

Balancing the Needs of Future SNA Revisions with the Resources of National Statistical Offices

Robert P. Parker (Consultant)

Paper Abstract:

This conference will focus on the “main challenges in compiling national accounts, now and in the future.” Past SNA revisions have generally resulted in changes needed to improve the relevance of the accounts. However, the processes used to select changes do not directly incorporate information on the ability of national statistical offices to implement a change. The latest available information on SNA revision implementation compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division indicates that ongoing efforts by international organizations have been only partially successful in achieving full compliance by all countries. In addition, this information does not cover either the reliability of the resulting estimates or the timeliness of the source data and methods to be used to implement the changes. Studies into the problems of implementation indicate that the reasons include inadequate funding, inadequate technical resources, and lack of user interest in some of the changes. With regard to the funding problem, recent experiences with socio-economic household surveys in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and United States indicate that there are funding problems for all types of key statistical programs. This paper will examine the idea that the SNA revision process should be expanded to include a “cost-benefit” analysis similar to the formal cost-benefit analysis now used in the United States for evaluating new government regulations. The paper will examine three of the key changes incorporated into the most recent SNA data and consider whether the revised accounts may have reduced international comparability.