

Implementing the SNA93 in Anglophone African countries

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What is meant by “Implementing the SNA93”? The National Statistical Offices of Anglophone African countries (AACs) have been engaged in national accounting since the fifties or sixties. That is, they have been producing estimates of GDP and its components more or less in line with international standards. From time to time, with some technical assistance, they have established better estimates for a new base year. This has often been done using data from household expenditure surveys. For more sophisticated economic analysis, international experts have led the construction of social accounting matrices (SAM). Unfortunately, SAMs have effectively been dropped by the SNA 2008, apparently because they “go beyond a rigorous accounting structure based on observations”.

On the other hand, the NSOs have never prepared regular sector accounts as has been done in the UK since 1940. These accounts were conceived to address Keynes’s question “How to pay for the war?” as household sector saving played a key part in the answer. Today, integrated sector accounts are at the heart of the SNA. But if implementing the SNA in AACs implies establishing sector accounts (and balance sheets) within the next few years, we must question its relevance.

Here we should recall the characteristics of the countries concerned. They lack resources, and not just statistical resources. Their economies are small, with only a few hundred formal enterprises. In most cases, the GDP is well below €20 billions. The informal sector, including agricultural and non-monetary activity, can be up to 65% of GDP.

Statistics must on the one hand respond to demand and on the other be feasible to compile. In AACs, GDP, its growth rate and components are, with the CPI, the most in demand among economic statistics produced by the NSOs. The latter therefore produce estimates one way or another, often within a reasonably short time, but typically based on little reliable information. The question therefore is not how to implement the SNA as such, which is not needed, but rather how to improve the estimation of GDP and its components, in order to provide a realistic sketch of the structure and development of the economy roughly in accordance with SNA concepts.

Some ideas will be proposed on priority actions to be taken.