



ECLAC/CDCC Inter-Agency Meeting on the
Development of Social Statistical Databases and a
Methodological Approach for a Social Vulnerability
Index for Small Island Developing States
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REPORT ON THE INTER-AGENCY MEETING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL STATISTICAL DATABASES AND A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL VULNERABILITY INDEX (SVI) FOR SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES



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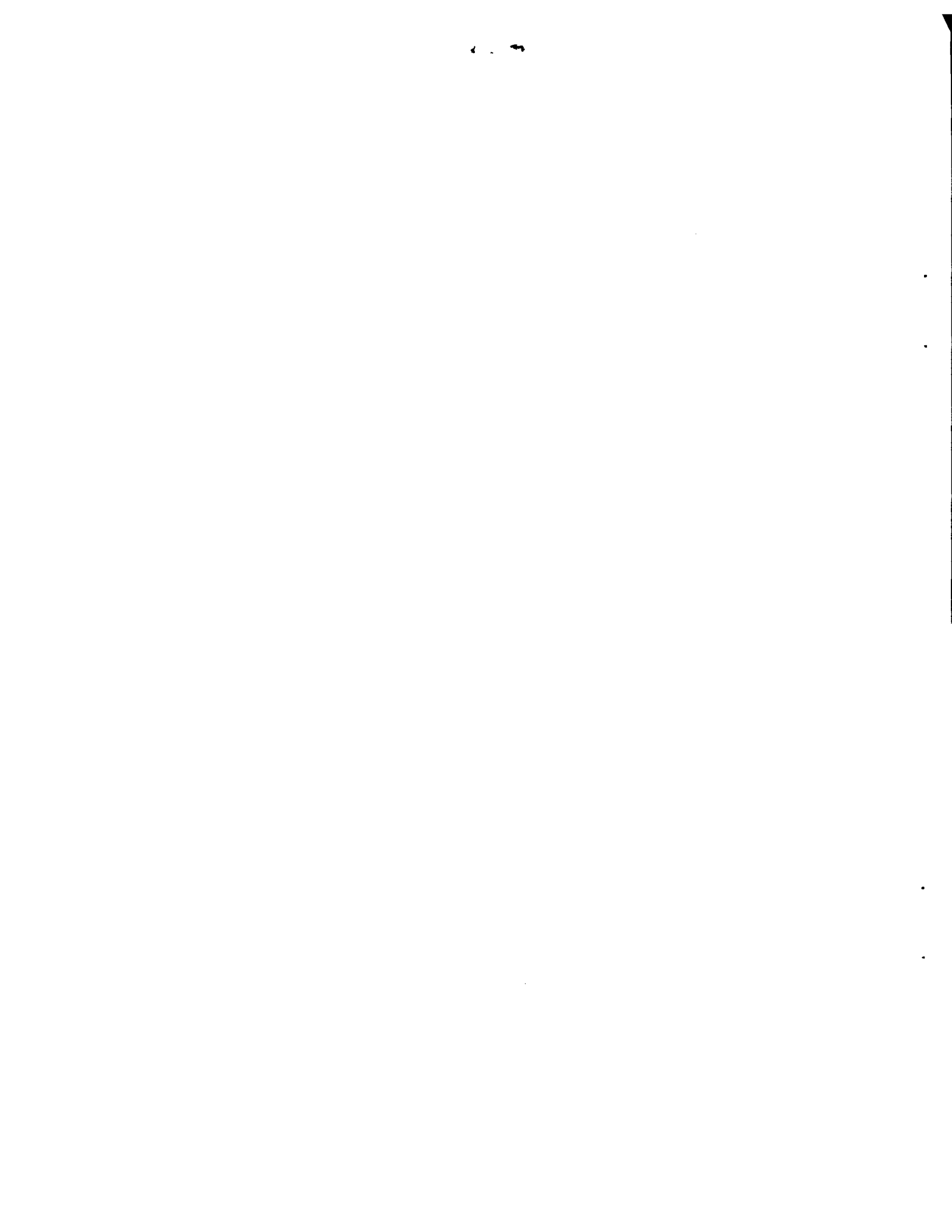
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**INTER-AGENCY MEETING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL
STATISTICAL DATABASES AND A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL VULNERABILITY INDEX (SVI) FOR
SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES**

Introduction

A one-day inter-agency meeting was held on 14 February 2001 at the conference room of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

Agency representatives from the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) were in attendance. The meeting was held to review and discuss, among other things, the recommendations from the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on the Development of Social Statistical Databases and the Development of a Methodological Approach for a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) for Small Island Developing States convened two days earlier. Also discussed were areas of, and modalities for, collaboration on the project. The list of participants for the meeting is annexed to this report.

The meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Introduction to the ECLAC/CDCC project
3. Review of recommendations from the ad hoc expert group meeting
4. Agency response to the project - in terms of similar exercises
5. Areas for collaboration
6. Modalities for collaboration
7. Closing

Agenda item 1
Welcome

Mr Lance Busby, in his capacity as Officer-in-Charge, welcomed participants intimating that the meeting was being held to maximise United

Nations resources, share information and avoid duplication with respect to the project entitled, the Development of Social Statistical Databases and a Methodological Approach for the Development of a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) for Small Island Developing States. He noted that on the previous two days, a meeting of experts was held on the project, which culled the conceptual issues pertaining to the project and that the day's proceedings would look at the operational aspects in light of the information gleaned.

Agenda item 2
Introduction to the ECLAC/CDCC project

The representative of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (ECLAC/CDCC) secretariat, and the Project's Coordinator, briefed participants on the project and noted that the project would be strengthened by an interdisciplinary in-house approach which would bring to the table many years of experience in data collection and analysis. The meeting heard that the main objective of the project was to improve the social conditions of persons living in ECLAC/CDCC member countries by strengthening the capacity of policy makers to formulate, implement and evaluate social policies. Complementary to several statistical projects currently ongoing in the region, it would enable regional governments and researchers to access a comprehensive database of social statistics of the ECLAC/CDCC member countries. To facilitate that process, the project would generate, among other things:

- (a) Fully searchable databases of socio-demographic statistics for all ECLAC/CDCC member countries housed and linked through the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat in Port of Spain;
- (b) An integrated data collection protocol on violence against women;
- (c) A published compendium of social statistics;
- (d) A website for dissemination of selected socio-demographic data sets;
- (e) A methodology for the construction of a Social Vulnerability Index; and
- (f) A manual for use in the construction and review of the SVI.

While data would be collected from 24 countries, it was revealed that at the onset, and as a test case, the SVI would be constructed for eight countries. This figure was however, subject to revision. The countries identified thus far for the construction of the SVI were Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, Haiti, The Netherlands Antilles, St Kitts and Nevis, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. It

was explained that the range of countries were selected to give the project the opportunity to work with differing levels of data sets – those that were in good shape and those that were not - and would allow for the sharing of skills among countries with stronger and weaker technical capacities.

The meeting was asked to note that the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States/United Nations Development Programme (OECS/UNDP) and the Caribbean Community/United Nations Statistics Division (CARICOM/UNSD) projects were currently focusing on the strengthening of social statistics at the national level, therefore, there was a need for collaboration to ensure the best use of all resources.

The meeting was informed that funds for the project had already been secured and that the project was a subregional one with most of its activities taking place at that level. The project was not intended to operate at the national level so it could not, for example, be expected to provide technical assistance to Central Statistical Offices (CSOs). It was understood that other regional projects were addressing the strengthening of the CSOs and that the funds were available in the subregion to assist countries in the management of their data sets. Participants were also asked to note that at the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting held two days earlier, concern was expressed about the quality of data in the subregion and therefore, assistance was not ruled out for countries experiencing extreme difficulty in getting their data sets ready for the subregional databases project. The Project Coordinator viewed the construction of the SVI as a long-term interactive process that would sensitise and generate interest within the subregion in the usage of social data. It was expected that later in the year a consultant would be hired and data would be in hand to commence work to facilitate the construction of the SVI.

Discussion

The meeting was informed that the UNDP and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) were already engaged in the construction of a catalogue of social indicators. It was suggested that one needed to be aware of the outputs of that and similar projects as well as any obstacles and problems that the other regional projects were experiencing. The ECLAC/CDCC secretariat indicated it was aware of the other projects and discussions were ongoing with the respective implementers.

Agenda item 3
Review of recommendations

The participants were informed of the recommendations derived from the ad hoc expert group meeting, which were:

- (a) There was need for a repository of census and social statistical data as it was noted that census data, in many instances, from as early as 1970, was no longer available;
- (b) There was need to make sure that governments were fully aware of the project;
- (c) Collaboration of all stakeholders should be sought;
- (d) Existing social databases should be reviewed;
- (e) There was need to examine gaps in the existing data sets;
- (f) Legislative issues which might affect the ability to obtain data should be taken into account;
- (g) There was need to increase statistical literacy;
- (h) There was need to address technical concerns such as the level of disaggregation of data, and collection of and access to data;
- (i) Both qualitative and quantitative data should be stored;
- (j) There was need for a comprehensive Meta Data Dictionary; and
- (k) There was need to standardise the data to be collected.

Discussion

Several participants expressed concern regarding the varied methods of data collection in the subregion and the use of extensive lists of indicators. It was suggested that the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat, as the repository, should make a decision on the standard of data it would receive.

Problems were noted, however, with the standardisation of data as this was affected by many variables. An example was made of the data collected from entry and departure cards in the subregion.

It was suggested that the standardisation of the data should start at the level of the CSOs, which could be influenced through the databases project but, more significantly, through the CARICOM Statistics Standing Committee.

The concern was raised that countries might not be able to produce the indicators requested. It was noted that the databases project would not collect indicators but raw micro-level data and that its users would calculate the indicators, as needed, thus reducing the burden on countries.

It was posited that the project needed to provide the technical framework at a very early stage, which would demonstrate that it had the potential and feasibility to service all levels of publics involved, such as researchers and planners. Participants also advised on the need to keep abreast of copyright and ownership issues which impacted on the access to information while also keeping in mind that policies changed over time and would also have some bearing on access.

Agenda item 4 Agency response to the project

The representative from the CYP gave a brief review of that organization's activities, indicating that it was mainly a training institution involved in working with youth and that it had been recently given a new mandate to facilitate youth empowerment. That was against the backdrop of the delivery of services by governments and agencies sometimes without adequate research, which actually exacerbated problems at the national level. The new mandate, therefore, included the development of a Youth Index. It was also exploring the establishment of a database, but it acknowledged that currently it did not possess the capacity and expertise to collect data. In that regard, it had prepared a project proposal, which justified the need for the database and a consultancy to assist in that area. It was also indicated that the CYP had a strong interest in the areas of youth and health, youth and education, youth and employment, youth and decision-making, particularly in risky circumstances such as HIV/AIDS. She also stated that the prospect for collaboration with the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat was encouraging as the organization was in need of training in data analysis, access to sound data and the other outputs highlighted in the project.

Discussion

The representative of the CYP was informed of some alternatives, which would assist that organization and was directed to the National Institute for Youth (INJ) in Chile, which established on-line an interactive database on youth supported by census data. It was, therefore, suggested that the CYP should investigate this system for possible adaptation, as the engine was movable and the parameters and users already defined. The system was recommended as a good demonstration of how aggregate data from different sources could be made available. It also illustrated how the needs of the CYP could be operationalised in the short term.

It was explained that once data was housed at the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat it would be accessible to all users. Once the project got on stream the CYP would have access to the data. It was suggested, however, that it might wish to build into its own project, funds for software needed for data manipulation and analysis and staff training.

PAHO/WHO

The representative from PAHO/WHO indicated that since the mid-1990s the organization had been providing indicators and data regarding the member countries under its purview. It had the capability to profile the countries' health information and assist in the construction of indicators, which had been used in several publications, such as 'Health Conditions in the Americas'. It was indicated that the organization would be able to provide data to the ECLAC/CDCC project such as those used in the generation of mortality data. The Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) was noted to be the guardian and repository for the Caribbean data, which fed into the mortality database. Organizations such as CAREC, with which PAHO/WHO collaborated, had developed surveillance systems for the region and for the monitoring and evaluation of health systems in member countries. This information could be accessed from its virtual library based in Brazil and accessible on the world wide web.

She further informed the meeting that issues of standardization with regard to the collection of data had been dealt with through the passage of resolutions and the predefinition of the data it wished to collect. In addition, PAHO/WHO had supported its members in the coding of data using ICD 10 (a specialised software). With respect to the issue of connectivity, it was noted that the data was now being transferred from DOS to a Windows environment.

UNESCO

The representative of UNESCO indicated that an Education for All Assessment was conducted in 1998 for 22 countries and an agreement was reached to systematise the collection of data in the area of education. So far, 20 of the countries produced reports which were noted to be of varying quality and in 2000 a Plan of Action was produced. That was the outcome of a ministerial meeting which also resulted in the following:

(a) Agreement at the subregional level for the development of the design of a network for a Caribbean Regional Educational Management of Information System (CREMIS), which consists of four parts;

(b) Acknowledgement of the need for ministers to dialogue on educational policies;

(c) Recognition of the need to share statistics and other information; and

(d) Acknowledgement of the need for accountability and a definition of accountability for parents and teachers.

A consultancy firm had been engaged to address the activities of CREMIS in the countries inclusive of the Dominican Republic. Further, it was indicated that a monitoring team for the project was established. This team consisted of representatives from member countries and agencies. The team, which meets regularly, would hold an annual workshop for statisticians. Such a meeting would be used as a platform for the sharing of information on 22 March 2001. At that forum, among other things, the consultant on information technology would share their needs assessment report on the Caribbean.

It was concluded that ideally, UNESCO would like to see its data made available to the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat.

ECLAC/CDCC - Domestic violence

The representative of the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat reported that on the subject of crime and violence, some areas of data collection remained unexplained and although reports were being compiled by the police, reporting was sporadic. The problem of standardization arose as statutes that impacted on the ability to collect this information varied from country to country. Given this scenario, the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat was now engaged in a project to harmonize the various sites from which data on crime and violence were collected, i.e., to establish a Data Collection Protocol to harmonize information received from the courts, police and health centres, by year's end. That could also lead to the collection of data on perpetrators and eventually, prisons. Work is already underway in Central America and the Caribbean in that regard.

UNDP

The representative from the UNDP Office in Trinidad welcomed the project and noted that the organization's work in Trinidad and Tobago and the Dutch Caribbean was hampered by the lack of data on, for example, domestic violence, education, health and sustainable livelihoods. It was noted, as well, that consultants were incognizant of the sources of data for work undertaken on behalf of the organization. A project to clean the 1996 Standard of Living Conditions Survey data for Trinidad and Tobago and a project to measure poverty in Trinidad and Tobago, to be completed by year's end, was in process.

UNICEF

The representative of the UNICEF Office in Kingston, Jamaica, noted that in 1996 its mid-decade review focused on the measuring of achievements and since then efforts had been made to address quality and process. It was noted that that activity was a challenge. The meeting was advised that indicators developed so far could be viewed on the website www.childinfo.org. The review was highly participatory in approach and at the end of the decade all countries that participated were expected to complete a report which would feed into a subregional report. This would result in the standardization of the data. At a special session in September 2001, the Kingston Consensus on Children is expected to be signed in which countries will agree to existing indicators. At that time, work would have also begun on the development of new indicators. The UNICEF representative also spoke of the Social Indicators Monitoring System (SIMS) Project in Jamaica and the development of a digital database on which UNICEF is hoping to collaborate. It was noted that this would be an excellent example for the ECLAC/CDCC databases and should be examined. The meeting was also informed of several workshops to be held on the development of databases, data analysis and report writing and of ongoing work with the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI) in the area of nutrients and children with the possibility of the development of a gender development index and a gender-mainstreaming manual.

UNIFEM

The representative of the UNIFEM Office, Bridgetown, Barbados, noted that his organization faced many challenges in collecting information on crime and prisons. He outlined many constraints. Most significant to UNIFEM however, were those which were complicated by the political process involved in obtaining permission to access information. He outlined a process in which information held by the Police Commissioner required permission from the Attorney-General for release. The issue of confidentiality under the Statistics Act, the difficulty experienced in obtaining straightforward information from the public sector and the non-cooperative attitude of the private sector all impacted negatively on the collection of data. Even when the law provided for the mandatory release of information, difficulties were experienced where, for example, employers furnished national insurance information in aggregate form rather than individually to hide under-payments. He suggested that the CARICOM/UNSD project highlighted the need for countries to be given guidance with respect to the identification of indicators and not just broad requests. Exact meanings and calculations of what they were being asked to supply would be helpful. Data on employment was too often not disaggregated by sex. This made any gender analysis impossible.

Discussion

With respect to the definition of baseline data, it was suggested that an agreed period was needed to facilitate comparability. Agreement could be reached through an enhanced working relationship between government, stakeholders and agencies. In that respect it was noted that the Government of Jamaica had a good relationship with the University of the West Indies (UWI) and UNICEF Jamaica which augured well for the success of UNICEF's projects in Jamaica. To underscore this point, UNICEF's representative informed participants of how this level of relationship was nurtured through the sharing of information. Members of the Human Resources Council in Cabinet attended UNICEF's meetings and vice-versa. Further, UNICEF promoted the continuity of its relationship with government and managed the changes in government by informing all political parties of its activities.

It was suggested that the databases needed to be dynamic, i.e., have the capacity to capture changing profiles in the region. For example, in the next 20 years, it was anticipated that mental disorders would increase but as yet no data were being generated on this situation.

It was suggested that one of the key challenges to the project lay in the organization of the data rather than in its collection. The project was considered timely as many countries were now involved in the 2000-2001 census.

Concerning the issue of missing data, the meeting was reminded that the Meta Data Dictionary would allow the user to know what was missing and how new values were constructed. There was consensus, that it was better to input a value that was 90 per cent correct rather than no value at all.

Agenda item 5 Areas for collaboration

The representative of PAHO/WHO pledged to forward any information that was generated by the organization. She offered, time allowing, to participate on the advisory board if one were established, for the SVI project. She suggested that perhaps the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat should send the brief of the project to all the agencies and the project countries and ask them to advocate for the project at the government level. It was also suggested that agencies should table the brief in their host countries so that agreements could be reached on access to data. Further, that ECLAC/CDCC should market the project within the ECLAC system, noting that the output of the project was itself a marketing tool as researchers and planners were always looking for information. In that light it was agreed that the first generated compendium and the easy access to and use of data would also be a strong marketing tool.

Agenda item 6
Modalities for collaboration

It was suggested that this project needed to operate at two levels, i.e., the line ministries and CSOs. Lessons should be shared on the uses and advantages of social data and thus the need for the development of the project. Information on the project should also be shared with the CARICOM Standing Committee of Statisticians, planners, policy makers, both public and private, consultants, academics and civil society.

Agenda item 7
Closing

It was generally agreed that the way forward was to continue with the project as planned, sharing information on the project, collecting data and hiring personnel for the project, such as the IT consultant.

It was suggested that in the documentation, there was a need to identify and record the various mechanisms for data collection, what data were published and where they resided. Another suggestion was that the work of the European Commission of Statistics, which had an updated Meta Data Dictionary, funded through the Department for International Development (DFID), should be examined. The idea being to start with a sound and existing Meta Data Dictionary and modify it, where necessary, for the purpose of the SVI. It was also suggested that the Bureau of Standards should be involved in the development of the Meta Data Dictionary.

Participants were thanked for their contributions and the meeting was brought to a close after the usual exchange of courtesies.

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