



AFRISTAT's action in the statistical development of its member states

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Abstract

The Sub-Saharan African Economic and Statistical Observatory (AFRISTAT) is an international organization specialized in the statistical capacity building of its Member States. Distinguished by the fact that its only field of intervention is statistics, AFRISTAT works mainly for Member States on common methodologies for the collection, processing and dissemination of basic statistics and the harmonization of the concepts and nomenclatures they use in order to make their statistics. Since the beginning of its operational activities in 1996 until now, what are the main progress that we can recognize that AFRISTAT have contributed for a large part?

Under the instigation of AFRISTAT, we can highlight realizations and following experiences:

- The Observatory has trained many national statistical officers and many of them have become international experts;
- AFRISTAT has provided methodological guides and computer modules adapted to the African needs;
- AFRISTAT has also contributed to the improvement of the statistical production of its member states by mobilizing financing from technical and financial partners to support the implementation of concrete actions at country level;
- The Observatory provides a consistent quality response over time to requests from the member States faced with the high mobility of their staff and thus help them to ensure the continuity of the production of their statistics.

The finding is that the credibility of statistical producers has improved considerably through the strengthening of capabilities provided by AFRISTAT.

The consequences of all which precedes is that the statistics proposed to the public in the twenty-two member states that AFRISTAT counts are more diversified, regularly available and in conformity with international standards. Indeed, the confidence given to AFRISTAT by the African Development Bank and the West African Economic and Monetary Union Commission was very important to find the financial resources necessary to accelerate the obtaining of several results.

Three factors appear to us to require a particular attention for the regularity of the success of AFRISTAT at sub-regional level: the preservation of the concentration of his activities in the only domain of statistics, the coordination of actions with the others partners interesting by the production analysis of data and the engagement of member states for the payment of their contributions at the AFRISTAT's Fund.

Key words: capacity building, statistical harmonization, regional organization, financial resources.

1. Creation of AFRISTAT and evolution of its scope

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The Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT) is an international organization created by a treaty signed on September 21, 1993 in Abidjan by 14 African States ² of the Franc Zone. Its objective is to contribute to the development of economic, social and environmental statistics in the Member States and to strengthen their skills in this field. It collaborates with the national statistical agencies of the Member States and supports them in the collection, processing and dissemination of basic statistical information and in carrying out macroeconomic analyzes and syntheses. Its Constitutive Treaty prohibits it from replacing these bodies for the collection, processing and dissemination of basic statistical information in their countries.

Concretely, AFRISTAT works mainly for Member States on common methodologies for the collection, processing and dissemination of basic statistics and the harmonization of the concepts and nomenclatures they use in order to make their statistics. On this basis, AFRISTAT is in line with the African concern for regional economic integration, which presupposes the homogeneity and comparability of the statistical information produced.

Since the start of its operational activities in January 1996, AFRISTAT has registered two types of changes: its fields of intervention and the number of its member states. In the first case, the activities of AFRISTAT, which were initially oriented mainly on economic statistics, have gradually been extended to include social statistics and statistics on the environment and climate change.

In the second case, eight other countries³ in sub-Saharan Africa joined the founding countries of the Observatory to increase its membership to twenty-two (22) Member States, 41% of all the countries on the African continent.

2. Adapting AFRISTAT to the Changing African Statistical Environment

The environment in which AFRISTAT operates has evolved considerably over time as awareness of the importance of having good quality statistics increased among policy makers. This awareness was prompted by the ambition to find appropriate solutions to the various economic shocks that have hit different countries and the desire to improve the welfare of the populations. It was therefore imperative to provide relevant and reliable economic and social data for building national poverty reduction frameworks, monitoring the Millennium Development Goals,

The consequence of this is that the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), which wish to provide concerted responses to their member states in crisis, have begun to strengthen their statistical departments. The same trend has been observed among multilateral donors such as the World Bank and the IMF. The latter, for example, has opened regional technical assistance centers to better target country support.

Given the growing interest in African statistics, reflected in the increase in the number of actors, AFRISTAT emphasized its comparative advantages. The latter are essentially based on:

- Knowledge of the real needs of its Member States, which generates satisfactory technical support. This is supported by the AFRISTAT governance model. The composition of the Steering Committee⁴ and the bi-annual frequency of its meetings is conducive to the correct assessment of the needs of Member States' national statistical systems (NSS) ;
- Competence and working experience in the context of Member States, which are recognized by its experts. This stems from the competitive recruitment process and the focus on building the capacity of experts in order to provide them with all the necessary means to improve the quality of support;

²Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Centrafrique, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, EquatorialGuinea, Mali, Niger, Sénégal, Chad and Togo.

³Burundi, Cabo-Verde, Djibouti, Guinea, BissauGuinea, Madagascar, Mauritaniaand Sao-Tome et Principe

⁴The AFRISTAT's Steering Committee is composed by DG of NSO's members States.



- Highlighting the principle of subsidiarity and not substitution. The procedure recommended in the technical assistance missions consists in making the national executives do the work to facilitate the rapid appropriation of the methods and techniques transmitted. In order to achieve this, there is a preference for the combination of short-term supports in the face-to-face with remote assistance;
- Concentration on the only domain of statistics to avoid dispersion. This makes AFRISTAT capitalize on its areas of expertise. It provides a consistent quality response over time to requests from the member States faced with the high mobility of their staff and thus help them to ensure the continuity of the production of their statistics;
- The speed and flexibility in mobilizing its expertise. The administrative and financial management of AFRISTAT is constantly aimed at improving its efficiency. In this sense, the Observatory relies, in addition to its permanent experts, on a network of associate experts, managers in the SSs of the Member States.

Beyond all of the above, AFRISTAT encourages the coordination of partners who intervene in the same geographical space as him. This coordination takes place on the basis of formal and informal mutual consultations. Formally, the different institutions invite each other in their meetings to present and validate their respective action plans. At the informal level, experts from different institutions regularly exchange views on their intervention programs in the countries. In this way, redundant supports are avoided and greater complementarity is found for the good of the Member States. This coordination activity remains costly for the Observatory because it requires a great investment of experts in terms of monitoring. It also involves the management of some fifteen annual meetings, which 2/3 translates into representation missions.

Meetings
Organized by AFRISTAT
- Executive Committee
- Scientific Council
Organized by partners
- Steering Committee of West Africa
- Steering Committee of Africa Center
- PARIS21 ⁵ Annual Board Meeting
- WAEMU ⁶ Regional Statistical Committee
- ASS ⁷ Study Directors Meeting
Organized jointly
- Seminar of conjuncture West Africa
- Seminar of conjuncture Central Africa
- Annual National Account Seminar

3. What added value can be derived from the existence of AFRISTAT?

Through its role as an adviser to its Member States on statistics, the creation of AFRISTAT has had and continues to have a positive organizational, technical and financial impact. At the organizational level, the Observatory focused on two issues: the familiarization of statistical production bodies with strategic planning and results-based management (PS-GAR) on the one hand, and the modernization of their institutional framework on the other hand.

⁵ Partnership in statistics for development in the 21st century

⁶ West Africa economic and monetary union

⁷ African statistical school



Taking into account the findings of the various institutional diagnostics that have been carried out in several countries, issues related to the planning and programming of activities and the obsolescence of the legal and institutional framework governing statistical activity have emerged as weaknesses of SS. To help its member states to remedy these shortcomings, AFRISTAT has recruited experts in PS-GAR and institutional organization. Through their interventions, countries have been able to:

- Develop their national statistical development strategies (NSDS), which generally cover a five-year period. This exercise has resulted in improved credibility of NSSs and improved national statistical production priorities. In addition, this has enabled NSSs to leave intact their chances of benefiting from the multiform support of development partners, as many of them conditioned their interventions to the existence of an NSDS. All AFRISTAT member countries have developed and implemented at least one NSDS. The most advanced countries have developed three;
- Revise the laws and regulations in force in the countries. Under the leadership of the Observatory several Member States have adopted new statistical laws. Since 2000, 82% of countries have adopted a statistical law that takes into account recent developments. This renewal was generally associated with the transformation of the central bodies of the NSS from central government entities to national statistical offices (NSOs) with administrative and financial management autonomy. This evolution allows NSOs to achieve greater flexibility in the management of the resources made available to it in order to make its action more effective. All these changes have come about through active advocacy by AFRISTAT and other partners in the field to the national authorities.

At the technical level, AFRISTAT has contributed to the improvement of the statistical production quality of its member states by: (i) providing adapted methodological documents, (ii) developing transparent and user-friendly working tools, and (iii) strengthening the technical capabilities of national executives.

In order to allow Member States to work on the basis of internationally recognized and comparable standards, AFRISTAT has since its creation put at the disposal of the public nearly forty methodological documents covering twelve (12) different fields.

The use of the same and well-controlled working tools by the Member States' managers avoids the results, which cannot be explained. Therefore, the use of the same tools to produce comparable data is encouraged by AFRISTAT. To date, the following tools have been developed and / or promoted in three distinct areas:

- The ERETES module for assistance in the preparation of national accounts, which was designed by the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies and Eurostat, is adopted by AFRISTAT, which recommends it to its member states. This tool for which the Observatory is participating in the improvement is currently used by 82% of the Member States. The success of ERETES with its various users has convinced the African Union, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to such an extent that these institutions recommend it to all the countries participating at the regional implementation project of the 2008 SNA;
- The Phoenix-UEMOA tool for calculating the Harmonized National Household Consumer Price Index was designed by AFRISTAT. After its conclusive use in all WAEMU Member States for which it was drawn up, this tool is being disseminated to other countries;
- The TABLO model constructed for macroeconomic forecasting by French cooperation is used by AFRISTAT to train managers in its use. This model has also been adapted by the Observatory to help countries replenish the national accounts series for the distant years.

Capacity building is AFRISTAT's latest means of achieving its statistical harmonization mission. It consists of the organization of training workshops, technical assistance missions or study tours for the benefit of NSS managers. In addition to the knowledge transfer carried out during these various forms



of capacity building, AFRISTAT's opportunities for encounters are moments of exchange of experiences and healthy emulation. The satisfaction of all stakeholders is evident for this component as the results are commensurate with the investment. Indeed, it can be seen that the dozen workshops organized on average each year and the three (3) to four (4) technical assistance missions carried out per year and per country have enabled the development of quality national expertise since it is observed that:

- Several countries have made available AFRISTAT technical assistance in many areas thanks to the presence of a national technical offer;
- South-South cooperation in technical assistance has increased considerably;
- Member States constitute the reservoir in which AFRISTAT and other international organizations recruit their experts.

On the financial dimension, AFRISTAT's contribution to the development of statistics in its Member States rests on its capacity to mobilize financial resources. Two factors have been decisive in this respect: the recognition of AFRISTAT as a center of excellence in statistics and the function of executing agency of projects entrusted by donors with which it is accustomed.

The resources mobilized from the technical and financial partners enable AFRISTAT to contribute to the reduction of part of the financing needs of its member states. As an example and when we look at the period 2011-2015, we note that:

- AFRISTAT mobilized a total of USD 6,970,000 to strengthen the technical, material and financial capacities of its member states;
- 56% of the sums mobilized have been transferred to Member States to enable them to carry out national activities (organization of surveys, purchase of furniture and equipment, etc.);
- The sums allocated to the own use of the NSOs are not insignificant since they represent on average 2 to 3% of the budgets of these entities.

In addition, AFRISTAT associates countries in the management of the financing that it mobilizes by entrusting to them the administrative and financial follow-up of the operations realized in the country. This has enabled countries to develop their own project management capacities, thereby enhancing the credibility of NSOs on this issue.

The combination of all these actions has resulted in a more continuous, up-to-date statistical offer complying with the latest international statistical standards. For example, in the area of national accounts, fifty per cent of Member States draw up national accounts based on the 2008 system of national accounts, which is the most recent reference at international level. Moreover, no Member State has experienced a production disruption for many years.

4.Opportunities and Risks

The various evaluations that have been carried out on the impact of AFRISTAT on statistical development in its area of intervention have all produced positive results. To achieve this, AFRISTAT has benefited from certain circumstances, the most common of which are the following:

- the confidence given to AFRISTAT by the African Development Bank and the WAEMU Commission, which are responsible for 56% and 33% respectively of the funds mobilized by the organization for projects between 2011 and 2015;
- the capacity to negotiate financing by the Regional Economic Commissions, in particular WAEMU;
- the accession of several international organizations involved in the field of statistics to initiatives to coordinate actions and pool resources available to carry out certain activities;



- political support from Member States etc.

In spite of the above, there remain some risk factors that may prevent AFRISTAT from achieving the results assigned to it. The main factors are:

- the fact that certain Member States belong to several Regional Economic Commissions may be confusing as to the choice of standards and concepts to be used;
- weak project management capacity at the level of a few beneficiary States, which sometimes impedes the proper execution of activities (keeping and transmitting documentary evidence of expenditure to AFRISTAT within the deadlines);
- delays in the payment of AFRISTAT Fund contributions by Member States;
- etc.

5. Prospects for an even greater impact of regional cooperation on statistical development

In order to increase the positive impact of regional cooperation on NSS, the following actions should be promoted in relation to AFRISTAT:

1. Make the process of adopting regional statistical programs developed by the Regional Economic Commissions more participatory. The greater involvement of the Member States favours a good appropriation and gives more chances to the perpetuation of the achievements;
2. To promote South-South cooperation by using, as often as possible, local expertise that is easy to mobilize, less costly and efficient;
3. Reinforce efforts in Governments by releasing national counterpart funding in programs and projects initiated at regional level to ensure their full implementation and sustainability;
4. Strengthen the role of observatory of the organization to value the statistical production by analysis. The proposals of solutions to problems that arise in the countries which will be stemming it will contribute to the improvement of the visibility of statistics;
5. Pursue and increase technical adviser's role of the African regional organizations in the statistical domain;
6. Help the African regional organizations make operational their initiatives. It is in particular the case of the statistical indicators conceived which are not disseminate at country level. AFRISTAT has the expertise to organize workshop and support in the calculation of these indicators at the national level.

However, it is important that AFRISTAT strengthens its internal capacities and revises his institutional framework to widen its possibilities of intervention in the not member States.

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