This achievement comes out of huge efforts by the Fund in form of resources, training, technical assistance and joint missions with the member countries.

In the same spirit, technical support programs are in pace in the SADC region to rectify problems associated with the heterogeneity of the economic structures in the SADC member state. This has remained a continuous effort through the SADC functional structures and organs of the SADC including MEFMI through the Macroeconomic Management Programme, and various programmes executed under the CCBG and the SADC Secretariat. There have also been substantive collaborative efforts from the EU in support of the technical programs. Where possible more effort from the SADC member states should be sought to support the execution of the programs found key in the convergence process, while soliciting topping up from international development partners.

4.4 Modern Statistical Systems

The modern level of demand for the quality of statistical data is very high. The concept of quality in statistics is no longer limited to the timeliness and coverage of data. The role of information in decision and policy making is increasing steadily, driven by advancement and sophistication in operations exacerbated by the consequences of globalisation. Statistical data are used more and more frequently in complicated forms of analysis – econometric models, research, forecasts and solution of important economic and political problems. These recent developments have significantly re-shaped statistical requirements to the point that necessitate overhaul of the methods of statistical generation.

[16] EU adopted harmonized CPI in 1997.

The challenge in place is to generate high frequency statistical series on the key macroeconomic indicators across the SADC countries to assist in regional policy decisions. While some of the member states are far advanced, majority are trailing mainly explained by capacity and resource constraints. Statistical surveys are conducted in a staggered and in uncoordinated fashion across the member states which limit comparability which is the important aspect of quality of data. For improvement, it is thus imperative for the SADC to advance with the initiatives to facilitate implementation of statistical improvement mission drawing from the advanced member countries such as the RSA. What could be done to facilitate generation of high frequency and current statistics for GDP, health, and employment?

5.0 Conclusion

This paper examines definitions and discusses measurements and statistical improvement on selected macroeconomic variables under the SADC macroeconomic convergence paradigm. The paper observes that there are relentless efforts coordinated under the SADC Regional Statistical Programme to influence the evolution of statistical frameworks in the region to achieve statistical standards and practices that are consistent and comparable transversely across the SADC countries. The paper observes also that different statistical frameworks and backgrounds inherent in the individual member states hinder significantly the ability to cope with the magnitude and quality of the recent statistical demands. It is appreciated that statistical measurement issues and practices presents the ultimate challenge in the effort to generate comparable county and regional statistics. Development of legal frameworks in statistics, harmonisation, standardization and provision of technical support constitute suggestions for improvement.

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