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MIGRATION IN THE CARIBBEAN: BRAIN-DRAIN - REMITTANCES - DIASPORA

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MIGRATION IN THE CARIBBEAN: BRAIN-DRAIN – REMITTANCES - DIASPORA

I. Overview of the Caribbean

Historically the nature, direction and magnitude of migration in the Caribbean have always been influenced by trends in global and regional socio-economic development. The slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries caused the first major immigration waves into the region. After Emancipation in the nineteenth century, workers began moving within the region in search of employment or better working conditions. In the twentieth century, the movement of labor to destinations within the region continued. The oil-boom in the 1970s attracted many migrants from the smaller and less developed islands to work in the oil refineries in the dependencies of the Netherlands and the United States, particularly the United States Virgin Islands, Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles. Also the booming energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago was a magnet for many in search of employment. With the global crisis in the energy sector in the 1980s the demand for labor declined and new employment opportunities were needed. The growing tourism sector in the Caribbean in the 1990s increased the demand for workers in the service sector which, in many instances, could not be supplied by the domestic labor force in some of the smaller Caribbean islands. As a consequence, workers from other islands and neighboring countries in Latin America, particularly Colombia and Venezuela, came to fill in the gaps.

With the move towards independence in the 1960s and 1970s, chances to easily move north decreased only temporarily. The growing demand for qualified labor in North America and, to a lesser extent in the United Kingdom, opened new windows of opportunities for the highly qualified. The United States, but also Canada and the United Kingdom introduced legislation favoring the admission of skilled workers to fill the gaps in selected sectors of the domestic labor market which cannot be filled by nationals. As a consequence, a mass exodus of professionals, particularly skilled women in health and education, has begun which threatens the already achieved accomplishments in health and education in the source countries.

This global trend towards greater willingness to accept and even to promote the free movement of qualified professionals can also be observed in the Caribbean, where the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) launched the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) in early 2005. This agreement provides for the free movement of a certain group of highly qualified nationals within the CARICOM¹ region.

With the selection and recruitment of people who meet certain predetermined profiles, chances to migrate legally have increased for a few while many semi- or unqualified laborers find it more and more difficult to legally enter the labor markets in the developed world.

¹ CARICOM member States are: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago. Associate members are Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos Islands.

The global economic crisis that began in the late 1990s along with a raising demand for national security has increasingly led to more restrictive immigration regulations at most destination countries. Nevertheless, regardless of tighter border controls, the continued and growing demand for cheap labor in the formal and informal sectors in North America and parts of Europe has continued to attract large numbers of migrants from poorer countries. This has increasingly become an incentive for illegal trafficking in human beings and unregulated and illegal employment and exploitation at the workplace. Undocumented and particularly vulnerable migrants work in unregulated conditions without access to protective recourse mechanisms and, quite often live in fear of being caught and deported. Consequently, a growing number of undocumented migrants in many instances are denied their basic human rights as, for example, liberty and security of person or discrimination to equal protection of the law.

In total, over the last 50 years the Caribbean, with a present population of about 37 million people (United Nations, 2003), has lost more than five million people to migration. Based on the most recent data on migration provided by the United Nations Population Division (United Nations, 2002) the net-migration rate² for the Caribbean is one of the highest worldwide, with a great variation within the region itself. The countries that have experienced the greatest losses over the past decades are Guyana, Suriname, Jamaica and Saint Lucia. New trends in return migration suggest that these losses may be temporary since many younger migrants, but also retirees who have spent their economically active lives in the Diaspora are showing considerable interest in returning to their home countries.

II. Extraregional migration and its impact on the Caribbean – the Brain-drain

In many Latin American and Caribbean countries, emigration seems to have helped to alleviate tensions between population trends and job creation as well as those arising from socio-political, ethnic and religious conflicts or from acute forms of environmental degradation. At the individual level, emigration has always been one option for seeking employment opportunities and personal training outside of the country of birth. In this connection, this type of emigration is a source of currency – through remittances – for the home communities and, moreover, makes it possible to establish links that favor the incorporation of technology and productive investment in the home country. Increasing job opportunities in certain sectors of the labor market along with the hope of a prosperous life make moving north an attractive option for many Caribbean nationals. Based on data provided by the United States Bureau of the Census³, of all foreign nationals living in the United States, 10 per cent are of Caribbean origin with the majority coming from Cuba (34 per cent) and the Dominican Republic (25 per cent) and more than 10 per

² *Net migration*: Net average number of migrants: the annual number of immigrants less the number of emigrants, including both citizens and non-citizens. *Net-migration rate*: The net number of migrants, divided by the average population of the receiving country. It is expressed as the net number of migrants per 1,000 population. Source: Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat, International Migration, Wallchart, 2002, ST/ESA/SER.A/219, Sales No. EO3.XIII.3

³ Immigration Statistics were retrieved in April 2003 from the following web-site of the Department of Homeland Security in the United States:
<http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/index.htm>

cent from Haiti and Jamaica. Of all migrants from South America, each 10th is originally from Guyana⁴.

Skilled migration can be considered as one of the most important results of emigration. In specialized literature, it is frequently stated that the basis for international migration is essentially an economic one, linked to the inequality in the distribution of job opportunities, income and material living conditions between countries. This not only operates in relation to potential migrants, but also to the supply that exists in the recipient countries; both continuous technological innovation and the search for increased competitiveness –for which labor flexibility is considered a prerequisite– are a factor in attracting migrants (ECLAC-CELADE, 1999b). Thus, in developed countries, there is a growing interest in importing human capital. For that reason, measures are promoted to attract immigration; in addition, wage levels are substantially higher than those offered in the countries of origin (CEPAL, 2002, Iredale, 1998). According to a most recent study published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), (IMF, 2006) for most source countries in the Caribbean the percentage reduction in the labor force is considerably large in the higher-schooling categories. The majority of Caribbean countries have lost more than 50 per cent of their labor force in the tertiary education segment, and more than 30 per cent in the secondary segment. About 12 per cent of the Caribbean labor force has migrated to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries over the period 1965-2000. Family ties, geographic proximity and the use of the same language make the United States and Canada and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom, a preferred destination for Caribbean migrants. With more specific regard to migration of qualified labor in health and education, Caribbean countries, like Jamaica, Cuba and Trinidad and Tobago, are strong exporters of such skills.

Whereas some governments seem to favor the exodus of their skilled in exchange for desired remittances to boost their economies, many countries suffer tremendous constraints in their capacities to provide equal, qualitative and affordable social services to their populations. Worse, the continued depletion of professionals deprives the region of its desperately needed qualified staff whose education and training have often been a considerable expense to its taxpayers. Since qualified professionals play a critical role in sustainable development, this continuous loss threatens to paralyze progress underway in the economic and social sectors in the region. In some cases, emigration may have also meant an increase in economic dependency with respect to external savings-remittances. Similarly, on the individual level, emigration can be a source of instability, frustration and discriminatory treatment.

Therefore more needs to be done to alleviate the impact of the brain drain and to provide for attractive options at home for those who would otherwise seek greener pastures abroad. Research has shown that in the case of health workers an improvement in pay and working conditions could act as an incentive to stay. Also national security, a raise in pensions, better child care, educational opportunities and recognition of the profession are known to be important (WHO, 2002). With the negative consequences of the brain drain becoming more severe, the understanding is growing in the developed world that the severe shortage of professionals in the

⁴ The regional grouping applied by the Census Bureau differs from that applied by ECLAC in so far as Guyana and Suriname are part of South America, while ECLAC includes these two countries in the Caribbean.

developing world has begun to hamper global development efforts⁵ in numerous less developed countries.

Since the Caribbean has been one of the more seriously affected regions, ECLAC has conducted a study on the brain-drain in the health sector in Trinidad and Tobago. This effort was undertaken to contribute to the better understanding of the causes and consequences of the brain-drain on the public health system and to provide the government with possible policy tools to address the root causes and cope with the losses (ECLAC/CDCC, 2003).

The analysis of the situation of nurses in Trinidad and Tobago has shown that the present crises in nursing is the result of a variety of push and pull factors⁶:

- (a) Inadequate remuneration and benefits;
- (b) Unfavorable working conditions;
- (c) Lack of management and leadership;
- (d) Insufficient training and professional development;
- (e) Insufficient career-perspectives;
- (f) Under-utilization of acquired skills;
- (g) Burn-out due to increased workload as a consequence of resignations;
- (h) Lack of recognition of profession

The growing shortage of nurses in the developed countries and the emerging gaps in the public health sector can be seen as the main driving forces for renewed efforts by the developed countries to enhance international recruitment of nurses. International initiatives to control recruitment and to stop poaching from already drained countries seem to have had only a temporary impact, since international recruitment has resumed from all countries and fast track immigration procedures have been put in place in the United States and the United Kingdom. While global efforts are undertaken to urge developed countries to refrain from overseas recruitment, source countries need to undertake more serious efforts to address the root causes for this mass-exodus of the skilled by implementing already existing policies and programs at the country level.

⁵ Significant progress in addressing the brain-drain in the health-sector has been made in the United Kingdom where, in 2001, a Code of Practice for ethical recruitment was put in place by its National Health Service.

⁶ A general weakness in the Caribbean is the lack of timely and reliable data. Particularly difficult is the task of gathering information on migrating nurses from various sources in the source and destination country. Data collection systems are weak and the available data do not allow for further in-depth analysis. No systematic system to monitor the in- and outflow of migrants has been established and only scattered information is available on the emigration of nurses. No data are available on return migration, which would be essential to systematically trace return and recurrent migrant flows. Also no coherent data have been collected to analyze the outflow of nurses over the past 20 years.

Similarly, with the growing nurse shortage in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, attractive job offers are made by those in need and consequently the pull factors identified earlier have become stronger over the past decades:

- (a) Attractive payments and benefits;
- (b) Modern human resources management;
- (c) Professional work-environment;
- (d) Possibility of permanent residency in the receiving country (Green-card in the United States);
- (e) Financial support for registration and immigration procedures provided by foreign employers;
- (f) Supportive network of family and friends;
- (g) Opportunities for professional development and career advancement;
- (h) Professional recognition;
- (i) Improved quality of life for self and family.

To ease the pressure on the public health system in Trinidad and Tobago, the Government has begun to recruit nurses from Cuba and the Philippines. While this is not a viable long-term solution, it provides immediate relief for those in need of health services.

III. Remittances and other socio-economic benefits of emigration

Remittances and in-kind contributions sent by migrants provide important benefits to the immediate family members as well as to the national economy back home. Countries like Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Haiti are among those that benefit most worldwide from remittances received. According to a recent study conducted by the IMF, the Caribbean is the world's largest recipient of remittances as a share of GDP (13 per cent of the region's GDP in 2002) (IMF, 2006).

However, the measurement of remittances is extremely imprecise and the value of the flows of non-monetary goods has to be estimated in most cases. Since many Caribbean migrants do not always use bank accounts for their monetary transfers, a significant amount of such flows moves unrecorded through informal channels. To increase the flow of in-cash remittances some countries have undertaken efforts to facilitate the transfer of monies by establishing remittance service companies (e.g. Western Union, Remittance Express, etc.) and by making efforts to negotiate lower fees for such services.

Regardless of the efforts already undertaken, more research is needed to gain insight into the flow of resources to better understand the flow of remittances. It cannot be assumed that all migrants remit to the same extent. While male migrants with dependants back home generally remit more and more regularly, young professional women with neither children nor spouse most probably will remit much less. Also people who intend to return home at some time later in their lives generally remit more than those who have left their country for good. It has been shown

(Elisabeth Thomas-Hope, 2005) that the sending of remittances and financial transfers are not necessarily part of the return movement, but they are certainly associated with the transnational nature of households and families and, in many cases, with the intension or idea of subsequent return. While, as stated above, remittances count for substantial proportions of the GDP in some countries in this region (for example, in Jamaica remittances are contributing more to the national economy than revenues from the traditional export-sector), these financial flows are not being used as efficiently as they potentially could be. The point has been made that the volume of remittance flows to the Caribbean is still lower than would be expected compared with other migrant societies, for example in Asia, and that the flow is currently too unpredictable to be used for national investment projects (Samuel, 2000).

Apart from mere economic benefits, countries also profit from a wider array of returns. For example, health and education facilities have been strengthened through people-to people partnerships. Overseas-based nationals, school alumni and professionals contribute time, technical assistance and equipment to support population and development services in their home countries. For example, teams of Jamaican physicians in the Diaspora periodically visit to perform operations, or donate much-needed equipment and supplies to support the health system back home. Similarly alumni of teachers' colleges provide scholarships for students. Last, but not least, Caribbean tourism revenues have also grown through these and other networks of nationals in the Diaspora. Experience in the Caribbean has shown that Diaspora contributions increase considerably, when natural disasters, such as hurricanes or floods affect a specific country. However, these efforts are in most instances not coordinated at the national level and depend pretty much on the goodwill of individuals. Therefore more needs to be done to identify ways to formalize such partnerships and to identify new areas for cross-border collaboration between Diaspora and home country. Strong migrant networks could also lead to more trade and investment and could also contribute to human capital formation in the source countries by raising the expected returns from education funded through remittances.

Further with the ageing of Caribbean migrants in the Diaspora and their desire to retire back home, the need to address return migration and reintegration of older migrants has become more urgent. Also quite a few of those retirees are economically well off and would be willing to invest in the region, provided that lucrative and sustainable opportunities are being offered. Apart from addressing only the return of wealthy retirees, there is a need to recognize the repeatedly expressed interest of younger nationals living abroad to return in order to establish a business or find employed work.

The realization on the part of some Caribbean governments that the Diaspora constitutes or contains human and economic resources that would be of value to national development and that the returning population has a potentially major contribution to make, has led to the establishment of programs in Jamaica, Barbados and St. Kitts-Nevis to facilitate and encourage return.

With respect to incentives and partnerships for development between Diaspora and home country, not much is known for the Caribbean and more attention needs to be given to efforts to strengthen and enhance already existing cooperation. What is already known is that according to studies undertaken in Guyana, Jamaica and Haiti (Global Equity Initiative, 2005) the overall environment relating to personal safety and financial security seems to be the main basis on which investment and project partnerships will succeed.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations for policy-oriented research

In countries with high unemployment and low wages, emigration of the less skilled quite often serves as a safety valve for the labor-market and remittances are seen to be a welcome boost to the national economy. Very different is the situation in the case of out-migration of the more qualified, as is the situation in many Caribbean countries, where the total losses by far outweigh the benefits gained through remittances (IMF, 2006). This is particularly true for countries where also advanced education is free or highly subsidized (as is the case in the Caribbean) and little can be done to ensure that the nation will directly benefit from these heavy investments into human capital.

There are two possible approaches countries could take to cope with the losses and to benefit from the out-migration of their skilled professionals:

- (a) Minimize the losses by trying to retain the highly skilled;
- (b) Seek to increase the benefits of emigration by adopting a 'Diaspora Approach', i.e. to engage the Diaspora in development:
 - to build networks of trade, tourism, and investment promotion;
 - harness its knowledge, skills and assets; and
 - attract higher and more efficient forms of remittances.

A. Minimize the losses by trying to retain the highly skilled

With close proximity to North America and strong historical ties to Europe and the growing need for specific highly skilled labor in these countries, retention of the skilled will continue to pose a challenge to Caribbean governments.

Talking to prospective migrants and the Diaspora, many indicate a strong desire to either stay in their native country or to even return from abroad. However, the majority of the countries in the Caribbean are seldom in a position to provide a conducive environment that would encourage such endeavours. Shortages of resources, inadequate policy and programming and, at times, the lack of a political will at the origin countries make it rather difficult for those who wish to return. A good example for this seems to be the situation with regard to the brain-drain in the health sector in the Caribbean. Considerable research has been undertaken to identify the root causes and consequences of the loss of health professionals in the region. Based on the insight gained, policies and programs have been adopted at the highest government echelons⁷, however, very little has been done on the ground to implement these strategies that could retain potential out-migrants in the country or even trigger the return of those who have left already for greener pastures abroad.

An area that has been neglected so far is to explore the use of as yet unexploited domestic resources to cope with the loss. Research could be conducted to identify the scope of additional

⁷ In 2001 the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Regional Nursing Body has, in collaboration with other partners in the region, defined a strategy for retaining adequate numbers of competent nursing personal. This strategy is based on the recognition that migration can not be stopped where principles of individual freedom are respected and supports the view that migration of nurses can be managed to the benefit of all stakeholders concerned.

domestic resources such as, for example early retirees from other professions who could be trained as helpers and assistants and thus allow the remaining professional staff to focus on critical areas in the provision of health care. Further, following the example of other countries, training for export could be one option, as well as lifting age restrictions and increasing the mandatory retirement age. Further, a review of licensing procedures could be beneficial to increase the domestic labor force.

B. Seek to increase the benefits of emigration

While the impact of the brain-drain on health and also to a lesser extent on education in the Caribbean has been the topic of several studies and initiatives, very little research has been undertaken to identify ways on how to better involve the Diaspora in the development of the region.

With regard to remittances, it is known that Caribbean countries are recipients of the largest proportion of remittances per GDP (IMF 2006) and that the largest share of these remittances seems to be spent on consumer items and, to a very limited extent geared towards more sustainable investments. In order to increase the long-term impact of remittances on the development of the source countries, more research needs to be undertaken to identify ways to strengthen already existing partnerships and to identify attractive new avenues for future collaboration between Diaspora and home countries that could constitute a win-win situation for all parties concerned.

In order to guide governments and policy makers in their efforts to identify critical areas for direct policy intervention, more research needs to be done in the following areas:

(a) With regard to the Diaspora:

- Assess socio-economic impact of both, monetary and non-monetary Diaspora engagement and remittances and their role in development;
- Establish skills and business databases and provide analysis of available information to fill the supply and demand gap in labor and investment markets, but also to support establishment of transnational trade and business networks;
- Identify mechanisms to engage in a constructive dialogue with the Diaspora to identify appropriate ways and mechanisms to promote their contribution to the region;
- Assess involvement of civil society, academia and the corporate sector in Diaspora contribution;
- Provide demographic and socio-economic analysis of Diaspora with regard to their propensity to remit.

(b) With regard to the source country level:

- Assess scope for investments in source countries and identify appropriate and attractive areas for investment of remittances – short and long-term – other than consumers goods;

- Identify possible partners for transnational trade and identify appropriate incentives to support transnational trade between Diaspora and home country;
- Identify remitting costs and find ways to reduce expenses for such transactions.

Based on the findings of the above suggested research, the following strategies for enhanced Diaspora involvement are suggested:

- Develop Diaspora groups and networks as a link between migrants abroad and source country;
- Encourage open dialogue with the Diaspora and establish formalized processes for continued information exchange (newsletters, websites, regular meetings, etc.);
- With the involvement of the education sector, establish brain-gain and brain-circulation networks to make use of the professional skills of nationals abroad;
 - Adopt official Diaspora policies;
 - Provide supportive environment in source country (personal safety, secure banking).

This brief discussion of migration in the Caribbean has shown that migration also in this part of the world does not happen in isolation. Caribbean islands and countries are geographically sandwiched between the North American continent and Latin America. This along with historic cross-border family-ties and often a common language had encouraged mobility within the Americas and also to Europe over the past decades. Given the fact that gaps in economic and social development among sending and receiving countries will persist, migration to destinations outside the Caribbean will continue. To address the negative consequences and to enhance the benefits for all stakeholders concerned, sustainable partnerships are indispensable to find viable solutions to the present challenges migratory societies are facing in the twenty-first Century. The credibility of these partnerships, their strength and universality will directly depend on the political will and commitment of all stakeholders concerned.

C. How to enhance local research capacities

The earlier discussion of migration and the brain-drain and possible areas for intervention to address the causes and cope with the consequences has shown that more research is needed at the source as well as sending countries levels. However, apart from the illustrated need for more detailed research on specific aspects of migration, the Caribbean generally suffers from a lack of sound and timely socio-demographic data. This is due to the fact that the majority of the Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS), particularly the English-speaking countries and territories, are lacking the financial and human resources to establish and maintain academic institutions at the national level. The conditions are rather similar with regard to national Central Statistical Offices (CSO) and other governmental bodies to regularly conduct basis data collection activities, data analysis and systematic reporting and dissemination of such information to the interested public and policy makers.

The most renowned Caribbean academic institution is the University of the West Indies (UWI), with campuses in Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. Other countries in the region, such as Belize, Suriname and Guyana have their own national universities, however with

rather limited financial and human resources. With regard to national CSOs, only some countries such as Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Belize, Guyana, Suriname and Saint Lucia have a national infrastructure to conduct population censuses and/or household surveys, though, in most cases still rather dependent on the international donor community. While some region-wide coordination mechanisms are in place⁸, particularly with regard to censuses and household surveys, not much is done to collect, store and disseminate systematically social as well as population and development related research conducted in the region.

While various efforts are undertaken to support the region to enhance data collection, management and dissemination, very little effort is devoted to establish a supportive and sustainable infrastructure for demographic and social research. To bridge this gap, it is suggested that a regional mechanism, possibly based on the German model of a social science infrastructure⁹ be established in the Caribbean. Such a mechanism should be built on already existing academic institutions in the region and should coordinate its activities with already ongoing regional coordination mechanisms, such as the CARICOM Statistics Subprogram.

Such a facility could provide the following:

- Promote harmonization of censuses and surveys in the Caribbean;
- Collect and archive survey materials (questionnaires, codebooks, data, etc.) conducted and collected in the region by academia, by national and international governmental agencies as well as data and information collected by national and international NGOs;
- Provide technical assistance to those countries with limited national capacities;
- Provide data analysis, reporting and dissemination;
- Connect the Caribbean subregion with other international institutions and global research initiatives (ISSP, etc.);
- Facilitate access to official government data (based on legal framework elaborated and established among the respective governments and the service provider as well as the service provider and the end user of the data);
- Coordinate research in the field;
- Function as a clearing house for research in population and social development;
- Promote regional and international partnerships in data collection, management and dissemination of analysis;

⁸ At the CARICOM level: The CARICOM Secretariat Statistics Subprogramme, which is in charge of the development of a statistical infrastructure within the Secretariat and throughout the region to collect, compile, analyse and disseminate statistical information on the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) to facilitate processes that can lead to effective decision-making. An advisory body to the Subprogramme is the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians, which is composed of the heads of Directors of CSO of CARICOM member countries. More details can be retrieved on the following website: www.caricomstats.org.

⁹ The German Social Science Infrastructure Services e.V. (GESIS). The GESIS provides services in support of social science research including development and supply of databases with information on social science literature and research activities as well as the archiving and provision of survey data from social research. Services including consultation on methodological questions, development of complex methods of empirical social research as well as GESIS' own long-term observation of social developments with the aid of these instruments are also available. GESIS was established in 1986 and is divided into three local centres. (<http://www.gesis.org/en/index.htm>)

- Enhance communication among various partners (website, newsletter, meetings);
- Institutionalize training and capacity building; and
- Promote collaboration with international organizations and bilateral donors.

D. Policy recommendations

To establish the recommended social research infrastructure, the following policies would need to be taken into consideration:

- Promote the recognition of the benefits of such an institution for the region as well as for individual countries;
- Adopt policies to guarantee support from the national level (financial as well as in human resources) to establish and maintain such an institution;
- Initiate legal reforms and/or initiate the establishment of a legislative framework at the national as well as institutional level to make data and research accessible to the institution as well as interested third parties.
- Continue to promote legislation to adopt harmonized approaches of data collection and survey mechanisms, data management and dissemination of results at the regional level;
- Integrate ongoing activities in the Caribbean (Household Survey Projects, Census 2010 project) into the institution.

Filling the gap in the area of sustainable institutionalized research should be seen as a priority for the Caribbean from both sides, the region itself as well as the international donor and research community. Various past and present efforts to build and strengthen national and regional capacities in demographic and social research as well as to collect, manage and distribute data and research within and outside the region have not been sustainable.

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