



Malawi Government

Code of Practice for Official Statistics in the Malawi National Statistical System

Professional Standards and Ethics for Official Statistics

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PREFACE



The Code of Practice for Official Statistics has been developed in line with the National Statistics Act, 2013 which mandates the office of the Commissioner of Statistics to issue a Statistical Code of Practice that sets out professional and ethical standards to be followed by all agencies producing official statistics. It is also in compliance with the 2019/20-2022/23 National Statistical System Strategic Plan (NSS SP)

which calls for the development of a Statistical Code of Practice as a paramount means of ensuring trust, confidence, accountability and highest professional standards in statistical development.

The Code supports the Mission and Vision of the National Statistical System (NSS) in Malawi which state as follows: “To promote production, access and use of statistical data and information for evidence-based decision making, policy formulation, education and research, monitoring and evaluation of development programs in order to spur national development through coordinated, harmonized and comprehensive quality official statistics” and “A coordinated National Statistical System providing quality official statistics”, respectively.

This Code aims at providing the framework for ensuring that statistical data and information are trustworthy, of good quality and valuable, and that they measure the right phenomena. Those producing statistical data and information need to demonstrate their integrity and professionalism. Above all, the confidentiality of individuals and of business information must be protected. Statistical data and information must be based on the right sources of statistical data with transparent judgements about definitions and methods, and judgements about the strengths and limitations of the statistical data and information.

The Code is not targeting official statistics only. It provides a framework that is applicable to a wider range of statistical data and information that have not traditionally been described as official statistics. Providers of these other types of statistical data and information are implored to draw from the Code to help build public confidence.

With the purpose of improving the quality of the processes and the production of official statistics generated by NSS member institutions, I present to statistical data producers and users the Code of Practice for Official Statistics for the entire NSS in Malawi. The Code is subject to future revisions reflecting the changing data ecosystem.

Statistical data and information serve the public good if producers follow the principles and practices set out in this Code.

Lizzie Alexandria Chikoti (Mrs.)
COMMISSIONER OF STATISTICS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AfCS	African Charter on Statistics
DPs	Development Partners
MSQAF	Malawi Statistical Quality Assurance Framework
NSO	National Statistical Office
NSS	National Statistical System
NSS SP	National Statistical System Strategic Plan
UNFPOS	United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
UNSC	United Nations Statistical Commission

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1.0 BACKGROUND

The 2019/20-2022/23 National Statistical System Strategic Plan (NSS SP) calls for the development of a Code of Practice for Official Statistics which sets out the guidelines and standards in conducting the development, production, dissemination and communication of statistical products. It contains the fundamental norms that ensure trust and confidence in the statistical products of the National Statistical System (NSS) member institutions. It also improves the levels of user satisfaction, transparency and accessibility.

The Code guides NSS member institutions, including NSO as the coordinating agency of the NSS, in the development, production, dissemination and communication of statistical data and information as follows: provides a set of guidelines on good practices; helps to develop a better understanding of the training, supervision and support required; improves confidence of the users of statistical data and information through the information contained on the conduct and practices; and raises awareness among data users on the scope and limitations.

The Code provides producers of official statistics with the detailed practices they must commit to when producing and releasing official statistics.

This Code plays a paramount role of ensuring that statistical data and information published by government command public confidence through demonstrating trustworthiness and providing high-quality statistical data and information that enhance public value.

2.0 TARGET AUDIENCE AND APPLICATION OF THE CODE

- The Code is to be used by all those in government who produce and use statistical data and information, including statisticians, data scientists, analysts, researchers and policy-makers, among several stakeholder groups. All who are involved in the production and release of official statistics are to use the Code to understand why and how to achieve trustworthiness, quality and value.
- The Code provides all producers of statistical data and information with a framework that can be applied in a proportionate and flexible way to improve public confidence.

3.0 PILLARS, PRINCIPLES AND INDICATORS OF GOOD PRACTICE OF THE CODE

This Code is in accordance with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UNFPOS) adopted by United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) in 1994 and the African Charter on Statistics (AfCS) adopted by the 12th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in February 2009. It is

based on 19 Principles incorporated in three major pillars on: Institutional Environment, Statistical Processes and Statistical Outputs. Under each Principle, there is a set of indicators of good practice which provides a reference for reviewing the implementation of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics for Malawi's NSS.

A. INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Institutional environment refers to the organizations and units that have an impact on the collection, production, dissemination and communication of official statistics and their quality. There following are principles and indicators of good practice under this pillar.

Principle 1: Professional and Scientific Independence

The independence of the National Statistical Office from political and other external interference in collecting, producing, disseminating and communicating statistical data and information is specified in the National Statistics Act, 2013. NSS member institutions shall strive to conduct statistical activities professionally to the highest ethical and technical standards, making decisions according to professional considerations. This shall ensure credibility of official statistics.

Indicators of good practice

1.1 The National Statistics Act, 2013 shall guarantee the independence of NSO, as the coordinating agency of the NSS, from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics.

1.2 The Commissioner of Statistics shall ensure that there is independence on statistical methods, procedures, accuracy, relevance, integrity, timeliness and professional standards of statistical information produced as stipulated in the National Statistics Act, 2013.

1.3 Consultation, collaboration and joint-working shall be encouraged among NSS member institutions especially where an entity has limited skills, expertise and experience in dealing with new assignments and tasks.

1.4 NSS member institutions shall be expected to respect and acknowledge the contributions and intellectual property of others.

1.5 Producers and their staff shall follow this Code and staff sign and adhere to the Oath of Office and Secrecy as enshrined in the National Statistics Act, 2013.

1.6 No action shall be taken by NSS member institutions, nor public statement made, that might undermine confidence in the independence of the statistical data and information when released.

1.7 Statistical releases shall be clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements. In this regard, NSO should set a team to review any statistical document before official release to ensure that it is free of any policy or political statement, comment or recommendation. This also applies to statistics units in all other NSS member institutions.

1.8 NSS member institutions shall avoid compromising scientific validity for expediency.

1.9 NSS member institutions shall help strengthen the work of others through appropriate peer review; in peer review, they respect differences of opinion and assess methods, not individuals.

1.10 NSS member institutions shall recognize that differences of opinion and honest errors do not constitute misconduct; they warrant discussion, but not accusation.

1.11 It is contrary to statistical ethical practice for NSS member institutions to report or follow only those results that conform to expectations without explicitly acknowledging competing findings and the basis for choices regarding which results to report, use, and/or cite.

1.12 NSS member institutions shall exhibit respect for others and, thus, neither engage in nor condone discrimination based on personal characteristics; bullying; unwelcome physical, including sexual, contact; or other forms of harassment or intimidation, and takes appropriate action when aware of such unethical practices by others.

Principle 2: Technical Skills and Capacity

NSO shall ensure that all officers responsible for production of official statistics shall have wide knowledge of study design, data collection, analysis, dissemination and communication of statistical data and information. Statistical agencies and statistical units should have adequate numbers of skilled personnel.

Indicators of good practice

2.1 NSO shall ensure that all vacant posts in the Statistical Common Service are adequately filled by skilled personnel.

2.2 NSO shall work within its mandate to conduct assessments of capacity and training needs in the Statistical Common Service to ensure effective delivery of statistical products, services and satisfaction of user data needs.

2.3 NSO shall ensure that personnel responsible for producing statistical data and information in NSS member institutions are appropriately skilled, trained and supported in their roles and professional development.

2.4 NSO shall promote transfer of technical knowledge to all NSS member institutions.

Principle 3: Quality Commitment

NSS member institutions shall commit themselves to work and cooperate according to the Malawi Statistical Quality Assurance Framework (MSQAF) for the NSS.

Indicators of good practice

3.1 NSO through the NSS Coordination Unit shall regularly monitor product quality in all NSS member institutions through the MSQAF.

3.2 Quality guidelines are documented by all NSS member institutions and staff are well trained. These guidelines are spelt out in writing and made known to the public.

3.3 There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs from all NSS member institutions using external experts where appropriate.

Principle 4: Impartiality and Objectivity

NSS member institutions must produce and disseminate official statistics respecting scientific independence in an objective, professional, competent, respectful, ethical and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.

Indicators of good practice

4.1 NSS member institutions shall compile statistical data and information on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.

4.2 Choices of sources and statistical techniques by NSS member institutions shall be informed by statistical considerations with support from NSO.

4.3 Errors discovered by NSS member institutions in published statistical data and information are corrected at the earliest possible date and publicised.

4.4 Information on the methods and procedures used by NSS member institutions shall be publicly available.

4.5 NSS statistical release dates and times are pre-announced.

4.6 NSS member institutions shall give advance notice on major revisions or changes in methodologies.

4.7 All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time and any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and publicized. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements should be adjusted to release statistics immediately without waiting for pre-announced dates so as to ensure impartiality.

Principle 5: Cooperation and Mobilization of Data Providers

Statistical authorities continuously maintain and develop cooperation at various levels with each other and with the advisory bodies of NSS member institutions, as well as organizations, academic institutions and other international bodies.

Indicators of good practice

5.1 Response rate for surveys should be at least 70%.

5.2 Collection of secondary data sources (administrative) should be at least 90%.

5.3 NSS member institutions shall strengthen inter-institutional communication.

5.4 NSS member institutions shall cooperate in the statistical field in order to improve the system's performance.

5.5 NSS member institutions shall prioritise, in a coordinated manner, the generation of statistical information required for decision-making.

5.6 NSS member institutions shall promote the exchange and implementation of good statistical practices.

Principle 6: Legal Environment

In respect of the core mandate of NSO, the legal framework needs to be strengthened to support and enable research activities of the other NSS member institutions. The activities include research designing, data collection, analysis, dissemination and communication of statistical data and information. Administrations, enterprises and households, and the public at large shall be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for official statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.

Indicators of good practice

6.1 The mandate for NSS member institutions to collect information for the production and dissemination of official statistics is specified in the law.

6.2 NSO and all other NSS member institutions are allowed by national legislation to use administrative records for statistical purposes.

6.3 On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority shall compel response to statistical surveys.

6.4 Violators of the National Statistics Act, 2013 and other legally binding documents on production, analysis, dissemination and communication of official statistics shall be held accountable in accordance with the law.

6.5 Research studies are approved by NSO in accordance with the law.

Principle 7: Statistical Confidentiality and Data Protection

NSS member institutions shall not disclose any individual information gathered from households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents for statistical purposes to any third party in accordance with the National Statistics Act, 2013 and international statistical standards and guidelines. The confidentiality of such information and its use only for statistical purposes must be absolutely guaranteed in the law.

Indicators of good practice

7.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in the law.

7.2 Penalties shall be given for any willful breaches of statistical confidentiality in accordance with the law.

7.3 Statistical staff shall take an oath of office on appointment, taking note of penalties for non-compliance.

7.4 NSS member institutions protect and respect the rights and interests of human and animal subjects at all stages of their involvement in statistical undertakings.

7.5 NSS member institutions shall apply strict protocols to external users who are accessing statistical micro data for research purposes.

7.6 NSS member institutions shall recognize that any statistical descriptions of groups may carry risks of stereotypes and stigmatization. Statisticians should contemplate, and be sensitive to, the manner in which information is framed to avoid disproportionate harm to vulnerable groups.

Principle 8: Collaboration and Partnership

NSS member institutions shall collaborate and partner with other statistical producers, users and Development Partners (DPs) to achieve consistency and efficiency in the production, dissemination and communication of quality statistical data and information.

Indicators of good practice

8.1 The Commissioner of Statistics, as the coordinator of the NSS, shall encourage collaboration, harmonization and innovation of other organizations in order to achieve common goals and produce coherent statistical data and information.

8.2 NSS member institutions shall enhance dissemination, communication and accessibility of official statistics.

Principle 9: Resource Availability and Efficient Use

NSS member institutions shall collaborate with government and partners to ensure that staff, physical infrastructure, information and communications technology, administrative and logistical capability, statistical infrastructure and finance are adequate to maintain the statistical programmes on a sustainable basis.

Indicators of good practice

9.1 NSS member institutions shall ensure that the cost of producing new or addition statistical data and information is realistic and justifiable.

Principle 10: Transparency and Accountability

NSS member institutions shall fulfill the obligation to account for own activities and to disclose results in a transparent manner. NSS member institutions shall provide information on the sources, methods and procedures that have been used in line with scientific standards to facilitate correct interpretations of data.

Indicators of good practice

10.1 NSS member institutions shall ensure that documentation of processes and procedures is mandatory to allow replication and evaluation of programs.

10.2 NSS member institutions shall use independent measures such as internal and external audit, peer review and National Statistics Quality Reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of statistical processes. Statistics producers should be open about identified areas for improvement.

B. STATISTICAL PROCESSES

NSS member institutions shall constantly observe international standards, guidelines and good practices in the processes used to organize, collect, process, disseminate and communicate official statistics. The credibility of the statistical data and information is enhanced by a reputation for good management and efficiency. There following are principles and indicators of good practice under this pillar.

Principle 11: Sound Methodology

Sound methodology ensures quality statistical data and information. This requires adequate tools, procedures and expertise.

Indicators of good practice

11.1 The overall methodological framework used for NSS statistical data and information follows international standards, guidelines, and good practices, while constantly striving for innovation.

11.2 NSO shall ensure that procedures are in place for consistent application of standard concepts, definitions and classifications throughout the NSS.

11.3 The Commissioner of Statistics shall challenge the inappropriate use of statistical data and information and reflect upon how further misuse can be prevented.

11.4 The business register and the frame for population surveys are regularly evaluated and adjusted, if necessary, in order to ensure high quality.

11.5 NSS member institutions shall ensure that staff attend international relevant training courses and conferences, and liaise with statistician colleagues at international level in order to learn from the best and to improve their expertise.

11.6 Studies and analyses of revisions are carried out by NSS member institutions and updated for dissemination to improve the statistical processes.

11.7 NSS member institutions shall strive to use updated computer systems in the process of capturing and processing information.

Principle 12: Appropriate Statistical Procedures

Appropriate statistical procedures, implemented from study design to implementation, support production of quality statistical data and information.

Indicators of good practice

12.1 For statistical surveys, NSS member institutions shall ensure that questionnaires are systematically tested prior to data collection.

12.2 NSS member institutions shall ensure that statistical processes are routinely monitored and revised as required.

12.3 NSS member institutions shall strive to ensure that survey designs, sample selections and sample weights are well based and regularly reviewed, revised or updated as required.

12.4 NSS member institutions shall ensure that appropriate editing and imputation of computer systems are used and regularly reviewed, revised or updated as required.

12.5 NSS member institutions shall be involved in the design of administrative data in order to make it more suitable for statistical purposes.

12.6 NSS member institutions shall manage metadata related to statistical processes and disseminate as appropriate.

12.7 NSS member institutions shall ensure that, where official statistics are based on administrative data, the definitions and concepts used for the administrative purpose must be a good approximation to those required for statistical purposes.

12.8 NSS member institutions shall make agreements with holders of administrative and other data which set out their shared commitment to use of these data for statistical purposes.

12.9 NSO shall standardize the study implementation and reporting procedures as well as formats for all statistical reports produced.

Principle 13: Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents

Response burden is the effort required to answer a questionnaire; this should be proportionate to the needs of the users and should not be excessive for respondents. NSS member institutions should monitor the response burden and set targets for its reduction over time.

Indicators of good practice

13.1 NSS member institutions shall use administrative and other data sources whenever possible to avoid duplicating requests for data.

13.2 NSS member institutions shall limit the range and detail of official statistics demands to what is absolutely necessary.

13.3 The information sought by NSS member institutions from businesses is, as far as possible, readily available from their accounts and electronic means are used where possible to facilitate its return.

13.4 Best estimates and approximations are accepted by NSS member institutions when exact details are not readily available.

13.5 Data sharing and data integration, while adhering to confidentiality and data protection requirements, are promoted by NSS member institutions to minimize response burden.

13.6 NSS member institutions promote measures that enable the linking of data sources in order to minimise response burden.

13.7 NSS member institutions shall streamline questionnaires (for different studies) to minimise redundancy in areas of data collection.

13.8 NSS member institutions shall analyze and monitor time that is taken to complete an interview and find solutions to reduce time the respondents sit for interviews.

13.9 Existing data sources are examined by NSS member institutions to assess if additional tabulation or statistical techniques can be applied to approximate the data required before undertaking new surveys.

13.10 The suitability of existing data, including administrative, open and privately-held data, should be assessed by NSS member institutions before undertaking a new data collection.

13.11 NSS member institutions shall seek voluntary participation in statistical data collection, rather than using statutory powers, wherever possible.

Principle 14: Cost Effectiveness

The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet official statistics requirements. However, the resources must also be used effectively for generation of the official statistics.

Indicators of good practice

14.1 Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to NSS member institutions to meet current official statistics needs.

14.2 Internal and independent external measures monitor the use of resources by NSS member institutions.

14.3 NSS member institutions shall ensure that the scope, detail and cost of official statistics are commensurate with needs.

14.4 NSS member institutions shall optimize the productivity potential of information and communication technology (using automated initiatives) for the statistical processes.

14.5 Procedures exist in NSS member institutions to assess and justify demands for new official statistics against their cost.

14.6 NSS member institutions shall make proactive efforts to improve the statistical potential of administrative and other data sources and to limit recourse to direct surveys.

14.7 NSS member institutions shall ensure transparency and accountability for the use of resources with a clear feedback mechanism on resource use.

C. STATISTICAL OUTPUTS

NSS member institutions are committed to produce statistical outputs which respond to users' needs. Further, the statistical outputs are accurate and reliable, timely, coherent and comparable with other data sources, and are accessible and easily understood. These are principles ensuring that the statistical outputs are of good quality. The following are principles and indicators of good practice under this pillar.

Principle 15: Responsiveness to User Needs

Statistical outputs must be relevant to the users. Hence, NSS member institutions shall continuously engage with users in a transparent and respectful manner to ensure that their statistical needs are met as much as possible.

Indicators of good practice

15.1 NSS member institutions shall promote the use of statistical data and information through awareness and capacity development among users.

15.2 NSS member institutions shall ensure that processes are in place in NSS member institutions to consult users, monitor the relevance and practical utility of existing statistical data and information in meeting their needs, and advise on their emerging needs and priorities.

15.3 NSS member institutions shall ensure that priority needs of statistical output users are being met and reflected in their respective work programs.

15.4 NSS member institutions shall regularly conduct user satisfaction surveys to monitor user needs with regard to timeliness, accessibility, clarity and accuracy of the statistical data and information.

15.5 NSS member institutions shall promote data disaggregation during collection, processing, analysis, dissemination and communication of statistical data and information.

Principle 16: Accuracy and Reliability

NSS member institutions shall ensure that statistical outputs are correct in all details and reliable to users. They must portray the reality on the ground.

Indicators of good practice

16.1 NSS member institutions shall assess and validate source data, intermediate results and statistical outputs.

16.2 Wherever appropriate, NSS member institutions shall strive to use randomly selected representative samples when conducting surveys.

16.3 Sampling and non-sampling errors shall be measured and systematically documented by NSS member institutions.

16.4 NSS member institutions shall systematically document all the survey methodologies followed, including limitations.

16.5 NSS member institutions shall pretest survey instruments and thoroughly train all field personnel to maintain fidelity of primary data.

16.6 NSS member institutions shall regularly assess, correct and validate secondary data.

Principle 17: Timeliness and Punctuality

Official statistics must be disseminated by NSS member institutions in a timely and punctual manner.

Indicators of good practice

17.1 NSS member institutions shall stick to their dissemination time schedules as they fit well with highest official and international dissemination standards. The elapsed time between the reference period and the availability of statistical data and information must ensure the timeliness of information according to user needs.

17.2 NSS member institutions shall ensure that survey results are released within the specified timeframe.

17.3 NSS member institutions shall ensure that the periodicity of producing statistical data and information tallies with user requirements as much as possible and is sequenced in accordance with NSS official statistics release calendar.

17.4 NSS member institutions shall publicize in advance and explain any divergence from the dissemination time schedule, and set a new release date.

Principle 18: Coherence and Comparability

Statistical outputs from the same source or different sources and periodicity must be logical and consistent. One should be able to compare and reconcile them.

Indicators of good practice

18.1 NSS member institutions shall ensure that statistical data and information are internally coherent and consistent.

18.2 NSS member institutions shall ensure that statistical data and information from the same source are comparable over a reasonable period of time.

18.3 NSS member institutions shall ensure that statistical data and information from different surveys, sources and of different periodicity are comparable and reconcilable over a reasonable period of time.

18.4 NSS member institutions shall ensure that statistical data and information are compiled and produced according to the NSS Compendium of Statistical Concepts and Definitions.

Principle 19: Accessibility and Clarity

Official statistics should be presented in a clear, meaningful and understandable manner so that meaningful insights are obtained. They should be equally available and accessible to all users on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

Indicators of good practice

19.1 NSS member institutions shall present and archive statistical data and information, and corresponding metadata in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.

19.2 NSS member institutions shall disseminate statistical data and information, and metadata using modern information and communication technologies, and where appropriate, traditional hard copies.

19.3 Access to microdata is allowed for research purposes in line with provisions in the National Statistics Act, 2013.

19.4 NSS member institutions shall release accurate and reliable preliminary results when considered useful.

19.5 Advice shall be given by NSS member institutions about the appropriate use of statistical data and information. The lead statistician or analyst shall be visible to statistical output users and reachable to offer technical guidance and support to enhance the rightful utilization of statistical outputs.

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