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Contribution to the Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This presentation is contribution towards sharing examples of good practices and lessons learned in the production of statistics on e-commerce and the digital economy, as required by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) First Meeting of the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and Digital Economy to be held at Geneva, Switzerland. The deliberations will inform revision of the Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Information Economy. The Working Group on Measuring Electronic Commerce and Digital Economy aims to contribute to and advance cooperation on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy and enhance the availability, quality, comparability, usability and relevance of statistics on e-commerce and the digital economy with a view to supporting evidence-based policy making, in particular in developing countries like Zimbabwe.

1.2 Some good practices have been witnessed and lessons learned in the production of statistics on e-commerce and digital economy in Zimbabwe. However, the country has encountered fair share of barriers in the same area, denying more firms and people the opportunity to create value through e-commerce and digital economy. The country still has a lot to do in developing its capacity for measuring e-commerce and digital economy.

2.0 Measuring e-commerce and digital economy

2.1 Policy framework and strategy for e-commerce and digital economy

2.1.1 Electronic commerce has not yet taken off in Zimbabwe due to low Internet penetration, although electronic payments via debit cards and mobile applications have become very common. Moreover, the National Policy for Information and Communication Technology (2014) demonstrates Zimbabwe's commitment to developing e-commerce and digital economy.

2.1.2 Through not specific to e-commerce, Zimbabwe's National Strategy for Development of Statistics (NSDS) sets out the country's vision to improve the production and use of statistics in Zimbabwe. The policy's major thrust is capacity building and production of statistics through, addressing data limitations; prioritising limited available resources on statistics production; integrating statistics within government policy processes; providing a coherent framework for all national and international statistical programmes in Zimbabwe; providing an action plan for statistical capacity building; and acting as a catalyst for change. However, the NSDS lacks adequate funding.

2.1.3 In spite of the policies and strategies put in place, Zimbabwe still lags behind in terms of producing statistics on e-commerce and digital economy, making it difficult for policymakers to formulate, evaluate and review its ICT policies and strategies.

2.2 Institutional and legal framework for measuring e-commerce and digital economy

2.2.1 The Zimbabwe Government recognizes the need for production of reliable, quality, timely and regular statistics to inform policy design and measure development outcomes. As such, government promulgated the Census and Statistics Act 2007 (Chapter 10:29) that provides for the operations of National Statistical System (NSS) and its coordination by a semi-autonomous National Statistical Office (NSO) called Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT).

2.2.2 ZIMSTAT's key activities include undertaking national census, undertaking statistical surveys to collect statistics; coordinating and supervising the NSS and disseminating statistical information. ZIMSTAT's Production Statistics Division is responsible for producing statistics on e-commerce and digital economy. In order to execute its functions, ZIMSTAT is funded by Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, although it is legally empowered to raise charges in respect of services rendered as well as raise loans and or grants.

2.2.3 Whilst ZIMSTAT runs a website (www.zimstat.gov.zw), the website currently does not provide direct online access to any statistics on e-commerce and digital economy of Zimbabwe. The agency acknowledges that there are inadequate resources available for statistical measurement of e-business or capacity building, due to eroded government financial capacity to support ZIMSTAT and scarcity in grants. There is need to strengthen the capacity of ZIMSTAT and NSS; stakeholder strong awareness on the use and value of measuring ICT; effective coordination and management of the NSS; and production and dissemination of quality ICT statistics.

2.3 Defining e-commerce and digital economy

2.3.1 In the absence of an operational definition of e-commerce, the production of comparable statistics on e-commerce and digital economy presents difficulties. The Zimbabwe National Policy for ICT defines e-commerce as the buying and selling of products or services over electronic systems such as the Internet and other computer networks.

2.3.2 Zimbabwe's ICT policy document does not define the concept of e-business, yet this is an essential element of digital economy. Zimbabwean ICT policymakers should come up with a definition for e-business that could be used for statistical purposes- measurement of e-business processes.

2.4 Measuring ICT demand (use) in Zimbabwe: Core indicators on the use of ICT

2.4.1 ZIMSTAT has to date carried out a limited number of official surveys to measure ICT use in Zimbabwe. The 2010 and 2014 ICT surveys aimed at collecting data on access and use of ICTs by households in order to measure digital divide in Zimbabwe. The 2017 ICT survey focussed on collecting data on access and use of ICT by primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions. It is clear that no stand-alone official survey has been carried out using core indicators on the use of ICT by businesses in Zimbabwe. Electronic transactions (e-commerce) are at the core of statistical measurement of e-business.

2.5 Measuring ICT demand (use) in Zimbabwe: Other indicators on the use of ICT

2.5.1 Whilst some of the official ICT surveys included measurement of household access to mobile phones; the assessment falls short of measuring other important aspects of ICT demand such as, use of mobile phones for business-related activities, and expenditure on ICT.

2.6. Contributions on national experiences in the measurement of domestic and cross-border e-commerce.

- As a nation we have government e-services platforms such as the ZimConnect Portal where citizens can get different services online, e.g. Ministry of Industry and Commerce has a platform for application for Import and Export licenses.
- Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) has a platform to collect revenue.
- The Government of Zimbabwe is also promoting access and utilization of I.C.Ts through the establishment of viable ICT Infrastructure for example, Community Information Centres have been established in the country's provinces, Last Mile Connectivity i.e. laying fibre, ICT Labs in schools and all these are being done by the Ministry of ICT, Postal and Courier Services.
- Training citizens on basic ICT skills.
- Zimbabwe Statistical Office (ZIMSTAT) will be carrying out a survey in conjunction with Postal and Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (POTRAZ) on ICT access by households and use by individuals.
- The other survey will on ICT access and use in businesses.