

High-level Ministerial Dialogue on
Social Security and Sustainable Social Development
in the Caribbean
St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda
14-15 June 2006

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**REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE -
SOCIAL SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
*IN THE CARIBBEAN***

St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, 14-15 June 2006

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**REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE -
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Introduction

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, convened a High-Level Ministerial Dialogue on Social Security and Sustainable Social Development in the Caribbean in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, on 14 and 15 June 2006.

The meeting sought to provide an opportunity for experts in the field of social security to review social policies and programmes and their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable population groups in the Caribbean. This is in keeping with the mandate to follow up on the implementation of major United Nations global summits on social development and to support governments in the Caribbean in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and in keeping with the outcomes of the thirty-first Session of ECLAC. It is also consistent with the mandate of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD), which established a subcommittee in 2005, under the chairmanship of Barbados, and including Antigua and Barbuda and Trinidad and Tobago, with a view to carrying forward the proposals for the development of a Caribbean Social Protection Strategy.

Representatives of the following Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) member countries attended: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. In attendance at the meeting were a number of ministers with responsibility for social development and representatives of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB); the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat; the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); the Department of International Development (DFID); the European Union (EU); the International Labour Organisation (ILO); the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The list of participants of the meeting is attached as Annex II.

The meeting followed the agenda as detailed below:

1. Opening session
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work
3. An overview of a framework for a regional approach to social development
4. Social security – Social protection and social provisioning
5. Country statements
6. Presentations from development partners

7. Social dimensions of regional integration and social protection measures in the Caribbean SIDS
8. Regional social development framework
9. Plenary discussions
10. Closing remarks.

**Agenda item 1:
Opening session**

Mr. Rudolf Buitelaar, Deputy Director of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, welcomed the participants to the meeting. He reminded participants of the thirty-first Session of ECLAC convened in Montevideo, Uruguay, 20-24 March 2006, and in particular recalled the resolution adopted at that session which emphasized that social protection, in terms of health care and social security, was deemed essential in order to strengthen the social cohesion of regional countries. He also pointed to the common issues of low coverage, lack of financing and management problems that needed to be addressed.

He indicated that the aim of the meeting was to adopt a regional action plan with respect to social protection and that such an action plan would be aimed at advancing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the sub region, through more effective dialogue, partnership and collaboration. This was especially needed, bearing in mind that governments had expressed concern regarding the proportion of populations living below the poverty line in countries of the subregion. He pointed out that governments were challenged to strengthen the social covenant based on economic, social and cultural rights and that ECLAC had suggested that such a covenant should include three key elements which converted social policy into a tool for promoting equity: universality, solidarity and efficiency. Finally, he thanked the Government of Antigua and Barbuda for hosting the meeting, mentioning in particular its support in the coordination of the organizational arrangements.

Ms. Leisa Perch, Programme Manager, UNDP Subregional Office for Barbados and the OECS, welcomed participants on behalf of her organization. She emphasized that the meeting was a clear example of the continued commitment of the United Nations system to joint programming and strong partnership which would continue to be strengthened. She stated that economic development without social considerations had not proven sustainable nor had social development efforts de-linked from economic and fiscal realities. She reminded the meeting of the United Nations World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) convened in Copenhagen in 1995 during which heads of State and governments agreed to “integrate economic, cultural and social policies so that they become mutually supportive, and acknowledge the interdependence of public and private spheres of activity”.

Pointing out that the subregion performed well at a number of levels and ranked highly in terms of human development, she emphasized that poverty and inequality remained serious development challenges for the subregion. She concluded by outlining four important areas which posed significant challenges to the subregion: education, social vulnerability, youth in transition and HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Hamilton Lashley - Adviser to the Prime Minister on Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals, Government of Barbados, recalled the subregion's vulnerability to external shocks and their impact on social and economic development. He outlined the Government of Barbados' creation of the office of the Advisor on Poverty Eradication and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals which would address social issues and embark on a strategy to achieve the Goals. He emphasized that due to changes in the economic, political and social environment in the subregion, a regional coordinated approach was required to deal with the issues of growing social disintegration and dislocation. To do so would, however, require strategic partnerships with the private sector. Thus, he viewed the meeting as an important step towards addressing the challenges that had been identified and formulating a regional plan of action to deal with these issues.

In his opening remarks, the Honourable Hilson Baptiste, Minister of Housing, Culture and Social Transformation of Antigua and Barbuda, emphasized the need for action in the subregion in dealing with social issues. He pointed to the importance of having the necessary funds in social ministries and lamented that these ministries were often underfunded and not considered crucial ministries, a perspective which he challenged. He outlined the importance of social dimensions and noted that while social ministries had not contributed directly to government coffers, they were able to develop policies that resulted in significant expenditure savings.

The Honourable Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda, welcomed participants and reminded them of the importance of placing social development at the top of the agenda in the subregion. He stated that although remarkable improvement had been made in several areas, such as improved access to education, health and the standard of living of the people in the subregion, efforts at strengthening and harmonizing social services delivery in terms of quality. He considered the high-level dialogue as a platform for countries to respond collectively and collaboratively to the challenge posed by development and to learn from mistakes made in the past. He pointed to the increased ageing of Caribbean populations and how life expectancy had increased dramatically in recent times. This factor must be recognized and integrated into social policies and national strategic development plans. Finally, he emphasized the importance of continuing to forge linkages in the subregion through the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) to tackle social ills that were affecting the subregion's social and economic development.

Ms. Sheila Stuart, Social Affairs Officer at the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, delivered the vote of thanks to the organizers of the meeting.

**Agenda item 2:
Adoption of the agenda and organization of work**

The meeting adopted the agenda as presented.

Agenda item 3:
An overview of a framework for a regional approach to social development

ECLAC presented an overview of the document ‘Shaping the Future of Social Protection: Access, Financing and Solidarity’, which was presented at the thirty-first Session of ECLAC, and the Caribbean response to this work. In particular, it was noted that a new approach to social security was needed, one which encompassed more solidarity and was based on human rights. This approach could be shaped through new covenants.

A shift from the current system, which was principally based on employment, would be required as contributions and tax-based financing should complement each other, where contributory and non-contributory systems worked alongside each other. This would result in obtaining an improved balance between incentives and solidarity. In fact, employment-based social protection systems had failed to provide increased coverage in many countries in Latin America.

Therefore, a new approach where social protection was formulated as a social right was required, particularly since poverty denied the rights of citizens to be full members of society. Such a system would require capacity, institutions and resources; enforcement would only be a gradual process. Therefore, a new social covenant was needed, which had ethical and procedural components, to define the framework of social institutions and to determine which mechanisms would govern it.

The ECLAC representative presented several of the sectoral proposals of the document regarding health-care systems, pension systems and anti-poverty social programmes, noting however that many of the proposals in the report pertained to Latin America and were not necessarily replicable in the Caribbean.

It was argued that the key challenge in the Caribbean was the task of defining a social protection framework that would respond to high levels of social vulnerability and that would act as an integrated, effective and comprehensive system, both as a safety net and as a springboard. Other challenges concerned the shift from social assistance to social development; creating social protection and health services for all in the long term; improving the operation of labour markets and creating a contributory and non-contributory pension scheme. Finally, it was underlined that one would need to integrate risk management and risk reduction strategies at the regional, national and individual levels and that the subregion could only proceed with greater coordination and harmonization across countries with the collaboration of regional bodies and international agencies.

Agenda item 4:
Social security – Social protection and social provisioning

The Director of the National Insurance Scheme in Barbados delivered a presentation on approaches to social security reform in the subregion and its policy implications, achievements and challenges. He stated that social security initially focused on the poor in the subregion, but

coverage had expanded over the years. However, the main political focus in the subregion had been directed towards economic issues.

In essence, Caribbean countries had incorporated a standard package of benefits. These included old age contributory pensions, employment injury, sickness, invalidity, maternity and funeral benefits. The major problem in the subregion, however, was related to the proportion of workers covered, as the informal sector in the Caribbean and the self-employed contributed a large proportion of the total work force, but were not covered by standard social security arrangements. The trend to contract labour exacerbated this problem, as these persons were unable to contribute on a regular basis. Therefore, he argued, the solution lay in creating greater flexibility, which in turn required more political will.

He also noted that pension reform was a critical issue in the Caribbean, and that several countries had begun the process. This was necessary because of the unprecedented and dramatic fall off in fertility rates in every Caribbean country, which had led to an inversion of the population pyramid. The introduction of full indexation of pensions remained a crucial component of pension reform: currently, only two countries in the subregion indexed pensions in an ad hoc manner. Linked to this was the fact that insurable earnings also needed to be indexed.

Regarding funding, he pointed out that a major hindrance to carrying out necessary pension reform was the wide spectrum of stakeholders involved, and therefore a possible solution lay in the adoption of a genuine tripartite approach. He also referred to a noticeable concentration of investments in government paper and warned that for vulnerable economies in the Caribbean this might not be a wise decision.

In terms of scope and operation of benefits, he argued that the introduction of unemployment benefits might be worth considering in other countries as stabilization of income was an important component of social protection; currently these were only visible in Barbados. An unemployment programme should be linked with a training institution to encourage the unemployed to be re-trained for alternative skills. A further possibility pertained to the introduction of severance payments.

An important aspect of social security was the welfare system as it constituted a critical part of social provision in most countries. In conclusion, he stated that social security was more deeply complex than might ordinarily be evident and suggested that while some progress has been made and joint seminars and conferences were taking place, there was need for more dialogue on the technical and critical factors of the various systems in the Caribbean.

The representative from Jamaica stated that intermittent increases in pensions were implemented every two years in Jamaica and that these increases were linked to inflationary factors, combined with increases in the minimum wage. In response, the Director of the Barbados National Insurance Scheme made the case that indexation was required in all member States to ensure that inflows and outflows of the social security system were matched and observed that currently increases in pensions were implemented at ad hoc intervals. He further raised the question as to whether or not social security should be increased in scope to provide health care and unemployment insurance; this was however, dependent on national consensus.

The Minister of Housing, Culture and Social Transformation of Antigua and Barbuda stated that it was necessary to embrace social policy, noting that in recent boom years in Antigua and Barbuda, social policy had been neglected and social problems had increased.

It was also noted that in the current scheme many citizens viewed contributions to social security as an actual tax, hence they were reluctant to contribute. However, to simplify collection of contributions as well as disbursement of payments, a best practice had been implemented in Saint Lucia where a 'mobile social security office' had been created, whereby a vehicle manned with staff from the social security office would regularly travel around the island and visit people to facilitate their payments. This was a best practice which all participants hoped could be emulated.

A representative of Barbados noted that while social security was an essential tool in poverty alleviation and thus symbolized the first pillar in protection against poverty, there was need to be more precise as to what a 'new social covenant' would encompass. In addition, while extension of social security was important in the fight against poverty, it was not yet clear how the informal sector would be covered, and extending coverage to this sector would be beneficial in efforts aimed at poverty elimination.

In response to the statement by the representative of the OECS that the current social security schemes were inherited from the pre-independence era, the presenter responded that the impact of social security had been significant for the subregion and that programmes had been put in place to reduce risks to communities. Most of the programmes had been modeled along the lines of income replacement programmes to ensure, for example, that sick people had funds to recover and could return to the labour market.

A representative from Barbados pointed out that programmes geared towards social integration and sustainable livelihoods in the subregion did not include a focus on indigenous roots when looking at sustainable livelihood. As a result, many programmes were not sustainable as they did not result from national consensus hence there was a lack of enthusiasm amongst populations to identify with such programmes. A representative from Antigua and Barbuda added that there was a need to underscore the role of culture in social development emphasizing, too, that many initiatives had been started which had not taken culture into account.

A representative from ECLAC presented the challenges facing Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) with specific reference to social integration and sustainable livelihoods. She provided examples of policy recommendations based on work undertaken as part of the macro socio-economic assessments of natural disasters and explored the implications for social policy in Caribbean SIDS.

She stated that Caribbean SIDS faced a number of common challenges to achieving social integration and sustainable livelihoods. These included the persistent poverty among the populations in the subregion, and the accompanying high levels of inequality. The paucity of data on the unemployment and underemployment, particularly of youth, in the subregion was also noted as was the increasing level of urban violence. The difficulties posed by the use of many of the islands as transshipment points for illicit drugs was raised and the ill effects of the weak and disintegrating social capital resulting from the impact of modernization and

globalization. The socio-economic impact of natural disasters and the social and environmental vulnerability of the small island States were highlighted using the indicators of the cost of the impact of natural disasters, as well as the fact that segments of the populations continued to suffer from social exclusion.

In view of these challenges, selected policy recommendations were presented. These included the need to strengthen the culture of evidence-based social policy formulation; advancing the boundaries of social protection as the subregion undertook the necessary vulnerability analyses; striving for greater efficiency and coherence in the delivery of social protection programmes in areas of administration, monitoring and evaluation; strengthening the institutional framework for long-term social planning and, finally, harmonizing social protection policies across the subregion.

In response to the presentation, a representative of Jamaica highlighted the critical nexus between poverty and environmental degradation, pointing to the fact that the poor were particularly more vulnerable and, in terms of a vulnerability index, several indices applied to them. Many had to take significant risks due to a lack of alternatives.

Professor Karl Theodore of the University of the West Indies (UWI) presented on the policy implications, challenges and opportunities to approaches to health sector reforms vis-à-vis the epidemiological transition in the Caribbean. In particular, he made the point that changes of lifestyles were required in the Caribbean considering its scale and evolution of morbidity.

He noted that in the Caribbean an epidemiological transition had taken place as the main diseases were now mainly non-communicable as opposed to the predominance of communicable diseases, indicating that the four leading causes of death in the Caribbean in 2000 were heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes. Deaths from stroke, heart disease and hypertension in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago were now three to four times more common than in North America; further, diabetes had emerged as a major problem and should now be regarded as an epidemic in the subregion.

These so-called 'lifestyle disease conditions' dramatically portrayed in the case of HIV/AIDS, impacted economies in many ways, affecting the labour force through illness and mortality, and therefore, the national income as a result of treatment costs as well as lost capital and/or accumulated savings, and were aptly described by Prof. Theodore as the mechanism of destruction. This debilitating mechanism undermined the two pillars of income and production, namely labour and savings, and reduced the capacity of health systems to foster social protection in three ways. This included the extension or deepening of poverty; the weakening of the government's ability to finance social expenditures thereby worsening the distribution of income; and the limiting of access to quality health services to the privileged sections of the society.

The point was made that per capita expenditure on health in the Caribbean was significantly lower than in larger, richer countries and that the Caribbean would not be able to finance the costs of these diseases, calling therefore for a change in lifestyle as the principal factor in mitigating their effects and therefore reducing morbidity.

Professor Theodore called for health-care reforms in the subregion that would strengthen solidarity mechanisms designed to provide equitable access to health services to the whole population, regardless of individual income or risk. Health reform would however have to proceed by keeping three basic concerns in mind, namely the availability of services, the delivery process, and the financing of services.

Regarding the first, a viable approach would be to move to a system where provision of services was guaranteed across the subregion as a whole, rather than each country providing all health services as this was proving to be too costly. A further challenge was how to retain human resources, considering the large emigration of health personnel from the subregion.

He noted that the region as a whole had high levels of investment in human capital and a general political bias towards social protection. However, while the intended use of resources should reflect the basic concern of quality of life for citizens, the case for allocation of resources must rest on economics rather than on providing the best service regardless of cost. The overriding principle would have to be to provide the best service at the least cost.

The representative of Jamaica stated that while a public education programme was needed to educate the public about non-communicable diseases, one would first have to explore the costs of such a programme as well as estimate the total cost of these diseases on the subregion.

Agenda item 5: Country statements

Antigua and Barbuda

Antigua and Barbuda was currently conducting a country poverty assessment and the data was currently being assessed after having completed the field-work,. Capacity constraints were immediately apparent in this assessment and posed one of the most significant issues to the country in its efforts to ensure that development took place in a sustainable way. These constraints were also found in the private sector, where civil servants were poached. Collaboration with development partners was flagged as a key component to the development process.

Barbados

Barbados had one of the largest broad-based safety nets in the subregion, providing protection for the most vulnerable. It embraced universal health care, ensuring that good health did not depend on one's ability to pay for medical attention. This was demonstrated by the provision of anti retro-viral drugs free of charge for persons infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

Social security and protection had resulted in universal primary education since education was compulsory up to the age of sixteen. Secondary education was free and access to tertiary education facilitated by the payment of tuition fees by the State. Currently attention was being

placed on the provision of free universal pre-primary education. It was stressed that social protection had taken on board the idea of social inclusion since 1995. Social provisioning had been made for disabled persons, and gender equity and equality were significant components of the social protection thrust. The representative pointed out that poverty remained a problem, at 13.9 per cent, the burden of which fell disproportionately on women. Barbados was also confronted with an ageing population. It is estimated that with the increasing life spans and declining fertility rates, 17 per cent of the population would be over 65 by the year 2010.

A number of programmes had been implemented to create a culture of self reliance including career development programmes, which had resulted in a decrease in the number of people on welfare. The authorities were working on finding a social policy mix that supported sustainable social development.

Dominica

In Dominica, one of the main issues was the pension reform programme in response to population dynamics which was putting pressure on the pension scheme. One of the reform issues was to apply automatic increases in pensions on a three-year basis. The minimum pension was being increased and efforts were being made to increase coverage, especially to the indigenous population, the Caribs who were largely self-employed. The particular vulnerability of this group was underscored, pointing out issues such as weak educational standards, high fertility rates and the lack of property deeds, which presented this group with many challenges including access to financing and quality social services.

Further efforts relating to the establishment of a national health insurance programme were presented. In the past, transfers from the social security fund had been made to the government to assist in the financing of health care, but this had had a negative effect on the reserves of the fund, therefore these transfers had recently been halted.

Some social development programmes, which had been implemented, were outlined: the regularization of squatters where land was made available to persons at a significantly reduced rate or free of charge; efforts to increase the availability of tertiary education for more people and to provide more facilities for access to education for disabled persons, as well as assistance to early school-leavers.

Jamaica

An overview of the wide range of policies programmes and legislative changes that were being implemented to achieve the Millennium Development Goals were presented. These included a comprehensive poverty eradication programme, national policies for senior citizens and persons with disabilities, strategic reform of the education system and reform of existing legislation in the areas of child care and protection, gender equality and labour and social assistance. The national insurance scheme of Jamaica was described and it was pointed out that benefits had become very critical for income security and had been increased in April 2006. Benefits had been enhanced in 2003 to include the introduction of a pensioner's health plan which covered a wide range of medical costs. The challenge, however, remained in the fact that

only approximately one third of the senior citizen population met the criteria to receive a full national insurance pension. This low coverage was related to activity in the informal economy and affected the most vulnerable sectors of the labour force.

Turning to health, it was pointed out that a national health fund was introduced in 2003 to reduce the burden of financing health-care. The bulk of revenue for this fund was obtained from excise duties on tobacco and alcohol, referred to as a 'sin' tax.

Since 2000, the Government of Jamaica had embarked on a reform of the social safety nets to increase their efficiency and effectiveness and ultimately attain the Millennium Development Goals. An essential component of this reform was the merger of three existing income support benefits: the food stamp, the old age and incapacity allowance and the outdoor poor relief programme, into a single conditional cash transfer program called the Program of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH). This programme seeks to promote human capital development especially among children and young people as a means of breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty. Preliminary evaluation indicated early successes in targeting the poorest households for benefits, and in particular increased school attendance among children in beneficiary families, and a reduction in poverty levels. The programme was deemed to have had a positive impact on school attendance, while overall poverty had fallen from 19.1% in 2002 to 16.1% in 2004. This contributed significantly to the country being on track to achieve Millennium Goal one. In addition, it provided women with an opportunity to improve their status and promote gender equality since many of the beneficiaries of this programme were female heads of households.

Finally, it was pointed out that within the context of the move towards a CSME, it was necessary to develop social policies and actions to strengthen social protection systems.

St. Kitts and Nevis

St Kitts and Nevis reported a positive growth of the country's social security fund, which was the second largest in the subregion with a reserve expenditure ratio that was the highest in the subregion. If no change was made, however, these reserves were likely to be depleted by 2053. Despite this healthy financial situation, the Social Security board was currently discussing the latest actuarial report with a view to reforming the system.

Life expectancy had increased while fertility rates were declining, which presented an untenable situation for the pay-as-you go systems that relied on contributions from current workers, (for example, the retirement age was 62 relative to an average life expectancy of 71 and increasing). In addition, while currently 32 per cent of the population was under 16 and only 8 per cent over 62, it was estimated that by 2062 more than 26 per cent would be older than 62 years of age. The changing population demographics provided the greatest challenge, which was exacerbated by the high migration rate of youths, and increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS among the productive age groups. Further challenges included finding strategies to reduce inflation of contributions, bringing more self employed into the system and diversifying the investment portfolio to optimize returns and reduce administration costs.

Social protection was seen as an investment in human and social capital that would lead to increased productivity of the workforce, employment and better education for children, therefore free universal secondary education has been available for 40 years in St Kitts and Nevis. In addition, school children had access to free meals, free uniforms, self-help books and paid up overseas examination fees.

An important component of this social protection programme had been the country's housing programme, which had built over 3000 homes in the last 15 years and provided numerous lots of land to the population at affordable costs.

Suriname

Creating social and economic well-being for the population was one of the principal pillars of the development vision of the Government. While there was no integrated programme to combat poverty, there existed many programmes within relevant institutions to tackle the issue. The challenge was how to come to a unified definition for poverty and work on a more integrated programme, incorporating the private sector and civil society. An outline was provided of several social provision programmes run by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, the main focus of which was on supporting needy households in order to maintain a decent standard of living.

It had been recognized that it was necessary for the relevant institutions to have a strong institutional capacity to enable successful social reform. Therefore an 'Institutional and Organizational Social Safety Net Capacity Strengthening Plan' had been drafted. Several other plans included a 'Policy Plan for Children 2002-2006' which was formulated in collaboration with relevant stakeholders; a 'Policy Plan for People with Disabilities 2005-2009' and a draft 'Integral Gender Action Plan 2006-2010'. Turning to census and household studies, it was noted that although there were quarterly household studies and annual reporting, the last report had been delivered in 1998. Therefore a more durable integrated system was needed to monitor achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Currently uniform and universal Goal indicators were being determined to assist with preparation of the 2006 Millennium Development Goal progress report for Suriname.

Trinidad and Tobago

The national strategic plan geared towards taking the country to developed country status by the year 2020 was outlined. The five major development priorities of the framework were described and it was pointed out that the aim was to nurture a caring society by reducing poverty, discrimination, economic and social marginalization, diseases and poor health as well as substandard living conditions and social unrest. The framework also provided for increased productivity through full employment and decent work, the promotion of gender equity, improving access to quality housing and addressing the issues of the youth population.

The government allocated 20 per cent of the national budget towards social investment and more than 100 social programmes, addressing various social problems and targeting specific vulnerable and marginalized groups, were undertaken across ministries. In terms of social security it was noted that the system faced similar challenges, pertaining to coverage and

financing, as other countries. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is aiming not only to reduce poverty but also to restructure and decentralize the social service delivery system to manage social and economic vulnerability.

In order to monitor progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, a survey of living conditions had currently been undertaken and would be institutionalized thereafter to take place at two-year intervals. A Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to provide data on indicators relevant to children and women was also being undertaken. These initiatives would provide sustained collection and analysis of data to assist in the monitoring of internationally agreed commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals.

Agenda item 6: Presentations from development partners

The representative of the ILO reiterated that the primary goal of her organization was to “promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity”. To achieve this goal, strategic objectives or pillars of the Decent Work agenda had been selected with social protection and social security identified as key components of the goal of decent work. In particular, this referred to labour protection, safety and health at work, conditions of work, employment, migration, HIV and AIDS in the workplace, and social security, which included the development of a framework for the design and planning of social security schemes, as well as their reform and extension to the informal economy. Social security was described as encompassing all income transfer schemes including social assistance, pensions, short-term cash benefits in cases of sickness, maternity, unemployment and employment injury.

She pointed out, however, that only 20 per cent of the world's population had adequate social security coverage and more than half had no social security at all. People in the informal economy, in rural areas and in areas affected by high insecurity were not covered by social security schemes. There was also an important gender dimension as most schemes catered for male breadwinners.

In 2001, the ILO reached a consensus that social security and access to health care should be a right for all and that priority needed to be given to extending the coverage of social security to those not covered, and to extend the types of coverage provided. In this regard, the ILO conducted research on the gaps in coverage and on the effects of extending coverage, to develop new mechanisms to provide coverage to the informal economy and provide countries with guidelines on how to extend social security.

Furthermore, the ILO assisted in strengthening the capacity of the national institutions through the training of stakeholders, by establishing networks of institutions and through the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the results of the schemes and identify gaps. In addition, between 1999 and 2005 an Umbrella Programme for Actuarial Reviews in selected countries in the region was executed; and annual training sessions for the staff of each institution was provided in order to strengthen their statistical capacity. Finally,

there were many other areas in which the work of the ILO addressed the issues of social development, such as the elimination of child labour, development of small and medium enterprises, gender equality in the workplace, social financing, and labour-intensive infrastructure development.

The representative of CIDA emphasized her organization's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and stated that substantial work was being carried out in Africa; and the Caribbean, where Jamaica, Guyana, Haiti were partner countries, and the OECS were 'countries of interest'. The focus of CIDA was principally economic well-being, environmental sustainability, governance and social development. HIV/AIDS had received particular attention in the Caribbean, as did gender equality issues, which were a vital component to CIDA's work relative to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. She highlighted several projects of particular relevance to the subregion which CIDA was involved in, including the Caribbean disaster management fund and the CARICOM regional trade policy response fund, which assisted the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM) to participate in international negotiation in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

She also highlighted the newly created Canadian Cooperation Fund which provided the possibility of technical assistance in the development of new policy approaches, new legislation, fiscal management studies, and the introduction of new processes and procedures.

The representative of UNDP, Jamaica, stated that the country team was concluding preparations on the development assistance framework for the period 2007-2011, following consultative meetings on Jamaica's country status. The main focus would be on the areas of equity and quality of education; coordinated sectoral response to HIV/AIDS; targeting vulnerable communities to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods; better management of hazards; improved access to sustainable livelihood and an improved social safety net; equitable and integrated health care. Programme priorities had in particular been redirected towards crisis prevention management as inadequate social rights coverage and inadequate risk management increased vulnerabilities to crime and violence. She stated that it had been recognized that a main driver of violence was high youth unemployment, therefore UNDP was looking particularly at the ability of institutions to carry out conflict reduction activities within their own development goals.

To reach its goals, UNDP emphasized working with development partners, and had been building capacity with stakeholders to monitor the government's activities on issues of crime and violence.

The representative of UNIFEM stated that despite incremental gains, challenges to the full attainment of the goal of gender equity remained, especially as new threats, such as the rise in crime, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the impact of natural disasters were emerging.

She pointed out that as the Millennium Development Goals did not sufficiently capture the realities of poverty or gender inequities in the Caribbean, UNIFEM had therefore been participating with national women's machineries to identify new gender-responsive and Caribbean specific indicators. Special attention had been paid to gender-based violence, sexual

and reproductive health and rights, poverty, and access to education. She noted that a UNIFEM-led task force on gender and poverty had submitted to the CARICOM Community Council Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs recommendations on suggested new targets and indicators. A final briefing paper had also been forwarded to the CARICOM Secretariat for consideration of CARICOM member States prior to the 2005 Millennium Summit..

She also outlined several UNIFEM activities carried out in collaboration with international agencies and regional institutions. These related to the eradication of poverty, child support and gender equality, food security, gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS and environmental sustainability. UNIFEM had also been involved in the assessment of the impact of natural disasters with other international agencies at the national and regional levels. Several of the recommendations drawn from this work related to the fact that governments should establish a mechanism to support poor households, in particular for female heads of households, in securing land entitlements, the strengthening of gender-sensitive training in communities and mainstreaming gender and natural disaster risk management.

The representative of the CDB presented research findings on social protection and poverty reduction which had been undertaken primarily in Belize, Grenada and Saint Lucia. This research was intended to compile an inventory of social protection measures and to gauge their effectiveness. The underlying goal of this research was to provide recommendations to the subregion on the formulation of effective social protection policy. One of the key issues that arose was the limited capacity of communities and households to protect themselves against contingencies threatening their living standards.

Four main areas of risks and vulnerabilities were identified: macroeconomic risks, natural hazards, labour market risks and the human development life cycle. He noted that the higher levels of vulnerability in the subregion were due to individual, structural and other factors which adversely impacted populations and forced them into poverty. Sustained volatility also forced households to engage in behavior that was dysfunctional to the long-term interest, thus perpetuating the cycle of deprivation and poverty. He also noted that while social protection instruments existed, these were not sufficiently strong or effective to protect households in many areas from exposure to natural, economic and social hazards. Again gaps in coverage seemed to be a prime concern, as was the quality of service and accessibility of service. It was also found that countries continued to struggle with the issue of national health insurance. Prime concerns here included the poor, unemployed and informal sector workers. The question was also raised, whether in the absence of national health insurance one could better target fee waivers for health care.

Overall, he called for a regional social protection framework as there was need for a more systematic and proactive policy to protect against risks and overcome vulnerabilities. In particular, the shared commonality in risks and vulnerabilities across the region as well as the similarity in the main social protection instruments employed across countries and the common issues and concerns suggested that there were economies and synergies to be had from adopting a regional approach to social protection. To make his point, he presented a recommended framework for social protection in the subregion. This was used to emphasize that a fundamental shift in the Bank's development philosophy had taken place, moving from a focus on measures to support economic growth to one in which systematic poverty reduction was at the core of its

operations as well as from a narrow concentration on financial and economic analysis, to encompass environmental impact assessment, social analysis and natural hazards impact assessments. Finally, in-house discussions related to the development of social protection policy in the subregion were taking place, using the findings of the research funded by the CDB, DFID and the Delegation of the European Commission.

The representative of DFID stated that within the organization's mandate to work with partner governments and institutions to reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals, DFID had also developed a Social Protection Framework for the subregion. It had also jointly funded, with the CDB and the EC, research which provided a subregional framework, subsequently endorsed at a regional meeting in Barbados in October 2004 and later by ministers at COSHOD in April 2005, which recognized the importance of addressing social protection due to the vulnerabilities faced by people in the subregion. Some of the issues raised in the framework paper pertained to the fact that social protection should be an integral part of poverty reduction strategies and that it should build in elements of empowerment to help people be more self-reliant, while recognizing that for some this might always be difficult.

Noting that donors needed to better coordinate their activities, she outlined other areas of DFID support in the subregion related to social protection, such as support to the CDB in building capacity in social development and social analysis in project design; and the development of Country Poverty Assessments and Poverty Reduction Strategies, as well as support to the Jamaica Social Policy Evaluation Programme (JASPEV), a programme which focuses on social policy developed through greater participation by civil society and communities.

She further noted that DFID had been engaged in helping the subregion develop "sugar adaptation strategies", which contained a proper analysis of the social impact on poorer communities of the changes brought about through closure or restructuring of the sugar industries. Pointing to several challenges in the subregion, she pointed to DFID's work in developing tools to carry out Poverty and Social Impact Assessments (PSIA)

In response to this, the representative of the EU supported what was said in particular by the preceding organizations. She emphasized that social protection introduced some key elements which, considering the risks and vulnerabilities of the subregion, needed specially designed safety net programmes for the Caribbean where targeting fit in a more national coherent comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that was more rights-based.

The Minister of Social Transformation of Antigua and Barbuda agreed and reminded the meeting that most countries were dealing with similar problems, therefore a more coherent regional approach alongside the international organizations would enable countries to make use of synergies to facilitate the attainment of more results, as ultimately results counted.

The representative of the CDB however emphasized that the onus of responsibility in bringing about change was with the respective governments in the subregion. While international organizations could assist in drafting programmes, in monitoring poverty, creating capacity and supporting member States, it was ultimately the responsibility of national governments to achieve results.

An ensuing discussion resulted from this intervention, focusing largely on the vulnerability of the disabled in the subregion. All participants agreed that a new approach was needed when dealing with disabled persons and a shift in stance was required to empower such vulnerable groups. Overall, it was felt that international agencies should place more emphasis on the incorporation of the needs of disabled persons. While ultimately the political will had to come from governments and while more awareness could be fostered by government programmes, the importance of international donors to act as a catalyst for this result was recognized.

The representative of the OECS presented an outline of the main work programme activities of the social policy unit of his organization. In particular, he related to the localization of need in the sense that certain goals had been refined and new indicators identified to relate the Millennium Development Goals to the more particular setting of the OECS member States. He stated that in cooperation with the EU, work was being undertaken to harmonize social policy, and that several meetings had been scheduled for the near future. With respect to capacity-building in the subregion, he pointed out that the main focus was on data analysis and interpretation to inform social policy design and poverty reduction strategies. He added that training was provided to strengthen statistical offices and other users and producers of data in capacity-building and institutional strengthening. He stated that a second Human Development Report (HDR) for the OECS was due in 2007 and that the preparatory phase was currently underway. This phase involved a study on the impact of the CSME and the proposed OECS Economic Union on social services/welfare and security provisioning. It intended to highlight current, new and emerging human and social development issues to help define the thematic areas for the new OECS HDR.

He pointed out that current challenges included finding consensus on a theme for the new HDR; avoiding duplication; coordinating development partners; integrating institutional responses; mobilizing resources for continuity and building a critical mass to respond to these challenges.

Agenda item 7:

Social dimensions of regional integration and social protection measures in the Caribbean SIDS

The Director of Youth Affairs in Barbados made a presentation on approaches, challenges and solutions to social policies and youth in the Caribbean. He pointed to the high proportion of young people in the subregion, noting that on average about 18-20% of the populations were considered as youths, i.e. between the years 15-24.

He stated that in the Caribbean, youth social policy had generally followed a social welfare approach to youth development in the sense that policy attempted to fix the perceived 'problems of youth', such as unemployment, crime and violence, HIV/AIDS and substance abuse. He however proposed that what was needed was an assets-based or developmentalist approach which recognized the human resource potential that young people represented and which sought to mobilize that potential in the process of personal and national development. He identified challenges to this approach, such as the traditionalism in the subregion that favoured

the social welfarist approach, the economic approach to development and in particular the low profile of ministries of youth in the subregion.

The assets-based approach considered the unrealized potential of youth through social problems as a result of the four problems mentioned above. The following scenario was described as example: an unemployed Barbadian of 16 years of age represented an idle investment in excess of \$52,000 in terms of education expenditure alone; accordingly, a 20 per cent unemployment rate among 16 year olds would translate into \$41.4 million idle capital; if health care and other social services were included, the amount would easily reach \$100 million. In this view, youth problems should be considered a drain on resources that would otherwise be available for national development and should be freed by rehabilitation of those affected. He further noted that overall forgone productivity due to unemployment of youth had been estimated to be as high as 7 per cent of GDP in the Caribbean, while the economic cost of youth crime had been estimated to range between 1 per cent of GDP (Jamaica) to 11 per cent (St. Lucia), which further underlined the importance of a coherent youth policy.

However, in view of the latter, the presenter made the point that youth policy needed to be evidence-based and research-driven and that there was currently a symbolic lack of research in this field. He called for a rights-based and a strategic approach to youth policy and deemed it crucial that partnerships and alliances be strengthened and deepened and that political will and appropriate resource allocation be essential to the process.

The representative of CARICOM made a presentation on the social and legislative aspects of meeting the Caribbean Single Market, focusing on efforts in the area of labour and social security. Emphasis was placed on the fact that a regional labour market was a key element of the CSME and that the Treaty of Chaguaramas not only called for harmonious, stable and enlightened industrial relations, but also for the development of a social infrastructure. Thus Article 73 called, inter alia, for full employment, improved living and working conditions as well as adequate social security policies and programmes while article 75 outlined the need for a social infrastructure for the alleviation of poverty and for securing social stability and stated that Member States must promote the establishment and improvement of health, education, sports and social security institutions and facilities.

The presenter pointed out that reciprocal social security agreements among member States had already been promulgated, and therefore mobile persons did not end up in a disadvantaged position in terms of social security benefits as pension rights were portable. However, he noted that different qualifying conditions were proving to be a challenge and that harmonization was still required across the subregion. He also pointed to some of the current key issues which dealt with the pooling of investment resources and a regional research and actuarial capability.

It was stated that overall, social security in the CSME was in a healthy state, with high reserves characterizing most schemes; however, the presenter warned that changes were nevertheless required as the number of beneficiaries were increasing while the number of contributors was decreasing.

The representative of UNDP, Barbados, focused on the need for strengthened statistical capacities to monitor the Millennium Development Goals. The importance of having an efficient and effective monitoring framework in place was crucial in fulfilling the Goals. A monitoring framework required several statistical tools to make the Goals operational, such as defining groups at risk, measuring epidemiological factors and impacts on development; and modeling the interlinked nature of issues such as poverty and health.

Several reporting requirements were outlined, focusing primarily on data characteristics and calling for time and relevant data which at the same time could easily be collected, was transparent, reliable and impartial. Only with such data could evidence-based policy measures be taken. In dealing with data, the presenter however stated that the identification of needs and strategic planning frameworks were crucial in the implementation of programmes and that while quantitative data was frequently collected, it was often not well integrated with qualitative data.

The representative lamented that in recent times poverty assessments in the subregion had failed to live up to expectations. Data collection was performed at irregular intervals and due to limited capacities of human, technical and financial nature, the analysis of household surveys did not receive the necessary priority. Thus, poverty assessments and poverty reduction strategies were constrained by the lack of access to reliable high-quality data, inadequate poverty analysis, limited spatial analysis and absence of linkages among data collectors, analysts and policy makers.

A presentation of the Support to Poverty Assessment and Reduction in the Caribbean (SPARC) followed. This sought to provide a framework of support to Caribbean countries to strengthen national and regional capacities to systematically collect, analyze and disseminate social data for poverty assessment as well as critically inform social policy formulation at national levels. It was aimed at improving data collection and analytical skills which would in turn strengthen poverty monitoring systems to complement social development strategies and policies linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Agenda item 8: Regional social development framework

ECLAC presented an outline of a social development framework for advancing the social and sustainable development of Caribbean SIDS, which included a number of broad components necessary for the attainment of social development. These included the provision of an enabling environment, poverty eradication, equalization of opportunities for all, particularly those living with disabilities, equitable access to all social services, social integration, inclusion and cohesion and the expansion of productive employment.

The presenter explained that the framework embraced many of the recommendations emanating from the presentations of this dialogue, as well as those emerging from the high level follow-up meeting on ‘strengthening social development: The way forward for Caribbean SIDS’, which was the genesis for the dialogue. In addition, it built on the work of a number of partner agencies in response to international mandates.

Among some of the emerging issues identified for advancing social development was the need to address the needs of children in poverty, the elderly and youth at risk, reducing the risk to natural disaster, ensuring gender equity, strengthening the culture of evidence based policy formulation, increasing partnerships for development, and bringing greater coherence to social safety net programming across the subregion.

The participants were divided into two working groups to consider the emerging issues for deliberation in developing a regional social development framework. The groups were requested to undertake the following tasks:

- Prioritize list (defining short and medium term)
- Describe expected outcome
- Describe national level response required to achieve outcome
- Subregional support required to achieve outcome
- Identify agencies that could provide support

Agenda item 9: Plenary discussions

Reports of the working groups were presented and discussed. It should be noted that due to time constraints the working groups were unable to complete the tasks assigned to them and this is reflected in the development of the Framework. An outline of the Social Development Framework for advancing the social and sustainable development of Caribbean SIDS, the final outcome document emanating from the working groups and plenary discussions is attached at Annex I.

The meeting agreed that:

(a) The social development framework for advancing the social and sustainable development goals of Caribbean SIDS would be finalized and circulated to all ministers in a timely manner.

(b) The outcome of this meeting should be sent to all countries, including those that were not represented at the meeting.

(c) The CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) should be encouraged to assign a focal point for Social Development/Transformation to assist in raising the profile of ministers with responsibility for social development.

Agenda item 10: Closing remarks

The Deputy Director of ECLAC, in bringing the meeting to a close, thanked the Government of Antigua and Barbuda for hosting the meeting. He also thanked the Government of Barbados and the UNDP for their co-sponsorship, as well as the resource persons and participants for their attendance and valuable contributions.

Annex I

Social Development Framework for advancing the social and sustainable development of Caribbean SIDS

Further to Agenda item 8, building a *Regional Development Framework* of the High Level Ministerial Dialogue on Social Security and Sustainable Social Development in the Caribbean, held in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, on 14-15 June 2006; and Agenda item 4, *Recommendations for subregional and/or national level strategies*, of the High Level Follow-up Meeting to the United Nations General Assembly 60th Session 2005 World Summit: Strengthening Social Development – the Way Forward for Caribbean SIDS, convened on 13 October 2005 in Port of Spain, the Ministers with Responsibility for Social Development, representatives of Governments and Development Partners in attendance at both meetings, contributed to the development of this Social Development Framework.

The Framework is to act as a strategic guide to comprehensive actions necessary in the medium to short term which would advance the achievement of the MDGs and the sustainable development of Caribbean SIDS. The Framework has been informed by the “Brief for CARICOM Delegations attending the World Summit” and by previous deliberations such as those convened by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) on Social Protection, held in Barbados in 2004.

The framework acknowledges that, though similar, each country in the subregion faces differing challenges and therefore the policies to address these challenges are of necessity going to be different.

Despite these differences there are however, enough similarities for a subregional approach. At the High –Level Follow-up Meeting a call was made for a subregional framework for implementation of the MDGs, since there was recognition that each country, by itself would not be able to achieve the goals of the MDGs.

The Framework is mindful that developing countries require a certain “policy space” in order to achieve the MDGs. It therefore positions its areas of concern, within the context of member States striving to strengthen their macroeconomic management in order to achieve the requisite growth with equity. Such growth with equity is essential to achieving and sustaining development goals. The Framework is also mindful of the need to strengthen partnerships for development.

The Framework sets out five priority areas for consideration by policy makers in the social sector:

1. Sustaining investment in human capital;
2. Redesigning social integration and inclusion policies;
3. Extending social protection and compensation;
4. Ensuring evidence-based social protection and provisioning; and
5. Strengthening the enabling environment.

Consideration was also given to the adoption by countries of the CSM and the impact which the coming on stream of the CSME will have for all CARICOM member States and CDCC member and associate member States.

**Social Development Framework
for advancing the social and sustainable development of Caribbean SIDS**

Broad Area for Consideration	Recommended approach	Supporting Regional partners
Sustaining Investment in Human Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Strengthen cohesion in poverty reduction programming ii. Enable the informal sector iii. Ensure quality education and skills training are available iv. Embark on public education programmes to communicate the social concerns of communicable and non-communicable diseases, particularly the impact on productivity and economic and social costs. 	CDB CARICOM OECS ILO DFID UNDP UWI
Redesigning Social Integration and Inclusion policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Address the causes and consequences of crime and violence; ii. Deepen the thrust for gender equity and equality; iii. Reduce inequality and promote social justice; iv. Reduce stigma to HIV/AIDS, increasing prevention, treatment and care; v. Ensure social provisioning for deportees; vi. Provide support for the Kingston Accord which supports the promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities; vii. Address issues of youth development 	CARICOM OECS ECLAC UNDP UNIFEM UWI UNAIDS
Extending social protection and compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Seek to reduce the proportion of children living in poverty; ii. Reduce the risk to natural disasters; iii. Extend coverage of social security to include the self employed and 	CARICOM OECS

	<p>those in the informal sector;</p> <p>iv. Consider the use of mobile national insurance offices to increase coverage;</p> <p>v. Reform public health systems to increase quality, efficiency and availability.</p>	<p>CDERA</p> <p>UNICEF</p> <p>ECLAC</p> <p>UNDP</p> <p>PAHO/WHO</p>
Ensuring evidenced-base social protection and provisioning	<p>i. Collect household data on regular basis to assess how households address poverty, vulnerability and the effectiveness of social protection instruments;</p> <p>ii. Collect labour market data on a regular basis, including information on skills;</p> <p>iii. Engage in social impact assessments of poverty initiatives;</p> <p>iv. Develop strong, transparent and effective monitoring and evaluation tools for social protection initiatives;</p> <p>v. Support policy analysis and research.</p>	<p>CDB</p> <p>CARICOM</p> <p>OECS</p> <p>ILO</p> <p>ECLAC</p> <p>DFID</p> <p>UNDP</p>
Strengthening the enabling environment	<p>i. Introduce Policy Analysis units in ministries with responsibility for social development;</p> <p>ii. Strengthen the capacity of Ministries with responsibility for social development through examination of internal structures and functioning and ensure best use of personnel attached;</p> <p>iii. Share best practices of Management of Social Development Programming within and across the subregion;</p> <p>iv. Review legislation (with a view to regional harmonization) that address social protection, in light of the free movement of persons in the CSME</p>	<p>CARICOM</p> <p>OECS</p> <p>UNECLAC</p> <p>UNDP</p>

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