

Background on Arab Statistical Initiative « ARABSTAT »

Aware of the growing importance for economic, financial, and sectorial state of art statistics, with considerable precision, reliability and coherence to help economic decision makers design suitable policies, the Ministry of Finance of the kingdom of Morocco, in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund and with the encouragement of governors of the Arab Monetary Fund has organized a regional conference for Senior Officials in Rabat on 15 May 2012 entitled : ‘ Economic and Financial Statistics for evidence- based policy- making ’. Representatives of statistical offices of many Arab countries and a number of officials and related regional institution, including the Arab Monetary Fund participated in this conference.

The conference discussed the challenges facing the enhancement of economic and financial statistics in Arab countries and means to launch a framework for regional cooperation, similar to other regional groups, to enhance statistics.

The people assembled confirmed the importance of establishing a board, an initiative or a statistical framework entitled (ARABSTAT) for the purpose of furthering efforts of systems and statistical capacities enhancement and reinforcing statistical cooperation among Arab countries. In this regard, the assembled people also underlined the importance of a technical cooperation between the International Monetary Fund and Arab Monetary Fund and called for a later conference of senior officials to reach an agreement on details and aspects of this initiative.

In this context, enhancing statistical systems and capacities in Arab countries received special attention during the Ministerial Meeting of the Arab Group with the General Director and senior officials of the Fund, which was held on the side-lines of the international Monetary Fund and international bank annual conferences in October 2012 in Tokyo.

during the conference, their Excellencies the Arab Minister of Finance stressed the importance of developing financial and economic statistics in Arab countries, however, they underscored the irrelevance of establishing an independent institution, calling for the realization of the initiative’s objectives under the Arab Monetary Fund and with the cooperation and technical support of the International Monetary Fund. There was an agreement, In line with Rabat’s conference, on the importance of holding a technical meeting to agree on aspects and details of this initiative, followed by a submission of a report to the council of the Arab Ministers of finance.

Accordingly, the Arab Monetary Fund organized, on 14 and 15 January 2013, in Abu Dhabi, a high-level technical meeting to discuss the launching of ARABSTAT in cooperation with the international Monetary Fund. Senior officials of the statistical institutions, Ministries of Finance administrations, Central Banks and central statistical institutes of 15 Arab countries participated in this meeting. Based on the discussion paper prepared by the Arab Monetary Fund, The meeting discussed the steps, mechanisms and procedures related to the initiative, in order to enhance coordination among the statistical institutions and provide support to further

develop the Arab statistical systems and capacities, increase chances of experience exchange among Arab countries, and enhance the provision of different statistics in these countries.

The persons assembled underlined the importance of enhancing the statistical systems and capacities in Arab countries, and promoting data and statistical quality. In this context, the people assembled called for the launching of ARABSTAT under the auspices of Arab Monetary Fund, with the cooperation of the International Monetary Fund and international and regional institutions and bodies, to achieve the stated purposes.

There was an agreement on the objectives of the initiative, and the tools needed to achieve them, as well as on the reference conditions of the technical committee of ARABSTAT. This committee is composed of heads of statistical bodies and offices in the Arab countries and their delegates, and representatives of Arab ministries of Finance and Central Banks who will follow the activities of ARABSTAT with the Arab monetary fund acting as its technical secretary.

The initiative was presented to the council of Arab ministers of finance in its fourth normal session held in Dubai on 2 April 2013. After the discussion, the council confirmed its support to the initiative and called the international financial institutions, and particularly the international monetary fund, to contribute in providing the technical support and guidance required for the success of the initiative.

By virtue of the approval of council of ministers of finance, in its capacity as a technical secretariat of the initiative, the Arab Monetary Fund called for the first meeting of the initiative's technical committee. This meeting was organized in Abu Dhabi on 11 September 2013, with the participation of the delegations of 14 Arab country including General Directors of the Arab statistical institutions as well as observers from international and regional institutions. The people assembled approved the initiative's rules of procedure and programme of action of 2013-2014 which will be implemented by the monetary fund.

On the meeting's eve, The Arab and the International Monetary funds agreed on ways of cooperating in implementing the initiative. The international monetary fund expressed its willingness to contribute in the statistical training efforts and invited the Arab monetary fund to participate in its technical advisory missions to the Arab countries.

In this regard, the Arab monetary fund contacted relevant regional and international stakeholders in order to explore ways to cooperate with them concerning the implementation of the Arab statistical initiative ARABSTAT. Various stakeholders expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Arab monetary fund in that area.