

Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on the Production
of Statistics in Caribbean Countries
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**REPORT OF AD-HOC EXPERT GROUP MEETING
ON THE PRODUCTION OF STATISTICS IN CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES**

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REPORT OF AD-HOC EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE PRODUCTION OF STATISTICS IN CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

Introduction

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, in collaboration with the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, convened an ad-hoc meeting of experts in statistics to explore ways of achieving improvements in statistics in Caribbean countries.

The meeting was held on 16 and 17 October 2003 at the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and brought together statisticians and persons working in related fields in their personal capacity as experts. Also attending the meeting were staff from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago and staff from the ECLAC Port of Spain and Santiago Offices. A full list of participants is annexed to this report.

Dr. Shelton Nicholls, Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, and Mr. Esteban Perez of ECLAC addressed the meeting in the opening ceremony. Both speakers observed the programme of presentations to be made and expressed satisfaction at the convening of the meeting. The meeting was conducted under the Chairmanship of Mr. Lancelot Busby of ECLAC and followed an agenda that is detailed below:

1. Criteria for the efficient coordination of the activities of data collection and the design of instruments for mapping and data collection applicable to the countries of the subregion
2. An inventory of statistics in the Region – Implications for statistical harmonization
3. The scope and quality of official statistics in Saint Lucia – The view of the Statistical Office
4. Census data as an essential input into official decision-making – The Aruba experience
5. Efforts at coordinating statistics at the national level – the case of social statistics and recommendations
6. Data Dissemination Standards

7. Compliance with the GDDS – The Barbados experience
8. Vision 2020 of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago
9. Responding to the demands of Vision 2020
10. Issues of data security in a national statistical system
11. Energising the statistical offices of the subregion – Issues of management, quality and training – The Jamaica case
12. Putting the Central Statistical Office and statistical services back on track
13. Investment in Statistics as a priority in the region: The proposed mandate and its status
14. Data limitations in modelling the Caribbean economies
15. General discussion and re-visit to the main issues discussed in the meeting
16. Where do we go from here
17. Closing Session.

Agenda item 1
Criteria for the efficient coordination of the activities of data collection
and the design of instruments for mapping and data collection
applicable to the countries of the subregion

Mr. Lancelot Busby of ECLAC introduced the topic as one that set the tone for the discussions that were to follow and highlighted the areas of:

- Data collection
- Coordination
- Design of instruments for mapping and data collection
- Harmonization of data activities
- Ownership of data produced through an inter-organizational team effort
- Networking and related issues
- Transparency of the statistical process
- Representativeness of the sample
- Coordination of statistical activities in the public sector
- Coordination of donor activity

He identified the background to the meeting as the frequent complaint in international forums that data for the Caribbean were not available or forthcoming. He mentioned several

ECLAC documents that addressed the problem and suggested a solution to the data unavailability.

Mr. Busby cited networking among data-producing agencies as being both desirable and necessary to the production of integrated datasets that could be linked to produce more data than each of the sets could if left in a standalone mode. He urged the meeting to discuss the issues listed and looked forward to a rich discussion over the two-day period of the meeting.

He concluded that the government that failed to pay attention to its data collection regime would fail to provide the datasets that it required to understand its own situation. Without indicators there could be no assessment of direction or extent of movement.

Agenda item 2
An inventory of statistics in the region –
Implications for statistical harmonization

Mr. Sylvan Roberts of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat observed the need to harmonize statistics in the subregion. To that end he encouraged member States of the CARICOM to document and submit their methodologies to the CARICOM website and to determine a core set of statistics to be produced. Focus was placed on social statistics and one of the major thrusts had been to develop social indicators and the Millennium Development Goals Indicators. Countries were committed to supplying indicators to CARICOM by the end of November 2003. He drew attention to duplication of effort and the lack of quality of data produced and cited lack of coordination at both national and international levels as the cause for the duplication of effort in the collection and compilation of social statistics. The thrust was to involve the major researchers and other users in the production of viable social statistics. CARICOM had, in consultation with its member States, developed a set of core indicators. The inventory yielded returns from 13 of the 15 member States, which indicated the statistics produced in each country and the reasons for the non-production of others. The CARICOM Secretariat had brought together eight member States to examine the extent of harmonization among its membership. It found that countries used different methodologies for literacy rates, for example.

Discussion on papers presented

In the discussion that followed, participants wondered how the countries benchmarked their indicators against global indicators. Participants requested and were given a list of the core indicators used by the CARICOM Secretariat. A number of participants stated that there was a need for monthly as opposed to quarterly indicators to guide policy. On the question of land and property, the meeting was informed that there existed gaps in data and that there was need for a national policy on data sharing in that regard. There was a call for greater collaboration between the statistics producers and the major users. One participant cited insufficient funding from the central government as contributing to the apparent national culture of data withholding. There was agreement that other government institutions wanted data but did not wish to pay.

Participants agreed on the need for a competent body to coordinate Information Technology (IT) and stressed the need to establish a national statistics coordinating system. This idea was generally supported. Some participants advocated the introduction of enabling legislation to assist the process. The meeting was informed that such an exercise was about to commence in one Caribbean country.

On the question of data sharing, one participant advocated the anonymizing of micro-level data so as to afford researchers the ability to work with fresh data while preserving confidentiality.

Several participants noted the remarks made in the opening presentation on the subject of sampling and suggested that the statistical office could draw samples for organizations wishing to conduct sample surveys as a bureau consultancy.

In the discussion, participants expressed the need to change the culture of the statistician community into one that was more open to disclosure within limits. The idea was expressed that statisticians needed to operate horizontally with other officials for the furtherance of their work. That did not seem to be an act against the Ordinance within which they operated. The new culture should see the statistician oriented toward providing a solution to a user's data needs.

Agenda item 3

The scope and quality of official statistics in Saint Lucia – The view of the Statistical Office

Mr. Edwin St. Catherine of Saint Lucia shared his experiences with improved data collection techniques as input into the securing of better quality data. He informed the meeting of the close collaboration that existed between the Statistical Office and the National Insurance Scheme. In order to build confidence in statistics among the public as well as the politicians, he proposed a series of consumer confidence surveys. He drew attention to the Continuous Sample Survey of Population (CSSP) as conducted by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) of Trinidad and Tobago as useful in that it combined labour force data with household data to produce useful indicators. Of particular relevance to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) was the need to collect statistics on the environment. This type of data representation lent itself easily to Geographical Information System (GIS) representation. GIS permitted the progression of geographical spatial systems from the enumeration districts or the electoral districts, down to the level of the building. Data collection should, however, be pre-designed to yield those disaggregations.

Saint Lucia was working on trade index numbers in a joint project with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as these had been lacking for some time. Variability in the items within any given tariff number did not inspire confidence in the average unit values derived from direct computing from the trade statistics. The strategy being examined was to conduct a targeted survey among dealers of a relatively few key items of import and export and use the responses to compute the index numbers. That approach would make for a result that was more accurate.

Mr. St. Catherine advocated the use of electronic forms as a way in which data could be supplied with less delay and pain to the respondent than before. This would propel the statistician into a new field of expertise and operation in keeping with the technology available.

Agenda item 4
Census data as an essential input into official decision-making –
The Aruba experience

Mr. Rendolf Lee of Aruba made a presentation that embodied the points of the essential nature of census data for planning and the issue of data collection in a micro State. Observing that a micro State shared the same problems of data collection and confidentiality as the larger countries, he drew attention to the need for timeliness in the release of data and proposed a prioritization of needs and strong planning as critical success factors to the exercise. He shared his country's experience with the use of GIS and existing mapping materials and its combination with human resources. In Aruba's attempt to streamline data collection, the Statistical Office used census as well as administrative data. Optical Mark Reading (OMR) and Optical Character Reading (OCR) were used. Imaging had been used with great success in the more recent past. This aspect of technology, however, required a high skill level on the part of the persons employing it. He emphasized the need to adopt a project approach to the execution of the census or survey to achieve the objectives of timeliness and quality of data.

Agenda item 5
Efforts at coordinating statistics at the national level –
The case of social statistics and recommendations

Mr. Sylvan Roberts expressed the need for the key agencies in the Caribbean involved in the production of social statistics to collaborate on a more frequent basis and at a broader level. The objective of the paper was to strengthen the capacity of CARICOM member States to collect, compile, analyze, publish and disseminate social statistics, including national indicators and their narratives and analysis. The main aim of the CARICOM programme was to produce indicators on a regular basis and to harmonize the indicators as far as possible. Among the challenges that presented themselves to the programme were quality of data, periodicity of reporting, missing data and mobilizing resources in member States. The need for technical assistance and training was observed.

Mr. Roberts concluded that a high level of response from member States was necessary and seemed to be forthcoming. To date, Haiti was the only country not yet on-stream in the provision of data for the project. He called for the removal of turf barriers and the recognition of all players as contributing to a common goal.

In the discussion that followed, the meeting endorsed the need to network. Indeed, that had become a concern of the United Nations system in its approach to funding new projects. Participants noted that there still existed the need for some donor agencies to coordinate their

funding more closely and avoid costly overlap. That overlap tended to put extra pressure on the finite resources of the statistical offices to respond to requests for data and to project activities.

ECLAC stated its preparedness to cooperate, and not compete with other agencies, in delivering assistance to the countries of the subregion.

Participants also noted that the haste on the part of some international agencies to publish sensitive indicators often led to confusion and public statements on the part of government officials of disassociation with and rejection of the figures presented. In that regard, the country reported on and the agency making the controversial disclosures would have to agree on what types of disclosures should be made. A revisit to the several national statistics acts should assist in clarifying the boundaries of assistance and disclosure.

One participant observed the need for institutions to focus on their core responsibilities and not be drawn into side issues. That would avoid the drift into areas of relatively little competence.

A number of participants observed that the present culture among many statistical offices was one of protecting its data sets from use. That tended to work to the detriment of the society. Those participants advocated the change to a user-culture on the part of the statisticians who produced the data. The data should not be viewed as an end in themselves but rather as input into national debate and the creation of knowledge.

Agenda item 6 Data dissemination standards

Mr. Dominic Stoddard of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago presented his paper in the context of the Central Bank environment and its mandate to publish statistical data. His paper recalled the Bank's commentary on data dissemination in the CARICOM subregion and its conclusion that in the case of the CARICOM countries, size of country was a determinant of quantity and quality of data produced. The paper examined several efforts at evaluating dissemination performance, among them being a peer review of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office by Fellegi and Ryten of Statistics Canada. Other contributions were made by the European Commission for Europe and De Vries. The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago saw its role as providing data as an input into economic management as well as a service to the public. It segmented its clients into the following groups:

- Executive management
- Policy makers (government and private sector)
- The banking sector
- International agencies
- Academic community
- The media
- General public

It divided its structure for information dissemination into the following four broad areas: publications, policy advice, outreach activities and field queries and identified timeliness, relevance and cost effectiveness as gaps in the existing dissemination system as seen from a management point of view.

He concluded that the Central Bank continued its modest programme of user needs assessments within existing resource constraints, to guide its information dissemination. It continued to be the force behind the mobilization of effort to have the country subscribe to the demanding international standards of data dissemination.

Mr. Stoddard recalled the origins of the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) as stemming from the financial crises of Mexico (1994) and Asia (1998) and the exaggerated response of the public to those events. The IMF had concluded that greater transparency in statistical reporting was necessary to avoid similar surprises in the future. The idea of the GDDS and its more stringent partner, the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS), was born. All statistics produced should be fully explained by way of meta-data and be published with predictable times of delivery on the worldwide web.

Agenda item 7 Compliance with the GDDS – The Barbados Experience

The presenter, Mrs. Angela Hunte of Barbados, examined the requirements of the GDDS and sought to ascertain the degree to which Barbados had been able to meet those requirements. In doing so, she first looked at the general background and rationale for establishment of the System; how countries might participate; the principal features; and the potential benefits to national statistical agencies, users of statistics and providers of technical assistance.

The background relating to the involvement of Barbados in the GDDS was provided, as well as information on technical assistance given by the IMF to assist the country during the early phase of implementation. The organizational structure to facilitate the provision of information to the Fund was examined.

The nomenclature and structure of the GDDS and data dimensions for the four macroeconomic sectors (the real, fiscal, financial and external sectors) and requirements for the four socio-demographic statistical categories were examined, followed by a discussion on the Barbados experience. The GDDS dimensions of quality, integrity and access were also discussed.

The paper concluded that although the GDDS was a useful tool for the development of statistical systems, little or no emphasis had been placed on the development of social and environment statistics. There was, therefore, the need for complementary initiatives to assist countries in development and improvement of their overall statistical systems. In addition, priority should be given to the strengthening of statistical organizations so as to assist them to

achieve their goals and objectives for sustained improvement and development within an acceptable time frame.

Agenda item 8

Vision 2020 of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago

Mrs. Ayleen Alleyne-Ovid of the Ministry of Planning and Development of Trinidad and Tobago presented the Vision 2020 of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and outlined its planning process. She discussed the scope of work and the preparatory work as done by the Ministry of Planning and Development and shared with the meeting ideas on the way forward. The approach to planning was multisectoral, multi-dimensional, integrated, promoted sustainability, was participatory and was based on deeper and more active development partnerships throughout the society.

Mrs. Ovid traced the beginning of Vision 2020 to Cabinet decisions of June 2002 through January 2003. They dealt with:

- The development and implementation of a Strategic Plan of Action
- The appointment of a multisectoral group to implement the planning process
- Establishment of a reporting structure
- Establishment of an interactive consultative mechanism
- Procurement of experienced international consultants
- Establishment of a secretariat to the multisectoral group

Mr. Arthur Lok Jack headed the multisectoral group of which the permanent secretaries of planning and development, social development, finance, energy, trade and industry were members. In addition, members representing the Tobago House of Assembly, the banking sector, investment, finance, commerce, energy, labour, science and technology, local government, tourism, culture, credit union league, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) formed part of the committee.

In describing the work of the multisectoral group, Mrs. Ovid reported that workshops had addressed the following areas:

Macroeconomy and finance	HIV/Aids and its impact on future development
Population needs	Economic participation of all segments of the society
Public service reform	Information & communications technology
Mayaro model – development partnerships	Participatory dialogue

The role of the judiciary in a developed country	The local government system
Science and technology policy	Geographic information systems
The prospects for the energy sector	Human resource development / education
National security and public safety	

The strategy for plan formulation made use of local expertise, supplemented by international experts, where necessary. Some 28 sub-committees were formed to cover a range of areas of national importance. Within the strategy for plan formulation was provision for examining best practices. To this extent the experiences of Malaysia, Singapore, Ireland, Costa Rica, Chile, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Mexico, among others, have been signalled for study.

Emerging from the strategy and plan implementation a number of deliverables had been identified. Those included:

- A situation analysis,
- A vision for the sector
- Overall objectives to 2020
- Specific objectives with targets for the periods 2004 – 2006 and 2007 – 2009
- An action plan with performance milestones and resource requirements.

Success in the work towards the realization of Vision 2020 would be evaluated in the extent to which there was evidence of:

- Economic growth and diversification
- Improving the education and health systems
- Reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS
- Improving the standard of living (access to basic amenities)
- Improving infrastructure (roads, communication & information access)
- Increasing emphasis on science and technology
- Preserving the environment

The way forward would see the culmination of the efforts of the various sub-committees and other initiatives into a final report that addressed their strategic plans.

The presentation referred to data requirements that would prove to be key factors of success of the plan. They included data on population, services, poverty, socio-economic data on a timely basis and data disaggregated by region to facilitate regional planning.

Discussion on agenda items 6, 7 and 8

In the discussions that followed the presentations, participants felt that a dissemination standard imposed by an external organization might not represent government's best interests.

Participants agreed that the GDDS was only one standard and that there could well exist many other standards that the countries should contemplate and act on.

In answer to questions on the extent of compliance accepted by the IMF, the meeting was told that partial compliance was not rejected by the GDDS, but that it would need to be accompanied by a commitment to improve data quality and reporting by an agreed date. In answer to a question as to the framework that existed at the national level in Barbados for the collection and compilation of social indicators, Mrs. Hunte clarified that her country adhered to the guidelines as set up by CARICOM through the SCCS by way of a list of core indicators. Harmonization of those indicators throughout the CARICOM region had not yet been accomplished. Policy makers were being sensitized as to the importance of social statistics.

The meeting was informed that the scope of GDDS coverage had extended to social statistics and had encompassed within recent times the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Agenda item 9 **Responding to the demands of Vision 2020**

Messrs. Clifford Lewis and Harold Wall of the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago presented a response to the demands made on the Statistical Office by the various sub-committees of Vision 2020.

Mr. Lewis listed a number of statistical offices of excellence and observed that they were all located in developed countries. He surmised that development of the country did not pre-date the achievement of an excellent statistical office and vice versa. He concluded that the society and the statistical infrastructure developed together.

Looking at Vision 2020, the enunciated goal of the Trinidad and Tobago Government of achieving developed country status by 2020, Mr. Lewis saw three major challenges for the Central Statistical Office. They were:

- The creation of a culture of statistics
- The provision of historical data and
- The provision of current, relevant and timely statistics to propel the society towards 2020 and keep it there

The lack of a culture of statistics reflected the nature of the society that was characterized by non-disclosure and a reluctance to take responsibility for data or information released. That was reflected in low response rates from surveys and the time lag between the initiation of a survey and the publication of its results. Education was identified as the way to correct that societal problem.

Mr. Lewis provided a list of the long time series that the statistical office had been able to provide so as to facilitate some understanding of the evolution of the economy and society. He observed that Vision 2020 demanded a statistical organization that provided a range of quality

and timely socio-economic indicators. He cited the per capita Gross National Investment to be US\$8,500 in 2003. The level required for attainment of developed status was quoted as US\$ 20,000 per capita. The imperative would be for per capita Gross National Investment to increase by some 4% per annum for the next 17 years. He noted the danger to the society and economy of a shift away from manufacturing toward distribution in a situation of rising incomes and appreciating exchange rates. He noted the need for the production of statistics with intervals far less than annual and the production of statistics that could be used with agility to monitor on a more frequent basis the performance of the economy and society.

Mr. Lewis concluded by stating that the society should become aware of the fact that the provision of data was a civic responsibility that redounded to the welfare of all.

Mr. Wall observed that the growing need to organize data across different disciplines and organizations had given rise to the concept of Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI). Many countries were developing data systems to capture data and represent them at different levels of geography, from the local (small area) level to the global. He described the SDI as based on partnerships at corporate, local, government, national, regional (multi-national) and global levels. He cautioned that success in the creation of such an infrastructure was hampered by a lack of support from the very stakeholders who stood to gain from the initiative.

He stated that much of the potential for the use of knowledge lay in the ways by which knowledge might be shared. That depended to a great extent on the culture of a society. This theme underlay his initial presentation. This was followed by a demonstration of a GIS integrated information system that he had constructed. The presentation of the data in the form of thematic maps made the understanding of the data easy and provided impact. It was seen as a format that would appeal to a decision maker. He informed the meeting that in many cases assistance with the data came further away from the official disseminator of information than one would have imagined. He observed that ministerial intervention and sponsorship were critical factors that would contribute to the success of the SDI.

The demonstration showed the power of integration of datasets. The point that was at the base of the two presentations (Lewis and Wall) was that networking, though desirable, did not come naturally and that there was much work to be done to foster that collaboration.

Discussion on papers presented

Several participants identified coordination, including lack of coordination among donor agencies, as requiring some attention. The need for coordination extended to the dissemination of key indicators, many of which would have to be standardized to make them more easily understood.

On the question of the GDDS, some participants thought that a standard for dissemination imposed by an external institution might not meet the public interest of the subregion. The view was held that the GDDS was merely one standard and that it could form one of a number of concentric circles of standards that could be designed with reference to the Caribbean data dissemination issue. The meeting wished to ensure that data dissemination standards relevant

primarily to the national economy and society were adopted nationally and questioned if a quarterly index of GDP was accepted within the GDDS. The absence to date of quarterly nominal GDP data was one of the reasons adduced for the failure of Trinidad and Tobago to sign on to the GDDS.

The observation was made that social statistics were not subjected to the same scrutiny as economic statistics.

In answer to a question on the use of multiple sources of data, the meeting was convinced that a single source for updating data would be the ideal, although linking of sources could be done with a measure of meaningfulness.

Agenda item 10 Issues of data security in a national statistical system

Mr. Lennox Benjamin of Guyana viewed data security as a central element of data management. Concern for data security was reflected in all of the Statistical Acts of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean as they were all patterned on the British Act. Some issues of confidentiality discussed in the Acts might have led to a stance on disclosure that was considered to be more conservative than either intended or meaningful in contemporary times. Nevertheless, the statistical offices had a duty to continue to operate with the confidence and trust of their data suppliers and therefore had to be seen as protecting the confidentiality of their data beyond a certain point.

The statistical offices had to strike a balance between disclosure of data and the protection of confidentiality. In modern times the perimeter of data to be protected existed on two levels – the physical and the virtual. The need for networking was seen as more pressing in modern times than before. This need had to be balanced with the protection of confidentiality as per the provisions of the acts. Security systems within a networked environment had therefore to be put in place. In the case of computer facilitated networks, appropriate access bars had to be designed and systems through network servers had to be protected through the use of firewalls.

Agenda item 11 Energising the statistical offices of the subregion – Issues of management, quality and training – The Jamaican case

Ms. Sonia Jackson of the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN) observed the tenets of modernization in the public service in Jamaica and set the STATIN modernization agenda within that context. The paper reviewed the issues of leadership, organizational structure, positioning/ image within the public sector, the integration of business strategy with IT strategy and funding.

She outlined STATIN's vision as one of becoming a learning organization on the cutting edge of information and technology. The key to sustaining the learning organization lay in

leadership, not only at the top of the hierarchy but at all levels throughout the organization. The learning organization required constant review of performance and strong and positive leadership. She shared with the meeting the personal attributes of a good leader.

Ms. Jackson observed that in the past, managers in STATIN came from within the organization and promotion to that class was based on a mixture of seniority and excellence in the technical field. The “home resourced” managers did not have the skills and training to drive organizational change. In the present environment, the Ordinance should be revisited and should make a distinction between the chief statistician and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The organigram should be adjusted to make room for the two posts. The position and needs of the organization at a given time should determine the type of CEO to be engaged. Organizations that still operated in the twentieth century mode needed to turn their paradigm to operations in the twenty-first century. Such a move required a change in the organizational culture from a command and control style to a participatory approach.

The change as discussed should be funded by the central government. The learning nature of the organization would make it open to the receipt of technical assistance as it strove to acquire excellence. The organization would produce products demanded by the user community and for which a market price would be payable.

Ms. Jackson underlined the prerequisites to the achievement of excellence through a learning organization. Among them were:

- Strong leadership
- The right status and image of the National Statistical Office
- Adequate financial resources
- The right type of CEO at the right time.

Agenda item 12

Putting the central statistical office and statistical services back on track

In his paper, Mr. Peter Pariag raised three questions:

1. When and why did the CSO go off track?
2. Is the organization capable of getting back on track?
3. What is necessary to put the CSO on track and keep it there?

He traced the history of consultancies that recommended changes to the CSO from as far back as 1990 to 2002 and commented on the failure to implement those recommendations. The organization had developed a mission and a vision statement and had identified nine goals which, if achieved, would make the organization a center of excellence.

Putting the CSO on track would require good governance in statistics. Among the necessary actions that would work towards the improvement of the CSO were the following:

- An organizational structural change
- A comprehensive communication plan
- Advice for making the transition to the new structure
- Financing of the new structure
- Change management support
- A legislative framework to facilitate the changes that should be undertaken
- A change in the culture of the organization
- Drivers that would encourage competent staff

He concluded that the mechanism for effective change required visionary leadership and sound management practices.

Agenda item 13
Investment in statistics as a priority in the region:
The proposed mandate and its status

Mr. Sylvan Roberts of the CARICOM Secretariat presented the document at caption. He recalled a call for governments to invest resources in statistics that had been made to the Caribbean Community Council in July 2001. The Community Council noted the information required on the status and role of statistics in the region and also noted the developmental work in statistics. The Council also mandated CARICOM to prepare in its work programme a three-year plan for the improvement of the quality and range of statistics available to the region. He presented the resolution that had been taken to the meeting of Council in 2001 but which had to be supplemented with data on work programme and costs. That would be put in place in time for the next meeting of the Community Council.

Discussion of agenda items 10 –13

In response to Mr. Benjamin's paper, the meeting perceived two problems concerning networking:

(a) A number of the statistical agencies in the region were not networked. That posed a problem when a comprehensive range of data had to be referenced in preparing a response to a request for information.

(b) The need existed to retrieve data from networks while maintaining the security of the network. That situation brought into play the issues of security and confidentiality.

The discussion on data security highlighted the need for statistical offices to be more aware and skilled in the use of the technology available as a means of achieving greater security of their data.

Concerning backup of the data, it was now an accepted principle that offsite backups should be made. Mr. Benjamin stated that while in the statistical offices that principle was being adhered to, one was not certain that in the other data-producing agencies the same standards and principles were being upheld. Some participants cited their organizations as engaging in “data sanctuary” activities in which they stored datasets from countries. Those could be returned to the countries if the nationally housed holdings ever became lost or corrupted.

Participants wondered if the Freedom of Information Act had placed further burdens on the dissemination of information. Mr. Pariag clarified that the data were not included in the provisions of the Act.

Participants observed the risk of producing questionable data when agencies not outfitted to conduct survey activity conducted such surveys for their organizational data needs and in fact produced substandard data. Such agencies did harm to the CSO, which was meticulous in its work and aimed to produce accurate data.

On the question of management capabilities of the chief statistician, the meeting agreed that management skills and capabilities should be resident not only in the head of the office but in all of its levels.

At least one participant thought that confidentiality of data carried a higher weight than dissemination at the present moment. The point was made that in a globalised world, the accent should be placed on the availability of data for analysis and for informed policy-making. Some balance should be brought between those two opposing stances on data.

Citing the need for change within the statistical offices, several participants agreed that there should be more discussion between the producers of data and the users. For example, the social planners needed to interact more closely with the statisticians in order to gain a better appreciation of the data. The link between the producers of data and their resource market (the suppliers of the data) should also be fostered through frequent discussion and seminars. Internally, the concept of the value chain should be introduced to staff so that they could see where their efforts fit into the broader picture. The value chain should be facilitated by the new technologies.

The meeting agreed that change had to come from within the statistical offices, with fresh viewpoints being introduced through formal training, attachments to other statistical offices or through interacting more closely with highly trained personnel from similar organizations either domestically or abroad.

Discussion took place on strategies that could be used to move the statistical offices forward. In addition to the suggestions of training, discussion focused on plans. The plan should be captured in writing and be displayed in prominent locations. In addition, the plan should reflect a vision that the office should hold on to and pursue with tenacity.

The discussion included the problem of preservation of “turf” within the public sector. The observation was made that international organizations also experienced some “turf wars” at

times, but that was on the decline. Some organizations were engaged in standardization work in an attempt to change the culture of the supplying offices.

Agenda item 14

Data limitations in modeling the Caribbean economies

Dr. P.K. Watson presented a paper that looked at the various alternative approaches available for modelling the Caribbean economy and considered the data requirements to use those models to their full potential. It matched the requirements against the current data availability. He cited as one of the principal objectives of the paper the need to convince the relevant authorities that there was considerable benefit in developing the databases in the Caribbean so that the techniques discussed in the paper could be used to advantage.

Dr. Watson traced the development of modeling in the Caribbean from the 1960s and 1970s with structural econometric models to the 1990s when the so-called time series alternatives to structural modeling were first used. He observed that modeling efforts had failed to influence the decision-making process in the Caribbean in sharp distinction to the situation in the more developed economies. He cited a number of reasons for the failure to interest decision makers in the Caribbean. The reasons included:

- Skepticism of the policy makers vis-à-vis the validity of quantitative economic models
- Ignorance about the potential of such models
- Ignorance about the requirements for the best use of those models
- Models too expensive to maintain
- Personnel on the ground did not have the required competence
- The data were not available and the required data would be too expensive to acquire

The paper discussed different types of models and their characteristics and examined their data requirements. It was not overly concerned with the quality of economic data used in macroeconomic models in the Caribbean nor with the disparity between concept and measure. It accepted the fact that economic data were of questionable quality and observed that that deficiency justified the existence of econometrics as a special branch of study in the first place. The quantity of data available to the econometrician was the disturbing factor in the Caribbean. Factors influencing quantity were periodicity of data, length of time series, missing values, and missing series, among others. Watson presented an appraisal of the types of data that were available. In so doing he presented a list of core series of interest to the model builder. He concluded that data deficiency was a serious constraint in any structural econometric modelling exercise in Caribbean countries.

In the discussion that followed, the volatility of parameters derived from rolling co-integrative equations was discussed. The cause of the volatility could not be ascertained with certainty. Participants questioned the quality of some of the data that were used in the building

of models. Some data, for example the trade data, were not cleaned before being used in the model. The presenter acknowledged the dubious quality of trade data internationally.

Data quality tended to increase, as in the case of financial statistics, as the periodicity of reporting became more frequent.

Agenda item 15
General Discussion and re-visit to the main issues discussed in the meeting; and
Agenda item 16
Where do we go from here?

The meeting noted the CARICOM resolution on investment in statistics and thought it worthwhile to re-submit to the Community Council of Ministers. Participants were invited to make submissions to the CARICOM Secretariat to strengthen the resolution where possible.

The meeting recalled the suggestion made in a submission that the role of the statistician was evolving to include a necessary competence in IT as part of the statistician's stock-in-trade. Output-oriented training in IT skills should become a major element of staff upgrade.

Notwithstanding the fact that at present statisticians seemed not to have fully explored the powers conferred on them by the Statistics Acts, those pieces of legislation should be reviewed. The Acts should be examined to ensure that they addressed with a degree of pointedness the evolved political, economic, social and technological environments that surrounded and impacted the production of statistics. It was suggested that the time had come for systems reviews of statistics-producing organizations to ensure that they were geared towards excellence and relevance.

One of the ways of ensuring supervision of the quality and relevance of the work of the statistical office was the establishment of statistical advisory committees that comprised representation from a range of stakeholders. At least one participant expressed the need for a quality management project specialist to effect this change throughout the system.

The need for sponsorship of reform in statistics from a very high political level was expressed and met with general approval.

The recommendation was made that statisticians had to think "outside the box" and develop imaginative solutions to work challenges. Networking provided the possibility of building on the experiences of others. Much could be accomplished with effective coordination and collaboration among statisticians and other producers of data without extra cost.

Bearing in mind the scarcity of some types of skill among statisticians, the suggestion of the establishment of a common pool of experts was raised. There had been limited success of that initiative for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) countries in the field of household surveys. However, in national accounts, one expert had been servicing the OECS countries with excellent results and with unification of methodologies and output formats.

Regarding the role of the statistical office as facilitator of research, participants recommended the establishment of a strategic business unit that would engage in offering consultancy services to the public. The income derived from that activity should be retained for the development of that unit. There was need to derive a basis and rationale on which to charge the client. The caution was sounded that that new business might demand an inordinate amount of staff resources and that it would detract from the core business of the office. One participant clarified that revenues collected would be deposited into government's Consolidated Fund.

Participants agreed that there should be coordination of externally funded projects in a manner that would avoid overlap and wasted effort on the part of the national beneficiaries. That coordination should be done by a government department. Participants observed that the funders of the projects had embarked on some projects, mainly to satisfy their own mandates. Care should be taken to ensure that projects were properly financed and did not depend on a contribution in kind from the statistical office that was too high to support.

Agenda item 17 Closing Session

Dr. Penelope Forde of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago delivered the closing remarks on behalf of the Bank. She expressed satisfaction with the discussions of the two-day meeting and reiterated the importance of data collection and dissemination. She thanked ECLAC and the participants for their part in making the meeting a success and looked forward to deeper involvement in shaping the course of statistics in Trinidad and Tobago and in the rest of the Caribbean through forums such as these.

Dr. Esteban Perez of ECLAC expressed his satisfaction at the quality of the papers delivered and the discussions over the period and promised that the report and papers of the session would be reproduced in a joint publication of ECLAC and the Central Bank.

The Chairman brought the meeting to a close by thanking the participants for their participation. He looked forward to continued discussion and action at the national level to advance the status and output of the statistical offices of the subregion.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations emerged from the discussions conducted on the foregoing topics. Much discussion centered on the following topics:

- Data collection and use
- Data quality
- Transparency of the statistical process
- Data security

- Enabling legislation
- Management and modernization of statistical offices

The participants recognized the need for strong support from the administration but decided that there were initiatives that they, as chief statisticians, could take to advance the situation in statistics without additional implications on recurrent expenditure by the central government. The recommendations were therefore of a nature that would allow implementation without reference to the policy makers as they were consistent with the expected continuous change processes that operated within set policy.

In the area of **data collection**, the recommendation was that to the extent possible, the chief statistician should assert himself/herself as the leader in statistics and initiate dialogue with other data collectors to reduce duplication of effort and to elicit more accurate and relevant data from the polled community.

The statisticians viewed sample design and selection as an area of expertise that was not widespread. They therefore agreed that they would begin to be more proactive in offering such services as consultancy services to data collectors.

They agreed that their efforts at networking to a greater extent than they had done in the past could bring about much change at the operational level without the intervention of the central government. Networking would bring with it issues of data ownership and cost and revenue sharing. Collaboration on data collection should also extend to the main collectors of administrative data. The use of technology could bring about efficiencies in such data collection.

Cutting across the issues of data quality and harmonization of statistics in the Caribbean, the statisticians were encouraged to adopt common methodologies as far as possible, to increase the comparability of data across countries. In most cases this was purely a statistical matter and therefore could be addressed at the level of the statistician. Before harmonization could take place effectively, the statisticians would need to come together to discuss the merits and demerits of the methodologies in use.

In the area of the **use of data** by researchers, the present protocols acted as a degree of hindrance to fuller use of fresh data by researchers. In order to solve concerns of confidentiality breaches, data should be anonymized. The statistical community in the Caribbean was urged to adopt this paradigm.

The meeting agreed and recommended that GIS should be employed as a means of integrating data as compatibility in concepts, definitions and coding schemes across databases would yield more information than the mere sum of several databases. The representation of data on thematic maps would be a valuable persuader to the administrative echelons of government and could trigger further positive support to the improvement or creation of an integrated statistical system.

Regarding **data quality**, the statisticians agreed that a greater degree of centralization of some of the statistical processes would contribute to a higher quality of data collected. A

Statistical Advisory Committee was proposed as a mechanism for maintaining vigil over data standards.

The statisticians recommended that especially in the relatively new areas of concern such as environmental monitoring, a more exhaustive documentation of issues and a more direct identification of the crucial indicators that could inform policy should be prepared.

The meeting acknowledged the recommendation that data quality could be improved while achieving greater timeliness of production. More aggressive project management approaches would have to be taken to plan and execute data collection. In this regard the need for management training of statisticians was accepted.

On the subject of data dissemination standards, the meeting recommended that the GDDS and the SDDS of the IMF be implemented along with other data dissemination standards as designed by the country for its own purposes, primarily.

The meeting received the recommendation that the statistician should depart from the past mindset within which he/she operated and become more user-oriented. This would involve more interfaces with users in which methodologies and measures could be discussed. The image of statistics as being an arcane operation should give way to an engagement with the various publics of statistics. This would help to increase public confidence in the work of the statistician and minimize the suspicion of less than straightforward processing and representation of data.

The meeting recommended that the contributing organizations engaged in statistics should focus on their core duties and produce excellent results within their areas of responsibility.

Data security involved the realization of the statistician's commitment to preserving anonymity while assisting in the use of data collected. The meeting received the recommendation that the fundamental principles of official statistics should be upheld. This is what guaranteed the confidence that must be placed in the statistical office as an impartial agent in information collection and dissemination.

In discussion of the **management issues** facing statistical systems, the recommendation that statisticians become more management oriented was accepted. Such paradigm shifts had begun in a number of Caribbean countries with good results. Statisticians were urged to implement those new approaches, as they did not need approval from any administrative layer above the parent ministry.

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