

Muhammad Al-Jasser: The need for national data compilation and dissemination

Opening speech by His Excellency Dr Muhammad Al-Jasser, Governor of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), at the Special Data Dissemination Standard and Monetary Statistics workshop, Institute of Banking, Riyadh, 11 December 2010.

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Dear Workshop Organizers and Participants,

It is my pleasure to inaugurate such an important workshop at a time when many national data compiling agencies are confronted with ever increasing user demands and challenges.

I take this opportunity to express my thanks to all the GCC organizations (central banks, ministries of finance, and statistics centers) participating in this event. Of course, I also extend my appreciation to the IMF for providing pivotal leadership in building capacity for producing official statistics in the region, and paving the way for adding new dimensions and quality to official statistics and thereby contributing to the global statistical system.

Dear Participants,

The need to compile and disseminate data in a systematic and professional way, especially with respect to the growing data needs, can hardly be overemphasized. For example, the recent global financial crisis has exposed the lack of data in key statistical areas that might have helped authorities better measure and understand the risks to the international financial system. Remedies to fill such data gaps (e.g., maturity mismatches) are critical for monitoring systemic risk originating from systemically important financial institutions.

Similarly, the rapid transformation of the world economy has also brought new data needs for environmental and social welfare statistics. Data needs could originate from the necessity to cover new areas of measurement and use new methodologies to improve data quality, use and availability. They could also stem from the requirement to come up with new subject measures and variables.

Therefore, national data compiling agencies must be cognizant of such evolving data needs to remain relevant and useful. After all, it is the responsibility of the statistical community to make sure to address new data-related challenges which are driven by current and emerging user demands for official statistics.

It is potentially in recognition of emerging data-related challenges that the IMF took several steps to enhance transparency and openness, and launched two key data dissemination standards in the 1990s. These included the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) and the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS).

Let me briefly touch on these standards.

The SDDS was established in 1996 to guide IMF member countries, interacting or set to interact with international capital markets, in the provision of their economic and financial data to the public. Countries that subscribe to the SDDS agree to follow good practices in four areas which include the coverage, periodicity, and timeliness of data, public access to those data, data integrity, and data quality. Earlier this year, the IMF Board expanded the scope of the SDDS to include seven financial soundness indicators in order to make all stakeholders better understand cross-border linkages, and made it mandatory for participating nations to report international investment positions on a quarterly basis over a transition period of four years. Indeed, the SDDS is a global benchmark for disseminating macroeconomic data to the public. So far 64 countries have subscribed to the SDDS.

The GDDS, on the other hand, was launched in 1997 for member countries with less developed statistical systems. This system gives member countries a basic framework for a broader national statistical development strategy, addresses the full range of issues critical for compiling and disseminating data, and makes explicit plans for improvement to align national procedures with best practices. Until now, the number of participating countries in GDDS is 106.

Both standards share several common features, and have successfully contributed to enhancing the range, quality, and timeliness of country data available to the public. They have also been instrumental in providing better information to underpin the operations of international financial markets and economic policy assessments in general, and thus facilitating public and private decision making. May countries that have participated in GDDS be able to eventually join the club of the SDDS. This is what Saudi Arabia has planned for.

Dear Participants,

This 5-day workshop is to expand on many data-related issues and standards, including the ones that I have just talked about. Some of the important topics which would be covered over the next five days include:

1. IMF's key data dissemination initiatives
2. Essentials of SDDS and its subscription
3. Essentials of standardized report forms
4. Development details of statistical bulletin tables proposed by the GCC monetary union.

This workshop will provide an opportunity for all GCC organizations in the statistical community to share national experiences, and lead discussions to identify areas for mutual cooperation for further improvement in data production and presentation.

I may emphasize here that timely availability of reliable and mutually consistent national data would be of great help to the GCC Monetary Council in its task of preparing for the achievement of the ultimate goal of GCC Monetary Union. It will also provide the basis for judicious policy formulations even after the establishment of the Monetary Union for the region. I therefore urge you all, to actively engage in workshop discussions to fully understand these matters, come to useful conclusions and make your deliberations fruitful.

Dear Participants

I hope that by the end of the workshop you will have achieved at least the following two objectives:

1. Sufficient statistical insight to effectively address burgeoning data-related issues and concerns, and be in a position to produce intended statistical forms and table, and;
2. Identification of some future work based on mutual cooperation.

I thank you all for your attention and wish all a productive and rewarding workshop.