

Second Meeting of the Ad Hoc Advisory Panel
on the construction of the Social Statistical
Databases Project
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**REPORT ON THE SECOND MEETING OF THE
AD HOC ADVISORY PANEL ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE
SOCIAL STATISTICAL DATABASES PROJECT**

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Introduction

The second meeting of the Ad Hoc Advisory Panel for Social Statistical Databases (SSBDs) was held on 1 October 2001 in the Conference Room of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (ECLAC/CDCC) office in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

Attending the meeting were the members of the panel, namely: the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat; the Central Statistical Office (CSO), Saint Lucia, and the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC). Also in attendance were: the Information Technology Specialist of the Project; the Data Manager; staff members of the Social Development Unit, the Statistics Unit and the Documentation Centre, Computer Information Systems of the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat. The representative of the Latin America and the Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE), Santiago, and, one observer from the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Development (CIRD) were also present. Absent was the Central Statistical Office, Trinidad and Tobago. The list of participants is annexed to this report.

The following agenda of the meeting was discussed and adopted:

1. Report on the status of the Project (Administrative)
2. Report on the construction of databases:
 - Identification of data housed
 - Standardization of data sets – Labour Force Survey
 - Demonstration of database Prototype
3. Website development
4. Schedule for further development of the Project
5. Report from CELADE on the REDATAM database
6. Report from CARICOM on the activities of:
 - CARICOM/UNSD meeting
 - Statistical meeting in the Bahamas
 - COHSOD
7. Closing

Agenda item 1:
Report on the status of the project

The ECLAC/CDCC secretariat reported on the following activities, which were scheduled during the first meeting of the Panel on 6 July 2001.

(a) The representative of the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat met and visited with key stakeholders in Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the five countries selected for the initial collection of social statistical datasets. The Panel was informed that the requested datasets from these countries were received, plus one other - Puerto Rico. Firm promises were also made with regard to the delivery of other datasets and disaggregated datasets, where necessary;

(b) The project had already begun the second phase in the collection of datasets from the Bahamas, Guyana, St Kitts and Nevis and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. There is also an attempt to collect datasets from one associate member State in each phase of the data collection process. The Netherlands Antilles is the country identified for the second phase;

(c) A data manager was contracted;

(d) The following equipment was identified and ordered for the Project: one server, two computers, one printer, one scanner and software. Delivery was delayed due to the events of 11 September 2001 and was expected by the end of October; and

(e) Financially, 20 per cent of the first year's budget has actually been spent. The delivery of the project equipment by the end of October will increase this expenditure to 40 per cent of the budget.

Agenda item 2:
Report on the construction of databases

Mr. Kerwyn Roach, Information Technology Specialist on the project, reported on the inventory of datasets collected, and the data conversion exercise that had taken place, to date.

Identification of data housed

(a) Puerto Rico:

(i) Census summary data in Excel format for 1990; and

(ii) Standard of Living Conditions (SLC) summary data in Excel format for 1999-2001

- (b) Saint Lucia:
 - (i) SLC in Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) format;
 - (ii) Labour Force Surveys (LFS) in SPSS format for the following years (The number behind the years represent the number of this survey conducted within the year.): (1994;1), (1995;2), (1996;2), (1997;2), (1998;2), (1999;3), (2000;2); and
 - (iii) Census in REtrieval of DATA for small Areas by Microcomputers (REDATAM)+ G4 formats for 1991.
- (c) Trinidad and Tobago:
 - (i) Census in Redatam WinR+ format for 1990.
- (d) Belize:
 - (i) LFS in Integrated Microcomputer Processing System (IMPS) 4.1 and 3.1 for the following years (1993;2), (1994;2), (1995;1), (1996;1), (1997;1), (1998;1), (1999;1); and
 - (ii) SLC in IMPS 3.1 for 1995;
- (e) Jamaica:
 - (i) Census in IMPS 3.1 for 1990
- (f) Barbados:
 - (i) LFS summary data in Excel format for 1994-2000;
 - (ii) Census data in SPSS format for 1990; and
 - (iii) SLC in SPSS.

Standardisation of datasets - Labour Force Survey

Mr. Roach explained to the participants that the datasets, which were primarily in three formats SPSS, IMPS and REDATAM would be converted into Microsoft SQL – the target database. He also explained that until the software for the target database was acquired (delays due to the September 11 incident), Microsoft Access was the conversion tool that was most readily available and would do the job.

He further explained the conversion process as a five-stage process involving:

(a) **Inputting the files into Microsoft Access and generating a variable list.** At this stage he explained some of the technical issues that arose, including differences in variable names among surveys within the same country, the need to manually inspect files for inconsistencies, and the loss of the data dictionary during the conversion process;

(b) **The creation of a survey standard.** The representative of the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat reported on the challenges arising in conducting the exercise to harmonize survey data across countries. These included the differences in meaning of variables that had the same names; the similarity in meanings of variables with different names; and the need to harmonize value labels and responses in such a way as to allow for comparative research within the subregion. A draft document of the first attempt to harmonize the LFS of Saint Lucia and Belize was presented to the meeting for discussion;

(c) **Data standard conversion.** Mr. Roach demonstrated the conversion process using the standardised data to the final output - the merged datasets of the social indicators of several countries. During the demonstration, he pointed to the importance of harmonising and merging the datasets of the specific countries, based on the modifications that might have been made to their surveys from year to year, before harmonising and merging the available datasets of countries within the subregion. He also spoke of the importance of providing hard copies of questionnaires and variable lists when countries provide datasets for the project. He further explained that in some cases the data dictionaries would have to be rebuilt since they might be lost in the conversion process depending on the software used to house the data;

(d) **Cross tabulation queries.** In speaking on the generation of reports arising out of database queries, Mr Roach explained and demonstrated the possibilities of obtaining outputs of up to three rows by one column, which allows for increased interactive possibilities for users of the database.

Mr. Roach ended his presentation by outlining the equipment that was needed and being obtained for the Project.

Comments

Participants expressed surprise in some cases, at the progress made in the collection of country datasets.

The question of accessing smaller datasets housed by departments other than the CSO was also raised. It was decided that for the construction of the social databases, the Project would concentrate initially on collecting population census data, as well as LFS and SLC datasets. The representative

of the CSO in Saint Lucia also made the point that in cases where the sample sizes were small, weights would have to be used in order to raise the data to the level of the population.

The importance of constructing metadata for the statistical databases was also reiterated and it was recommended that the Project work closely with Directors of Statistics to ‘fine-tune’ the construction of such.

Agenda item 3:
Website development

The Database Manager on the Project conducted an analysis of websites that presented statistics on Caribbean indicators of social development. He indicated that 13 websites were examined and analysed for: (a) ease of use and level of interactivity; (b) use of graphics; (c) format; and (d) layout. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) rated very highly in their adherence to the rules of proper Human Computer Interface Design (HCID). They all provided a wealth of data and information, while maintaining an appropriate image and providing a level of interactivity and ease of use for visitors to the site. As a result, the Data Manager recommended that the SSDBs take the following actions:

(a) Use UNICEF and ILO as benchmarks for the development of the website for the SSDBs Project. UNICEF maintains a good design and attractive site that is easy to navigate, while ILO serves as an example of the type of statistical data retrieval – a fully searchable online database that should be employed;

(b) The Project website should provide a single location where most, if not all, of the social development indicators could be found;

(c) Ensure that data already existing on other sites does not conflict with data on the Project website;

(d) Present data dynamically through the use of an online database;

(e) Start to collect images related to the type of data to be displayed;
and

(f) A site search engine should be implemented and menus should be used to develop interactivity.

Comments

In discussing the establishment of the website for public access of the databases, participants raised issues of ownership of data, mechanisms of cost recovery and formats for publication of data on the web site. It was agreed that these issues spoke to the need for the establishment of data dissemination standards in the subregion. With regard to the question of copyright, it was categorically stated that the data remained the property of the respective countries from which the data had been obtained.

Agenda item 4: Schedule for further development of the project

The following activities were scheduled for further development of the Project. They included:

- (a) Collection of the remaining datasets from the five countries in the initial phase of the project;
 - (b) Begin collection of datasets from the next five countries identified for the second phase of data collection;
 - (c) Review of technical assistance needed by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to get their Labour Force Survey data in electronic format;
 - (d) Create a website for the databases project by November;
 - (e) Publish the document of harmonized data by the end of November;
- and
- (f) Organize a third meeting of the Ad Hoc Advisory Panel by the end of the year.

Agenda item 5: Report from CELADE on the REDATAM database

The representative of CELADE spoke of the project in which he had created a web interface to the REDATAM datasets, allowing easier access to data via the internet. This project was in the pilot stage, with Saint Lucia as the only Caribbean country involved so far. The objective of this project was to build a harmonized data set for the 1980 and 1990 Population datasets. The representative of the CSO in Saint Lucia spoke of the usefulness of this interface and its user friendliness. He explained, however, that maintenance of this database would require a few programming skills, which could be imparted via training of relevant personnel. The meeting agreed that when fully up and

running, this website could be linked to the website containing the Social Statistical Databases of this office.

Agenda item 6:
Report of CARICOM meetings

The representative of the CARICOM Secretariat spoke of the following meetings that were being held in October by CARICOM, which were of direct relevance to the Project:

(a) **Council on Human and Social Development (COHSOD), Georgetown, Guyana, 3-5 October 2001** – One of the objectives of this meeting would be to inform ministers and other policy makers as to the state of social statistics within the region and advise on steps that were being taken to strengthen the collection and maintenance of such data. The meeting was informed that the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean was invited to make a presentation to participants about the Project;

(b) **The United Nations Statistical Department (UNSD)/CARICOM Meeting, St Georges, Grenada, 8-12 October 2001** – This meeting was convened to discuss aspects of the UNSD/CARICOM Project, including issues of gaps and deficiencies of social statistics in the region; and

(c) **Ninth Meeting of the Regional Census Coordinating Committee (RCCC) and Twenty-sixth Meeting of the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians (SCCS), Nassau, The Bahamas, 22-26 October 2001** – One of the issues that will be discussed at this meeting is the harmonization of data.

Agenda item 7:
Closing

It was suggested that the third meeting of the Advisory Panel be held in mid-December. The date was to be finalised by the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat. The ECLAC/CDCC representative brought the meeting to a close by thanking participants for their contributions.

Annex I

List of participants

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ECLAC system

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