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THE GENERAL DATA DISSEMINATION SYSTEM

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THE GENERAL DATA DISSEMINATION SYSTEM

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

A. The General System: Objectives

2. The General 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 General System 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 General 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 General System focuses on the data that are most important in evaluating performance and policy in four sectors across the economy—real, fiscal, financial, and external—as well as complementary socio-demographic data that shed light on economic development and structural change. The General System addresses the development and dissemination of a full range of economic and financial data: (1) presenting objectives for the development and dissemination of comprehensive frameworks in each of the four sectors; and (2) encouraging the development and dissemination of indicators of appropriate frequency and timeliness reflecting countries' needs and abilities. Table 1 presents these two aspects of the data dimension.

Box 1. Summary of the General Data Dissemination System

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.

Dissemination of economic and financial 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.
 - a. Dissemination of documentation on methodology and sources used in preparing statistics.
 - b. Dissemination of component detail, reconciliations with related data, and statistical frameworks that support statistical cross-checks and provide assurance of reasonableness.
Plans for improvement. The GDDS recommends that plans for improvements be developed for all areas on which shortcoming exist and that these plans be disseminated.
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 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.
 - b. Identification of internal government access to data before release.
 - c. Identification of ministerial commentary on the occasion of statistical releases.
 - d. Provision of information about revision 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 are principal requirements for the public.
 - a. Advance dissemination of release calendars
 - b. Simultaneous release to all interested parties

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 broad money 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 detailed classifications. In the areas of government and balance of payments, extensions of coverage are encouraged.

6. With regard to indicators, Section B of Table 1 provides for each sector (i) indicators for the comprehensive frameworks—GDP for national accounts, central government budgetary aggregates for central government operations, broad money and credit aggregates for the broad money survey, and balance of payments aggregates for the complete balance of payments; (ii) additional data that permit tracking of the principal measures in the comprehensive frameworks; and (iii) other data relevant to the 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. Section B also presents a section for socio-demographic data, which includes categories of population, health, education, and poverty.

7. The General 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 and balance of payments statistics, the *1993 System of National Accounts* and the fifth edition of the *Balance of Payments Manual* 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 General System are produced by official national agencies. The inclusion in the General 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.

(2) *Periodicity and timeliness*

9. The General 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.

Table 1. The Data Dimension of the GDDS
A. Comprehensive Frameworks

Core frameworks	Coverage, classification, and analytical framework	Encouraged extensions	Periodicity	Timeliness
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/ borrowing. Producing and disseminating sectoral accounts and national and sectoral balance sheets as relevant.		Annual	10–14 months
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
Broad money 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
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 transfers, current account balance, reserves and other financial transactions, and overall balance, with detailed components as relevant.	International Investment Position (IIP); external debt data for the total economy encouraged, where these are of analytical or policy importance 1/	Annual	6–9 months

1/ In countries where external debt data are important from a policy or analytical perspective, the General System recommends that data on debt securities and loans, within the IIP categories of portfolio investment and other investment, be developed as a priority.

Table 1. The Data Dimension of the GDDS
B. Data Categories and Indicators

Data categories	Core indicators	Encouraged aggregates and/or components	Periodicity ^{1/}	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 Primary commodity, agricultural, or other indices, as relevant		Monthly As relevant	6 weeks– 3 months for all indices
Price indices	Consumer price index	Producer price index	Monthly	1–2 months
Labor market indicators	Employment, unemployment, and wages/earnings, as relevant		Annual ^{2/}	6–9 months ^{2/}
Fiscal sector				
Central government budgetary 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	Reserve money		Monthly	1–2 months
Interest rates	Short and long-term government security rates, policy variable rate	Money or interbank market rates and a range of deposit and lending rates	Monthly	3/
Stock market		Share price index, as relevant	Monthly	

Table 1. The Data Dimension of the GDDS (concluded)
B. Data Categories and Indicators

Data categories	Core indicators	Encouraged categories and/ or components	Periodicity	Timeliness
External sector				
Balance of payments aggregates	Imports and exports of goods and services, current account balance, reserves, overall balance	External debt and debt service for the total economy data, as relevant	Annual (quarterly strongly encouraged)	6 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 weeks – 3 months
Exchange rates	Spot rates		Daily	3/

Socio-demographic data			
Categories	Indicators ^{4/}	Periodicity ^{5/}	Timeliness ^{5/}
Population	Population; population growth rate; urban population; rural population; population by gender; age composition of population		
Health	Population per physician; life expectancy; infant/child/maternal mortality		
Education	Adult literacy; pupil–teacher ratio; primary/secondary school enrollment		
Poverty	Access to safe water/sanitation; number of people per room; income distribution; families below minimum standard of income		

1/The General System should be viewed as encouraging improvements over time in the periodicity and timeliness of data dissemination that are consistent with improvements in data quality. 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 General System.

2/Periodicity and timeliness for labor indicators are recommended after consultation with the Bureau of Statistics of the International Labor Office.

3/Dissemination as part of a high-frequency (e.g., monthly) publication.

4/The UN Expert Group on the Statistical Implications of the Recent Major UN Conferences has compiled a list of 15 indicators to form a Minimum National Social Data Set (MNSDS) together with a number of other indicators that may serve as a basis for development of socio-demographic data. The 16 indicators shown here are examples of the types of commonly used indicators. No particular indicator should be viewed as a specified component of the GDDS.

5/The periodicity of socio-demographic indicators will vary; some may be annual series while others may be compiled once in three or five years. Timeliness will also vary.

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 General 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 General System. The short end of the timeliness range corresponds to the timeliness requirements of the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) for a given indicator while the high end of the range relates to good practice across a broad group of countries. The General 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 General System provides objectives for data production and dissemination for both comprehensive frameworks and other data categories and indicators; these are summarized in Table 1.

(1) Comprehensive frameworks

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 General System recommends the development of measures of national and disposable income, consumption, saving, capital formation, and financing. 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 General 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 General 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 General System recommends complete coverage of all central government units, including budgetary and extrabudgetary accounts, social security funds, and decentralized agencies; complete coverage is essential in most countries to assess the actual fiscal stance. The General System recommends development of an appropriate analytical framework and classification schemes, but does not prescribe a particular framework or set of classification tables. The current *Manual on Government Finance Statistics* may be used 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. The General System recommends that complete data on the operations of central government be disseminated annually within 6–9 months. The General System also encourages the development of data on general government operations and/or public sector operations. 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 broad money 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 General 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. In recognition of existing good practice across a broad range of countries, the General System recommends monthly data to be disseminated within 1–3 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* 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, 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 General 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. However, only a few countries now prepare an international investment position, and international guidelines were introduced only recently (in the fifth edition of the *Balance of Payments Manual*). Accordingly, the General System encourages that countries work toward component detail according to the *Balance of Payments Manual*—direct investment; portfolio investment, including equity and debt; other investment; and (for assets), reserves—and disseminate the framework or components of it as appropriate and feasible. Breakdowns of the debt securities and loans, within portfolio and other investment, respectively, by currency of issue and by original maturity (short-term versus medium- and long-term using classifications by instrument) would be highly desirable for a view of external debt.

(2) *Indicators*

20. Section B of Table 1 presents the indicators that the General System recommends to be produced and disseminated. The four main sectors that are covered in the comprehensive frameworks—real, fiscal, financial, and external—are included; in addition, a set of socio-demographic indicators is included. In general, three types of indicators are provided for each of the four 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. In certain data categories, the production and dissemination of additional indicators is encouraged.

21. Many of the indicators are expected to be produced and disseminated on a more timely basis, and in some cases on a higher periodicity, 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 General 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 System of National Accounts* (or a regional counterpart) is strongly 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.

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 broad money 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. Monthly dissemination within 1–3 months is recommended.

29. With regard to data for the central bank, the component specified is reserve money. 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 dissemination of share price indices is encouraged.

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 strongly encouraged. Annual periodicity is recommended, but quarterly dissemination is strongly encouraged. For annual data, dissemination within 6 months is recommended. The dissemination of external debt data is encouraged, as relevant.

33. On a more frequent and timely basis, international reserves should be provided in U.S. dollars; dissemination of monthly gross official reserve assets within one to four weeks is recommended. Countries are encouraged to disseminate reserve-related liabilities, including forward contracts and similar derivative positions.

34. Merchandise trade data, also on a more frequent and timely basis, are recommended first with at least total imports and exports. Monthly periodicity within eight weeks to three months is recommended. Dissemination of major commodity breakdowns of imports and exports are encouraged, with a slightly longer time lag.

35. The General 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 may be limited to monthly, or preferably weekly, end period and period average rates.

36. The General 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 General System does not recommend specific indicators, but identifies four categories—population, health, education, and poverty—and a number of commonly used indicators within each category. The United Nations has produced a *Minimum National Social Data Set* consisting of 15 primary indicators and a range of secondary indicators that it has recommended for implementation in all UN member countries. The General System does not specifically include these indicators, but countries may find the primary and secondary indicators useful in deciding which indicators to use within the context of the General System.

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*

37. 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 kind of error to which the data are subject, sources of noncomparability over time, measures of coverage for census data or sample error for survey data).¹ Members are encouraged to provide documentation in the form of quality assessment frameworks to be provided by the International Monetary Fund.

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

38. 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

¹The 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.

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.

39. Integral to the quality dimension is the development and dissemination of plans for data improvement. For comprehensive frameworks and indicators, plans for improvement should be prepared and disseminated for all areas in which data shortcomings exist. In general, for all comprehensive frameworks and indicators, statistical authorities should indicate one of the three following positions: (1) plans for improvement that deal with identified shortcomings; (2) recent improvements that have been implemented; or (3) a country's determination that no improvements are required.

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

40. The 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

41. In the interest of transparency about possible undue influence on the data before release, this element 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

42. 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

43. 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

44. 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. Members 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

45. 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 paragraph 41 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.

B. Implementation

46. Members are encouraged to participate in the GDDS on a voluntary basis. Participation involves a commitment (1) to use the GDDS as a framework for the development of their national systems for the production and dissemination of economic and financial data, (2) to designate a country coordinator to work with Fund staff, and (3) to prepare descriptions of (a) current statistical production and dissemination practices and (b) plans for short- and long-term improvements that could be disseminated by the Fund. The descriptions of current practices 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 General 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 3–5 years would be identified.

Participation will commence upon the completion of the three actions set forth above and such commencement of participation will be publicly recognized by the Fund. However, at any time prior to 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 for staff 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.

47. 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.

48. The Fund will maintain a system to store the information about current practices and plans (metadata) provided by countries and will, as a service to its members, disseminate those metadata. The means of dissemination will be determined after further consultation with countries on the most appropriate means to provide wide and easy access to the metadata and recognition of countries' effort to achieve comprehensive, reliable, accessible, and timely statistics. 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. Members will be expected to review their metadata at least once a year and update them as necessary.

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

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