Digital transformation to sustainably strengthen trade statistics in Africa: Lessons from TiSSTAT and myACTA

Submitted by	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Statistics, Data and Digital Service (SDDS)
Proposed format	Panel discussion, with UNCTAD and representatives of African institutions implementing TiSSTAT and MyACTA
Indicative duration	75 minutes (from 4:15 pm to 5:30 pm)
Modality	In person, with remote participation for panellists and participants where required
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International statistical standards and modern digital technologies provide unprecedented opportunities to strengthen the production of trade statistics. Secure online data collection, standardized implementation of international classifications, automated validation and reproducible statistical workflows can improve the quality, efficiency and accessibility of official statistics. Yet translating these opportunities into sustainable operational systems remains a challenge for many countries.

In response to requests from African partner countries, UNCTAD has developed two complementary digital platforms: the Trade in Services Statistics Information System (TiSSTAT), supporting the compilation of trade in services statistics, and My Africa Cross-Border Trade Assistant (MyACTA), supporting collection and analysis of informal cross-border trade data. Both initiatives have been developed in close collaboration with implementing institutions and continue to evolve through their feedback and operational experience. They represent examples of shared digital tools, combining common development and maintenance with practical implementation support while allowing participating institutions to retain ownership and control of their data and services.

Experience from developing, implementing and operating these systems has demonstrated both the value of this collaborative approach and the remaining challenges to sustainable adoption. Beyond sound statistical methodology, long-term success depends on digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, institutional governance, operational capacity and sustainable arrangements for maintaining digital systems.

Rather than presenting completed solutions, this session is proposed as a discussion panel bringing together UNCTAD and representatives from African institutions implementing TiSSTAT and MyACTA. Panelists will share practical experiences from development, deployment and operational use, discuss how co-development has influenced the evolution of the applications, and reflect on the institutional conditions required for sustainable digital statistical systems. The discussion will explore how international technical cooperation can combine methodological guidance, shared digital tools and long-term partnerships to sustainably strengthen trade statistics capacity across Africa.

Purpose of the panel discussion

- To facilitate a discussion on how trade statistics capacity in African countries can be strengthened sustainably through the combined development of statistical methodology, shared digital tools and long-term institutional partnerships.

Objectives

- Present TiSSTAT and MyACTA as examples of digital statistical infrastructure developed in response to needs identified by African countries.
- Share implementation experiences from African institutions that have participated in the development, piloting and operation of these systems.
- Discuss how co-development and shared maintenance can contribute to sustainable statistical modernization.
- Explore how technical cooperation can better integrate statistical methodology, digital solutions and institutional capacity development.

Expected outcomes

- Exchange of experiences between African institutions engaged in digital statistical modernization.
- Increased awareness of co-development as a model for building sustainable statistical infrastructure.
- Identification of common institutional, technical and governance challenges affecting long-term operation of digital statistical systems.
- Recommendations for future technical cooperation, in response to requests from African institutions, that combines methodological expertise, shared digital solutions and long-term partnerships to strengthen trade statistics in Africa.