

THE GENERAL DATA DISSEMINATION SYSTEM

November 2003

1. The General Data Dissemination System's (the System) objectives, comprising four dimensions of good practices in data production and dissemination, are set out in Section I, and the System's mechanism of implementation is set out in Section II.

I. The System: Objectives

2. The System's purposes are (1) to encourage member countries to improve data quality; (2) to provide a framework for evaluating needs for data improvement and setting priorities in this respect; and (3) to guide member countries in the provision to the public of comprehensive, timely, accessible, and reliable economic, financial, and socio-demographic statistics in a world of increasing economic and financial integration. The guidance comprises four dimensions:

- The data: coverage, periodicity, and timeliness
- Quality of the disseminated data
- Integrity of the disseminated data
- Access by the public

3. For each of the four dimensions, the System describes two to four good practices to serve as objectives in the development of national systems of data production and dissemination. Box 1 provides an overview of the four dimensions and these elements.

1. The data: coverage, periodicity, and timeliness

Production and dissemination of reliable, comprehensive, and timely economic, financial, and socio-demographic data is essential to the transparency of macroeconomic performance and policy.

a. Definitions and general considerations

(1) Coverage

4. The System focuses on the data that are most important in evaluating performance and policy in four macroeconomic sectors—real, fiscal, financial, and external—as well as complementary socio-demographic data that shed light on economic development and structural change. The socio-demographic data as specified under the GDDS are closely aligned with the majority of the indicators used to monitor progress towards the Millennium

Development Goals (MDG)¹. The GDDS also covers most of the indicators used to monitor progress on national poverty reduction strategies. The System addresses the development and dissemination of economic, financial, and socio-demographic data: (1) presenting objectives for the development and dissemination of comprehensive frameworks in each of the four macroeconomic and financial sectors; (2) encouraging the development and dissemination of macroeconomic and financial indicators of appropriate periodicity and timeliness reflecting countries' needs and abilities; and (3) encouraging the development and dissemination of basic components for socio-demographic data of appropriate periodicity and timeliness. Table 1 presents these three aspects of the data dimension.

Box 1. The Four Dimensions of the GDDS

1. *The Data—Coverage, Periodicity, and Timeliness:* Dissemination of reliable, comprehensive, and timely economic, financial, and socio-demographic data is essential to the transparency of macroeconomic performance and policy.

The GDDS therefore recommends dissemination of data as described in Table 1.

2. *Quality:* Data quality must have a high priority. Data users must be provided with information to assess quality and quality improvements. The GDDS recommends:

- Dissemination of documentation on methodology and sources used in preparing statistics.
- Dissemination of component detail, reconciliations with related data, and statistical frameworks that support statistical cross-checks and provide assurance of reasonableness.

3. *Integrity:* To fulfill the purpose of providing the public with information, official statistics must have the confidence of their users. In turn, confidence in the statistics ultimately becomes a matter of confidence in the objectivity and professionalism of the agency producing the statistics. Transparency of practices and procedures is a key factor in creating this confidence. The GDDS therefore recommends:

- Dissemination of the terms and conditions under which official statistics are produced, including those relating to the confidentiality of individually identifiable information.
- Identification of internal government access to data before release.
- Identification of ministerial commentary on the occasion of statistical releases.
- Provision of information about revisions and advance notice of major changes in methodology.

4. *Access by the public:* Dissemination of official statistics is an essential feature of statistics as a public good. Ready and equal access by the public are principal requirements. The GDDS recommends:

- Dissemination of advance release calendars.
- Simultaneous release to all interested parties.

¹ See United Nations Statistical Division, Millennium Indicators Database. (<http://millenniumindicators.un.org>)

5. With regard to comprehensive frameworks, Section A of Table 1 presents a set of objectives for national accounts (real sector), central government operations (fiscal sector), the depository corporations survey (financial sector), and balance of payments accounts (external sector). The objectives emphasize the development, production, and dissemination of full-coverage data in each framework, the use of appropriate analytical frameworks following international standards, and the development of detailed aggregates and classifications. In the areas of government operations and balance of payments, extensions of coverage are encouraged.

6. With regard to indicators, Section B of Table 1 provides for each macroeconomic sector (1) core indicators for the comprehensive frameworks—GDP for national accounts, central government aggregates for central government operations, broad money and credit aggregates for the depository corporations survey, and balance of payments aggregates for the complete balance of payments; (2) additional data that permit tracking of the principal measures in the comprehensive frameworks; and (3) other data relevant to the macroeconomic sector. The so-called other data are often in the form of a price, including interest rates and exchange rates. For certain data categories, additional aggregates and/or components are encouraged. With regard to basic components, Section C of Table 1 outlines the basic components of socio-demographic data, within the data categories of population, health, education, and poverty, together with encouraged extensions. These socio-demographic data categories are closely related to the majority of the 35 MDG indicators that are derived from national statistical systems. The basic components or the encouraged extensions of the four socio-demographic data categories are linked to 23 of the 35 MDG indicators.

7. The System emphasizes development of comprehensive frameworks, but does not specify in detail the component breakdowns of these frameworks to be produced and disseminated. Internationally accepted aggregates and balancing items are recommended. In the case of national accounts, financial sector statistics, and balance of payments statistics, the *1993 System of National Accounts (1993 SNA)*, the *Government Finance Statistics Manual 2001 (GFSM 2001)*, the *Monetary and Financial Statistics Manual 2000 (MFSM 2000)*, and the fifth edition of the *Balance of Payments Manual (BPM5)* are widely accepted standards and provide appropriate guidance for the development of frameworks and aggregates.

8. Most of the data categories identified for inclusion in the System are produced by official national agencies. The inclusion in the System of some data categories that are produced by private organizations (at least in some countries) introduces some complexities, including the implicit stamp of quality that is given by official re-publishing. The inclusion of privately compiled data is warranted in the interest of obtaining a more complete picture of the economy and more consistent coverage across countries. However, including them requires some adaptation in the responsibilities that the official (disseminating) agency has with respect to some elements of access by the public, integrity, and data quality.

Table 1. The Data Dimension of the GDDS
A. Comprehensive Frameworks—Macroeconomic and Financial Sectors

| Core Framework | | Encouraged extension(s) | Periodicity | Timeliness |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--------------------|-------------------|
| Framework | Coverage, classification, and analytical framework | | | |
| Real Sector | | | | |
| National accounts | Producing and disseminating the full range of national accounts aggregates and balancing items in nominal and real terms, yielding Gross Domestic Product, Gross National Income, Gross Disposable Income, Consumption, Saving, Capital Formation, and Net Lending/Net Borrowing. Producing and disseminating sectoral accounts and national and sectoral balance sheets, as relevant. | | Annual | 10–14 months |
| Fiscal sector | | | | |
| Central government operations | Producing and disseminating comprehensive data on transactions and debt, emphasizing (1) coverage of all central government units; (2) use of appropriate analytical framework; and (3) development of a full range of detailed classifications (tax and nontax revenue, current and capital expenditure, domestic and foreign financing) with breakdowns (debt holder, instrument, currency), as relevant. | General government or public sector operations data, strongly encouraged where subnational levels of government or public enterprise operations are of analytical or policy importance | Annual | 6–9 months |
| Financial sector | | | | |
| Depository corporations survey | Producing and disseminating comprehensive data emphasizing (1) coverage of all depository corporations (banking institutions); (2) use of an appropriate analytical framework; and (3) development of classifications of external assets and liabilities, domestic credit by sector, and components of money (liquidity) and nonmonetary liabilities. | | Monthly | 2–3 months |
| External sector | | | | |
| Balance of payments | Producing and disseminating comprehensive data on the main aggregates and balancing items of the balance of payments, including e.g., imports and exports of goods and services, trade balance, income and current transfers, current account balance, reserves and other financial transactions, and overall balance, with detailed components, as relevant. | International Investment Position (IIP) | Annual | 6–9 months |

Table 1. The Data Dimension of the GDDS
B. Data Categories and Indicators—Macroeconomic and Financial Sectors

| Data categories | Core indicators | Encouraged extension(s) | Periodicity | Timeliness |
|---|---|--|---|----------------------------|
| Real sector | | | | |
| National accounts aggregates | GDP (nominal and real) | Gross national income, capital formation, saving | Annual (quarterly encouraged) | 6–9 months |
| Production index/indices | Manufacturing or industrial indices Primary commodity, agricultural, or other indices, as relevant | | Monthly As relevant | 6–12 weeks for all indices |
| Price indices | Consumer price index | Producer price index | Monthly | 1–2 months |
| Labor market indicators | Employment, unemployment, wages/earnings, as relevant | Disaggregation by age, sex, employment status, occupation and industry as appropriate. | Annual | 6–9 months |
| Fiscal sector | | | | |
| Central government Aggregates | Revenue, expenditure, balance, and financing with breakdowns (debt holder, instrument, currency), as relevant | Interest payments | Quarterly | 1 quarter |
| Central government debt | Domestic debt and foreign debt, as relevant, with appropriate breakdowns (currency, maturity, debt holder, instrument), as relevant | Government guaranteed debt | Annual (quarterly encouraged) | 1–2 quarters |
| Financial sector | | | | |
| Broad money and credit aggregates | Net external position, domestic credit, broad or narrow money | | Monthly | 1–3 months |
| Central bank aggregates | Monetary base | | Monthly | 1–2 months |
| Interest rates | Short and long-term government security rates, policy variable rate | Money or interbank rates and a range of deposit and lending rates | Monthly | |
| Stock market | | Share price index, as relevant | Monthly | |
| External sector | | | | |
| Balance of payments aggregates | Imports and exports of goods and services, current account balance, reserves, overall balance | | Annual (quarterly strongly encouraged) | 6 months |
| External debt and debt service schedule | Public and publicly guaranteed external debt, broken down by maturity | | Quarterly | 1–2 quarters |
| | Public and publicly guaranteed external debt service schedule | | Twice yearly with data for 4 quarters and 2 semesters ahead | 3–6 months |
| | | Private external debt not publicly guaranteed, and debt service schedule | Annual | 6–9 months |
| International reserves | Gross official reserves denominated in U.S. dollars | Reserve-related liabilities | Monthly | 1–4 weeks |
| Merchandise trade | Total exports and total imports | Major commodity breakdowns with longer time lapse | Monthly | 8–12 weeks |
| Exchange rates | Spot rates | | Daily | |

Table 1. The Data Dimension of the GDDS (continued)

C. Socio-Demographic Data

| Socio-demographic data | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--|---------------------------------|---|
| Data categories | Basic Components | Encouraged extension(s) | Related Indicators of Millennium Development Goals ^{1/} | Periodicity | Timeliness |
| Population | Population characteristics: size and composition of the population, derived from census, surveys, or vital registration system | Disaggregation of population and vital statistics data by age, sex, and region, as appropriate | | Annual (Census every ten years) | 3–6 months for annual updates; 9–12 months for Census |
| | Dynamics of growth: vital statistics: births, deaths, and migration | Reporting of mortality rates, crude birth rate, fertility rate, and life expectancy | 13. Under-five mortality rate 14. Infant mortality rate | | |
| Education | Inputs: measures of current financial, human, and physical resources available to public and private (if significant) educational institutions, recorded by level of education or type of program | Disaggregation of data by region is recommended for all data categories. Characteristics of teaching staff, including training, experience, and terms of employment (full or part time). Expenditures by households on education (including fees and other expenses for public or private education) | | Annual | 6–12 months following beginning of school year |
| | Process: measures of student progress through school, such as enrollments, dropouts, and repetitions, recorded by level of education and sex of students | Calculation of net enrollment rates (by grade and sex) | 6. Net enrolment ratio in primary education 7. Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 9. Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education | | |
| | Outcomes: educational attainment measured by progress through school, graduations, and completions by level; literacy. | Disaggregation by age and sex. Graduation and completion rates. Scores on standardized achievement exams | 8. Literacy rate of 15–24-year olds 10. Ratio of literate women to men of 15–24-year olds | | |

**Table 1. The Data Dimension of the GDDS (continued)
C. Socio-Demographic Data (continued)**

| Data categories | Basic Components | Encouraged extension(s) | Related Indicators of Millennium Development Goals ^{1/} | Periodicity | Timeliness |
|-----------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Health | Inputs: measures of current financial, human, and physical resources available to public and private (if significant) health system, including public expenditures on health services; capacity of health care facilities by location and type of facility, and the number of trained personnel by location and certification | Private (household) expenditures on health services. Disaggregation of data by region | | Annual (outbreaks of contagious diseases should be reported at higher frequency and with greater timeliness) | 3–6 months following end of reference period |
| | Process (service delivery): Measures describing the number of clients served and type of care provided by public and private care providers, including inpatient, outpatient, and preventative care; population served by public health services such as immunizations, sanitation services, and improved water supply | Measures of the responsiveness of the health system to non-health aspects of service delivery. Disaggregation of data by region. | 15. Proportion of 1-year-old children immunized against measles 17. Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel 19. Condom use rate of the contraceptive prevalence rate 22. Proportion of population in malaria risk areas using effective malaria prevention and treatment measures 24. Proportion of tuberculosis cases detected and cured under directly observed treatment short course 30. Proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source, urban and rural 31. Proportion of urban population with access to improved sanitation | | |

Table 1. The Data Dimension of the GDDS (concluded)
C. Socio-Demographic Data (concluded)

| Data categories | Basic Components | Encouraged extension(s) | Related Indicators of Millennium Development Goals ^{1/} | Periodicity | Timeliness |
|-----------------|--|--|---|-------------|----------------------------------|
| | Outcomes: statistics on mortality and morbidity, including mortality by cause and the incidence of disease by age, sex, region and other patient characteristics | | 4. Prevalence of underweight children under five years of age 16. Maternal mortality ratio 18. HIV prevalence among 15–24-year old pregnant women 20. Number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS 21. Prevalence and death rates associated with malaria 23. Prevalence and death rates associated with tuberculosis | | |
| Poverty | Income poverty: number and proportion of people or households with less than minimum standard of income or consumption; valuation of minimum consumption bundle | Measures of the distribution of household or per capita income or consumption, and incidence of low consumption | 1. Proportion of population below \$1 (PPP) per day 2. Poverty gap ratio (incidence x depth of poverty) 3. Share of poorest quintile in national consumption | 3–5 years | 6–12 months following the survey |
| | Other poverty measures: measures of deprivation or insecurity used to identify the population living in poverty, such as evidence of malnutrition, endemic diseases, educational achievement, and lack of access to basic services | Separate poverty estimates for urban and rural populations or for major regions, states, or provinces. Disaggregation of data by region. | | | |

1/ As documented (and numbered) in the Millennium Indicators Database of the United Nations Statistical Division (see <http://millenniumindicators.un.org>)

(2) *Periodicity and timeliness*

9. The System recognizes the importance of production and dissemination of data that are of appropriately high periodicity and timeliness, but attaches priority to improvements in data quality, in recognition of the tradeoffs that may exist in still-developing statistical systems between improving data quality on the one hand and periodicity and timeliness on the other.

10. Periodicity refers to the **frequency of compilation** of the data. The periodicity of a particular data category is determined by several factors, including the ease of observation or compilation and the needs of analysis. The System should be viewed as encouraging improvements over time in periodicity of data dissemination that are consistent with improvements in data quality.

11. Timeliness refers to the **speed of dissemination** of the data—i.e., the lapse of time between a reference date (or close of a reference period) and dissemination of the data. It reflects many factors, including some related to institutional arrangements, such as the preparation of accompanying commentary and printing. Dissemination of statistics takes several forms, among them.

- providing a formal publication, such as news releases (perhaps presenting only summary statistics), periodicals such as monthly bulletins, or one-time volumes;
- announcing the availability of statistics on request (but not necessarily without charge), increasingly pointing to electronic databases;
- providing a diskette, tape, or CD-ROM version of a formal publication or a database;
- providing brief recorded telephone messages and fax services, especially in the case of data categories justifying high-frequency distribution.

12. The objectives for timeliness that are presented in Table 1 are set out in terms of ranges of time in recognition of the diversity of countries covered by the System. The short end of the timeliness range corresponds to the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) timeliness requirements for a given indicator while the high end of the range relates to good practice across a broad group of countries. The System should be viewed as encouraging improvements over time in the timeliness of data dissemination that are consistent with improvements in data quality.

b. The specifications

13. The System provides objectives for data production and dissemination for both comprehensive frameworks and other data categories and indicators; these are summarized in Table

(1) Comprehensive frameworks (macroeconomic and financial sectors)

14. With regard to the comprehensive frameworks described in Section A of the table, the objective is to encourage the production and dissemination of complete sets of data with widest coverage, using appropriate analytical frameworks and classification schemes. Particular aggregates and balances are provided for illustration, but the emphasis is placed on complete data sets rather than specific indicators.

15. For national accounts, the objective is producing and disseminating data covering the widest scope of economic activity, including that of the informal sector. The emphasis is on

producing the full range of national accounts aggregates and balances, not only production-oriented measures. Thus, in addition to GDP, the System recommends the development of measures of national and disposable income, consumption, saving, capital formation, and net lending/net borrowing. The development of the full range of measures is a long-term effort for most countries and all countries need not follow the same path of implementation, as the appropriate path in a country will depend on analytical and policy needs and resource availability. International and regional manuals—the *1993 SNA* and the *European System of Accounts 1995*, for example—are recommended to guide development of national accounts. The UN Statistical Commission has endorsed a set of benchmarks to guide countries on the path of implementation. The System also recommends as long-term objectives and as relevant the development of accounts for principal sectors of the economy and of national and sectoral balance sheets. The System recommends that complete national accounts data be disseminated annually and within 10–14 months after the end of the reference year.

16. For the comprehensive framework for central government operations, the System recommends complete coverage of all central government units, including budgetary and extra—budgetary accounts, social security funds, and decentralized agencies. Complete coverage is essential in most countries to assess the actual fiscal stance. The System recommends development of an appropriate analytical framework and classification schemes, but does not prescribe a particular framework or set of classification tables. It is recommended to use the *Government Finance Statistics Manual 2001 (GFSM 2001)* as a guideline for development of central government data. This manual provides a broadly used analytical framework that identifies revenue, expenditure, and financing aggregates and deficit concepts, as well as detailed classification schemes. It is expected that countries will gradually adopt recommendations of the *GFSM 2001*. The System recommends that complete data on the operations of central government be disseminated annually within 6–9 months. The System also encourages the development of data on general government operations or public sector operations, as appropriate. When these data are of particular policy and analytical significance—for example, when the public sector borrowing requirement is a focus of policy—their development may be accorded a high priority, at least with regard to summary indicators.

17. The depository corporations survey is the comprehensive framework for the financial sector. The coverage of this framework includes all depository corporations (banking institutions) that have liabilities included in broad money aggregates. The System suggests an analytical framework that is based on a measure of broad money and factors that affect changes in money, especially domestic credit and external assets and liabilities. The IMF *Monetary and Financial Statistics Manual* is recommended as a guideline for the development of data. In recognition of existing good practice across a broad range of countries, the System recommends monthly data to be disseminated within 2–3 months of the end of the reference month.

18. For the external sector, balance of payments is the comprehensive framework. The objective is the production and dissemination of complete balance of payments accounts. The fifth edition of the IMF *Balance of Payments Manual*, and its Supplement on financial

derivatives, is recommended as a guide to development of a full range of external transactions measures. The manual provides a very widely used analytical framework and classification scheme of detailed components that identifies current (imports and exports of goods and services, net income and net transfer transactions), capital, and financial (direct investment, portfolio investment, financial derivatives, other investment, and reserves) account transactions; a range of analytical balances, such as the trade balance, current account balance, and the overall balance may also be compiled within this framework. The System recommends the dissemination of complete balance of payments data annually within 6–9 months of the end of the reference year.

19. The international investment position is increasingly recognized as a useful framework in which to develop an integrated picture of a country's stock of external financial assets and liabilities. Accordingly, the System encourages countries to work toward component detail according to the fifth edition of the *Balance of Payments Manual's* direct investment; portfolio investment, including a breakdown into equity and debt; financial derivatives; other investment; and (for assets), reserves and disseminate the framework or components of it as appropriate and feasible.

(2) *Indicators (macroeconomic and financial sectors)*

20. Section B of Table 1 presents the indicators that the System recommends to be produced and disseminated in the four main sectors that are covered in the comprehensive frameworks—real, fiscal, financial, and external. In general, three types of indicators are provided for each of the macroeconomic and financial sectors: summary measures derived from the comprehensive frameworks; data that permit tracking of the principal measures in the comprehensive frameworks; and other data relevant to the sector. The production and dissemination of additional indicators is encouraged for certain data categories.

21. Many of the indicators are expected to be produced and disseminated on a more timely basis, and in some cases more frequently, than the comprehensive frameworks. Timeliness for most indicators is specified as a range. These ranges must be viewed as approximations to be used flexibly as objectives.

22. The recommended indicator corresponding to the comprehensive statistical framework for the **real sector** is GDP at nominal levels and real (price-adjusted) levels. The System does not recommend specific data components, but breakdowns of GDP by major expenditure category and/or productive sector are encouraged. Gross national income (formerly GNP), saving, and capital formation are data components that countries are encouraged to provide. Classification according to the *1993 SNA* (or a regional counterpart) is encouraged. Annual indicators are recommended, but quarterly indicators are encouraged; dissemination within 6-9 months is recommended for annual indicators.

23. The data category intended to track GDP on a more frequent basis is a single production index or a selection of production indices. The index or selection of indices that is relevant will depend on a country's economic structure—manufacturing or industrial

production in some countries, primary commodity production (e.g., petroleum or rice) in other countries, and/or agriculture in still others. To provide a guide to developments in GDP, a monthly measure is recommended for manufacturing or industrial production. The "as relevant" notation for periodicity is a recognition that in many countries, such as those where seasonal crop production is important, production may be better represented by a quarterly or half-yearly index.

24. For price statistics, consumer price indices are recommended and producer price indices are encouraged. They are widely used in their own right; in addition, their underlying detail is needed for price-adjusted national accounts. Monthly periodicity is recommended with timeliness of 1–2 months after the end of the reference period.

25. Labor market data are critically important statistics in industrial countries but may be less meaningful in others, such as those with large informal or subsistence sectors. The "as relevant" notation recognizes that the coverage of the specified employment, unemployment, and wages/earnings components may, of necessity, be less than the total economy and that such concepts may not be meaningful. The annual periodicity and 6–9 months timeliness are recommended after consultation with the Bureau of Statistics of the International Labor Office. Disaggregation by age, sex, occupation, and industry are relevant to two MDG indicators namely the share of women in nonagricultural wage employment (MDG Indicator No. 11) and the unemployment rate among youths (MDG Indicator No. 45).

26. For the **fiscal sector**, the indicators corresponding to the comprehensive framework are central government aggregates; relevant measures such as revenue, expenditure, an appropriate balance, and financing are recommended to be disseminated on a quarterly basis within one quarter. The coverage of units of central government reflected in the indicators should be broad enough to track closely the appropriate balance of the whole of central government. For some countries, this may be limited to budgetary accounts, but for many countries, social security funds and extrabudgetary accounts would need to be included. The production and dissemination of interest payments data is encouraged, particularly in heavily indebted countries.

27. The recommended data coverage for debt is the total debt of central government. Debt data should be classified as domestic and foreign, on an "as relevant" basis. Breakdowns may be provided, as relevant, by maturity (short- versus medium- and long-term, preferably by remaining maturity but on an original maturity basis if the former is not available), by currency, by debt holder, and/or by debt instrument. Annual periodicity is recommended for central government debt, but where debt is of major policy significance, quarterly periodicity is encouraged. The dissemination of information on government guaranteed debt is encouraged.

28. For the **financial sector**, broad money and credit aggregates are the indicators for the depository corporations survey relating to the analytical accounts of the banking system. Data should cover all units of the system that are included in principal national measures of money aggregates (such as M2 or M3). Major indicators should include the net external

position, domestic credit, and narrow or broad money. Classification according to the *Monetary and Financial Statistics Manual* is encouraged. Monthly dissemination within 1–3 months is recommended.

29. With regard to data for the central bank, the component specified is the monetary base. Monthly dissemination within one to two months is recommended.

30. Interest rates should include short- and long-term government securities rates as appropriate to the country (e.g., three-month Treasury bill rate and ten-year government bond rate) and a policy variable rate, such as the central bank lending rate. Dissemination of deposit and lending rates is encouraged. Monthly data observations are called for. Because the data are very often available in the news media and from commercial data vendors, official dissemination is less time-sensitive than otherwise would be the case and therefore no specific timeliness is recommended. Where rates are administratively determined, changes in rates should be disseminated as soon as possible after rate changes. The GDDS encourages the dissemination of a range of deposit and lending rates.

31. In countries where a stock market exists, the System encourages the dissemination of share price indices by official agencies.

32. For the **external sector**, balance of payments indicators relate to the comprehensive statistical framework. Recommended indicators include, for the current account, imports and exports of goods and services and the current account balance. Financial (capital) account components should include at least reserves data and an overall balance. Classification according to the *Balance of Payments Manual* (fifth edition) is encouraged. Annual periodicity is recommended, but quarterly dissemination is strongly encouraged. For annual data, dissemination within 6 months is recommended.

33. Data on public and publicly guaranteed external debt and the associated debt service schedule are included as core indicators. It is recommended that the stock data on public and publicly guaranteed external debt, broken down by maturity, be disseminated with quarterly periodicity and timeliness of one to two quarters of the reference date. The associated debt service schedule should be disseminated twice yearly, within three to six months of the reference period, and with data for four quarters and two semesters ahead. The GDDS encourages the dissemination of private debt not publicly guaranteed and the associated debt service schedule with annual periodicity within six to nine months after the reference period.²

34. The dissemination of monthly data on gross official reserve assets in U.S. dollars, within one to four weeks is recommended. Countries are encouraged to disseminate reserve-

² See: *External Debt Statistics: Guide for Compilers and Users* (Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund, Interagency Task Force on Finance Statistics, 2003)

related liabilities. Reserve-related liabilities usually include short-term liabilities of the monetary authorities, but country-specific measures may be disseminated.

35. The dissemination of monthly data on merchandise trade (at least total imports and exports) within eight to twelve weeks is recommended. Dissemination of major commodity breakdowns of imports and exports is encouraged, with a slightly longer time lag. The dissemination of data on external debt and merchandise trade allows the calculation of the ratio of external debt service to exports of goods and services (MDG Indicator No. 44).

36. The System recommends that spot exchange rates be available to the public on a daily basis. If these are readily available in the media or through on-line systems, public redissemination by official agencies may be limited to monthly, or preferably weekly, end period and period average rates.

(3) Basic Components (socio-demographic data)

37. Section C of Table I presents the basic components for the socio-demographic data with some encouraged extensions. The System provides for the coverage of **socio-demographic data** that may be useful in monitoring and evaluating long-term economic objectives to complement core macroeconomic data categories. The System includes four categories of socio-demographic data—population, education, health, and poverty. Section C of Table 1 summarizes the basic components recommended for compilation and dissemination for each category together with specified periodicity and timeliness. These do not represent the full range of statistics that are relevant for setting or monitoring social policies, nor do they reflect the full range of data gathering activities that official agencies may undertake. The System does not, for example, include categories for housing, criminal justice, or scientific and cultural activities. Nor does it include environmental statistics at the present time. While the present recommendations for socio-demographic data are subject to future elaboration and amendment, the categories and basic components included in the System represent important areas of statistical activity. The information produced is of great importance to the operation of governments, to the activities of non-governmental and international organizations, and to civil society in general.

38. The System makes no specific recommendations concerning which social or demographic indicators should be compiled or reported by participating countries. Countries should construct indicators to meet their own national needs based on good statistical practices. The basic components for the socio-demographic data that are listed in Section C of Table 1 include information on inputs of resources (financial as well as human) into the social area, as it may provide a useful link to public expenditure policies. This feature is particularly appropriate for the System as it is meant to provide a comprehensive framework spanning a broad range of interrelated policy areas, both in the social and economic spheres. As such, the System is particularly appropriate for covering the broad range of indicators used to monitor progress within national poverty reduction strategies. Furthermore, each socio-demographic data category specifies related MDG indicators which could be used to gauge the effectiveness of poverty-reduction policies.

39. The organization of the GDDS for macroeconomic and financial statistics is based upon the concept of comprehensive frameworks, such as the national accounts, which provide well-recognized economic and financial measures. There are no equivalent comprehensive frameworks for socio-demographic data. But there do exist guidelines for compilation, standard classification systems, and examples of “best practice” that are frequently cited and widely used by statisticians to organize the collection and presentation of social and demographic statistics. Detailed guidance, including references to relevant documents published by international agencies, is provided in the *Guide to the General Data Dissemination System*, IMF, 2001.

2. Quality

Data quality must have a high priority. Data users must be provided with information to assess quality and quality improvements.

a. Dissemination of documentation on methodology and sources used in preparing statistics

40. The availability of documentation on methodology and sources underlying statistics is key to users’ awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the data. The documentation may take several forms, including summary notes accompanying release of the data, separate publications, and papers available on request from the producers. Members are encouraged to prepare and disseminate statements about important features of quality (e.g., the kinds of errors to which the data are subject, sources of noncomparability over time, measures of coverage for census data or sample error for survey data).³

b. Dissemination of component detail, reconciliations with related data, and statistical frameworks that support statistical cross-checks and provide assurance of reasonableness

41. To support and encourage users’ checks and verification of data, this element provides for dissemination of components underlying aggregate series, dissemination within a statistical framework, and/or dissemination of comparisons and reconciliations with related data. Component detail is, of course, to be at a level that does not conflict with other desirable characteristics such as the confidentiality of individually identifiable information or statistical reliability. Statistical frameworks include accounting identities and statistical relationships (such as balance sheets). Comparisons and reconciliations include those that cut across frameworks, such as exports and imports as part of the national accounts and as part of the balance of payments.

³ The size of past revisions, which is often in the list of aspects of quality, is included in an element on integrity, drawing on its role as an indicator of the transparency of conditions under which data are produced.

3. Integrity

To fulfill the purpose of providing the public with information, official statistics must have the confidence of their users. In turn, confidence in the statistics ultimately becomes a matter of confidence in objectivity and professionalism of the agency producing the statistics. Transparency of its practices and procedures is a key factor in creating this confidence.

a. Dissemination of the terms and conditions under which official statistics are produced, including those relating to the confidentiality of individually identifiable information

42. This practice, which was embodied in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics adopted in 1994 by the United Nations Statistical Commission is indirect, but nevertheless fundamental to fostering confidence in the objectivity and professionalism of official statistics. The terms and conditions under which statistical agencies operate may take various forms, including statistics law(s), charters, and codes of conduct; these may not be in place or they may be out of date. Accordingly, a first step toward the objective would be to put such laws, charters, and codes in place. The terms and conditions incorporated in them may refer to matters such as the relationship of the statistical unit to a larger department or ministry of which it is part (if relevant), the legal authority to collect data, the requirement to publish data it has collected, the terms of reference for the chief statistician/director, and procedures and processes related to confidentiality of individual responses. Dissemination of this information may take a variety of forms, including annual reports of the producer of statistics, abstracts in key publications, and statements of relevant passages referring to confidentiality of survey forms. Producers may find it convenient to use logos and other insignia to remind users of the terms under which statistics carrying the logo are produced.

b. Identification of internal government access to data before release

43. In the interest of transparency about possible undue influence on the data before release, the System calls for listing the persons/positions within the government, but outside the agency producing the data, who have pre-release access. Such identification that is, statements of who knows what"—may take a variety of forms, including brief notices to the public and annual reports of the producer of statistics. This practice is addressed mainly to situations in which the data are sensitive for policy or other reasons, and the objective may be met, at a minimum, by following this practice for the most sensitive data categories and indicators.

c. Identification of ministerial commentary on the occasion of statistical releases

44. Ministerial commentary is not necessarily expected to maintain the same degree of objectivity or freedom from political judgment as would be expected of good practice for a producer of official statistics. Therefore, the practice is to identify such commentary so that its source will be transparent to the public. The identification of ministerial commentary on the occasion of statistical release may take several forms including separate statements by the minister (or other policy or political official) or, alternatively, identification of a statistical agency's material in a release that contains both ministerial commentary and data. The agency's material may include data, explanatory text (e.g., of an unusual event affecting the data), and objective analysis; the identification as agency material may be made in various ways, including the use of source lines in tables and of the producer's logos or other insignia. This practice is addressed mainly to situations in which the data are sensitive for policy or other reasons, and the objective may be met, at a minimum, by following this practice for the most sensitive data categories and indicators.

d. Provision of information about revision and advance notice of major changes in methodology

45. In the interest of transparency about the data producers' practices, this element provides for the provision of information about past revisions and about one of the major prospective sources of revision. Relevant information about revisions in data may include statements about the policy followed (e.g., a policy of revising monthly data when an annual, more comprehensive survey becomes available or a policy of no revision) and data about the size of past revisions; both policies and data on revisions may have to be developed before they can be disseminated. Changes in methodology (e.g., changes in base year, major expansions of sample size, introduction of alternative data sources, reclassification of transactions or industries) are to be expected in developing statistical systems. The advance notices may take a variety of forms, including, at a minimum, a short statement in the last presentation of unrevised data or a stand-alone basis. These statements would identify the kinds of changes to be made and give a source for additional information, such as a paper available on request or the name and address of a person able to explain the upcoming change. Members are encouraged, as well, to provide easy access to information explaining revisions after they are released (e.g., by access to a person able to answer questions about revisions).

4. Access by the public

Dissemination of official statistics is an essential feature of statistics as a public good. Ready and equal access are principal requirements for the public.

a. Advance dissemination of release calendars

46. Advance release calendars highlight sound management and transparency of statistical compilation and provide data users with information needed to take a more active, organized approach to acquiring the raw materials for their work. The objective may be met by the dissemination of calendars for the year ahead that show no-later-than targets for the release of comprehensive frameworks and indicators with annual periodicity and a range of dates, such as 3–5 days, for data released more frequently. Agencies are encouraged to make widely known the name and address of an office or a person who could provide the latest information about the likely date of release, including release of data for which periodicity and timeliness are irregular and newly disseminated data.

b. Simultaneous release to all interested parties

47. The objective is to release data to all interested parties at the same time in recognition that data are valuable commodities and in the interest of equity. Release is not intended to refer to access by government agencies, including those other than the producing agency; pre-release access is governed by conditions set out in the description of integrity (see subsection 3.b above). The act of release may consist of providing summary data, to be accompanied perhaps later, by provision of detail. The objective may be met by providing at least one publicly identified and accessible location where data are available to all on an equal basis once they are released.

II. Implementation

48. Members are encouraged to participate in the GDDS on a voluntary basis. Participation involves (1) a commitment to use the GDDS as a framework for the development of their national systems for the production and dissemination of macroeconomic, financial, and socio-demographic data, (2) designation of a country coordinator to work with Fund staff, and (3) preparation of descriptions ("metadata") of (a) current statistical production and dissemination practices and (b) plans for short- and longer-term improvements that could be disseminated by the Fund. (As an alternative to describing plans for improvement, the country may indicate that an assessment has been made that no improvements are required.) Participants are also expected to describe recent improvements that have been implemented. The descriptions of current practices and plans would correspond to each of the objectives for the data, quality, access, and integrity dimensions. The plans would identify the major shortcomings relative to the objectives set out in the System; the steps by which the shortcomings would be addressed; the resources, including technical assistance, necessary to achieve the improvements; and the time frame during which the improvements would be achieved. In particular, the improvements to be undertaken within the next year and within 2 to 5 years would be identified.

49. Participation will depend upon the completion of the three actions set out above and will be publicly recognized by the Fund when the metadata are posted on the Fund's Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board (DSBB). However, at any time before the

completion of such actions, members may indicate their intent to participate by sending an appropriate communication to the Fund. This communication will provide the basis set forth to work with the member on the actions involved in participation, but receipt of such a communication will not be publicly recognized by the Fund.

50. A country could opt for participation from the outset, move gradually toward participation, or continue to work with the Fund on the improvement of national systems for the production and dissemination of statistics, as in the past, without participation. Members that subscribe to the SDDS would not be expected to participate, although they may well find the GDDS useful as a framework within which to assess their data production and dissemination practices.

51. The Fund maintains a system to store the metadata provided by participants and as a service to its members, disseminates those metadata through the Fund's DSBB.⁴ The responsibility for the accuracy of the metadata and of the economic, financial, and socio-demographic statistics underlying the metadata rests with the member countries. Participants are expected to review their metadata at least once a year and update them as necessary.

52. Members may withdraw their participation at any time. They may do so by sending an appropriate communication to the Fund.

53. Reviews of the System's content and implementation procedures will be conducted by the Fund at appropriate intervals. The views of both producers and users of data will be sought.

⁴ On May 22, 2000, a GDDS site was inaugurated on the Fund's DSBB.