

## **Synopsis of the Status of Key Development Statistics in Africa**

### **Trade Statistics**

#### **Motivation and Objectives**

Although International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS) are based mainly on customs data, figures for the same country and year often differ across international sources, between a country's records and the mirror trade records reported by its trading partners, and between IMTS and National Accounts. These discrepancies reflect differences in source data, cleaning procedures, treatment of missing or inconsistent observations, and harmonization methods across countries and over time.

This brief pursues five objectives: (i) assess the public availability and coverage of trade statistics in Africa; (ii) compare trade statistics across selected international outlets; (iii) identify and quantify non-concordance in mirror trade statistics; (iv) examine differences in the reporting of trade statistics between National Accounts and International Trade Statistics; and (v) determine the extent to which Informal Cross-Border Trade is measured and incorporated in official merchandise trade statistics.

#### **Highlights of the Status of Statistics**

1. Africa trade statistics across international outlets have a longer time series, with more than 30 countries covering a span of seven decades compared to only three decades for national data sources.
2. The Central African Republic, Eritrea, and Somalia do not have publicly available trade statistics from national sources, contrasting with evidence from UNCTADSTAT and WTO that disseminates trade statistics for all 54 countries.
3. While Africa trade statistics for a majority (32 out of 54) of member states align across international outlets examined, the following differences are notable: UNCTADSTAT generally reports higher export values than UN Comtrade. The gap in 2023 is particularly large for Liberia (about seven times); Benin and The Gambia (about four times); and Niger (close to two times).
  - Trade statistics exhibit stronger alignment between the IMF and UN Comtrade than with UNCTADSTAT. In 2023, notable outliers included Cabo Verde, where UN Comtrade reported export values five times higher than UNCTADSTAT, and The Gambia, where IMF-reported values were 34 times higher than those reported by UN Comtrade.
4. In 2023, 33 out of 42 countries reported imports that were lower than the corresponding exports published by their trading partners. For instance, Congo reported exports to Togo valued at US\$153.2 million in 2023, while Togo published imports from Congo of only US\$765.3 million.
5. In eight countries, including Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mauritius and Nigeria, the differences in export values between National Accounts and International Trade Statistics are at least 10 percent.
6. Despite the dominance of informal cross-border trade (ICBT) in Africa, partly due to the prevalence of unapproved and unpatrolled borders, only four countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Uganda) have reflected ICBT in their official merchandise trade statistics