

Ad Hoc Expert Group to Consider
Recent Implementation Exercises of the
GDDS of the IMF and Implementation in other
Caribbean Countries
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
15 October 2001

GENERAL
LC/CAR/G.663
8 November 2001
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**REPORT OF THE AD-HOC EXPERT GROUP MEETING TO
CONSIDER RECENT IMPLEMENTATION EXERCISES
OF THE GENERAL DATA DISSEMINATION SYSTEM
OF THE IMF AND IMPLEMENTATION
IN OTHER CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES**

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Agenda item 3.....	2
Agenda items 4 and 5.....	3
Agenda item 6.....	6
Closing session.....	6
Annex 1: List of Participants.....	7

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Introduction

The meeting was opened by Mr. Lancelot Busby of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean. In providing a background to the General Data Dissemination System (GDSS), he recalled the failure in 1994 and 1995 of the statistical systems as monitored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to provide an early warning of the collapse of the Mexican and Asian economies. He explained that the meeting was a rather small ad-hoc expert group and that its composition was dictated in the final analysis by a restrictive funding situation. He thought that the usefulness of the meeting lay in the sharing of experiences with those countries that had gone through the GDSS implementation exercise. The report would be sent to all statistical offices and could form the basis for accelerated cooperation in collaboration with the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre (CARTAC), the technical assistance arm of the IMF in the Caribbean. The meeting adopted the draft agenda, making it the agenda of the meeting. It was as follows:

1. Registration of participants
2. Introductory remarks and introduction of agenda L. Busby
3. Presentation of Consultant's paper on Implementation of the General Data Dissemination System in Caribbean countries K. Coker
4. Discussion on Consultant's paper. Discussion will range from an elaboration of country experiences in preparing the metadata to problems of working with other national colleague organizations to get the exercise done. Introduced by ECLAC
5. Lessons learnt by countries that have implemented the GDSS Introduced by Consultant
Technical assistance needs of countries in order to bring them up to the stage of readiness to implement the GDSS
6. Closing session L. Busby

Agenda item 3
***Presentation of Consultant's paper on Implementation
of the General Data Dissemination System in Caribbean Countries***

Mr. Kenneth Coker, Consultant, presented the lead document entitled “*Experiences Gained from GDDS Compliance in the English-Speaking Caribbean*”. Mr. Coker brought to the attention of the meeting the importance of adhering to internationally agreed standards and referred to the work of the United Nations, the World Bank and the IMF in establishing standards. In his review of the background to the GDDS, he recalled the unexpected economic crises of 1994 and 1995. The IMF concluded that a more reliable system would have provided an early warning of the problems that were to surface later. The GDDS sought to put in place timely, reliable, comprehensive and accessible data that would lead to sound decision-making and the avoidance of turbulence in financial markets. He drew attention to the important lesson that globalization presented a challenge to data producers to provide more data at a more detailed level to support decisions that would have to be taken. To that extent, he cited the fact of inter-country interdependence in statistics.

The consultant outlined the chronology of the development and use of the GDDS, which he observed to be a structured process. The process observed as key objectives the following:

- (a) Coverage, periodicity and timeliness; and
- (b) Quality

The data dimension of the GDDS addressed the importance of **comprehensive frameworks** (economic and financial sectors, i.e. the real sectors, the fiscal sector, the financial and the external sectors) and **indicators**.

The consultant explained that participation in the GDDS was voluntary, but that countries should consider it absolutely necessary to subscribe to the system. He explained that the first act of subscription would be the appointment of a country coordinator. The country, through committees, would implement the GDDS as a framework for statistical development. After this, the committee would begin to prepare its metadata for inspection and improvement, if necessary, by the IMF advisers.

The metadata exercise recognized the need for interdepartmental collaboration. The GDDS implementation exercise ensured such collaboration and encouraged the sharing of data. The consultant stressed the importance of metadata as they could be used to indicate areas of statistics that could bear improvement and that could possibly attract technical assistance. He advised the meeting that the maintenance of the GDDS was more important than the initial compliance exercise. The GDDS should be viewed as being a mere stepping-stone to the more demanding Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS).

Agenda item 4

Discussion on Consultant's paper including an elaboration of country experiences in preparing the metadata and problems of working with other national colleague organizations to get the exercise done.

and Agenda item 5:

Lessons learnt by countries that have implemented the GDDS and technical Assistance needs of countries in order to bring them up to the stage of readiness to implement the GDDS

The countries that had gone through the initial GDDS implementation exercise shared their experiences with the other participants.

Barbados established a committee and appointed a GDDS Coordinator from the Ministry of Finance (formerly Economic Affairs). The Coordinator was assisted by representatives from the Barbados Statistical Service and the Central Bank. The committee verified that there existed an ongoing problem of non-standardization of definitions in the system. The committee developed the required metadata through visits to various ministries and departments, including the Statistical Service, which was developing metadata for the time series on external debt. The data producing organizations were being forced to review their definitions and methodologies and the Statistical Service was actively engaged in assisting those agencies to do so.

The committee met on an ad hoc and an "as-needed" basis. Their collaboration tended to be on a "round robin" basis. The representative of Barbados stated the need for Barbados to take a fresh look at the Statistical Ordinance as well as other legal instruments backing data collection in other agencies. That had become necessary in the light of contemporary globalization. In addition, the participant observed the need for occasional seminars on methodology.

In **Jamaica**, the GDDS committee was being coordinated by the Bank of Jamaica, with membership coming from the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN) and including representation from the National Accounts Division, External Trade and Consumer Price Index Divisions. The IMF had looked at the metadata available and had made suggestions for their update. Inter-agency cooperation was of a high standard. The country was adhering to the target dates as set at the meeting in St. Kitts/Nevis. There had been no work done on metadata on socio-demographic statistics. Establishment statistics were somewhat weak as private sector cooperation had left much to be desired. Production statistics were poor as the manufacturing sector was in decline and moving out of Jamaica. The participant registered the need for technical assistance in the inauguration of a producer price index. Jamaica was implementing the 1968 version of the System of National Accounts (SNA) and was in the process of migrating to the SNA 1993 version. Technical assistance was being received from Canada and Sweden. The Consumer Price Index was in need of revision and a household expenditure survey would be conducted in 2002 to provide the data for the revision exercise. On the question of release dates for data, ministers in key areas were given the data two days prior to its release. A study of the Statistics Act was being made with a view to devising a method of achieving greater compliance by the private sector.

The meeting discussed the merits and de-merits of applying penalties for non-compliance as opposed to educating and sensitizing all stakeholders into providing the best data possible in

response to government's requests. The participant from Jamaica believed that Jamaica would be in a position to subscribe to the Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board (DSBB) in 2003.

Guyana supported the need to establish the principle of developing the metadata, especially in the face of changing leadership of the various organizations. The representative of Guyana observed the need for his organization to put the issues of methodology to the public. By that means, the private sector could also be influenced. In Guyana there was a relatively new interest in the social sectors and in poverty alleviation. There had been a swing back to macroeconomics as a reaction to the possibility of recession. The participant observed that the Statistical Ordinance was outdated. So, too, were the penalties prescribed. Confidentiality of data had been breached, possibly because confidential data had been passed over to third parties without the knowledge or agreement by the Bureau of Statistics. The metadata exercise was important to bring about a measure of unification locally while maintaining compatibility with the rest of the world. The Zambia solution to achieving compliance with the Statistics Act was put to the meeting. Zambia presented compliance certificates to the firms that supplied data to the Statistical Office. Not having such a certificate would mean that certain vital permissions would not be given to the firm in breach.

The Bureau of Statistics in Guyana was working with the United Nations Statistical Division in New York to transform the traditional approach to the National Accounts to the SNA '93. Parallel to that exercise, the metadata was being written for the first time.

St. Kitts and Nevis was part of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) effort to implement the GDDS. It attended a meeting at the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) with two representatives of the IMF and one representative of each OECS country. In St. Kitts and Nevis, the Coordinator was an official of the Ministry of Finance. The Committee was completed with representation from the Statistical Office and the ECCB. The Committee had examined the metadata for the ministries of education and health. Metadata for the other sectors had not yet been completed because of competing work assignments of staff at the statistical office. Timeliness of data supply was problematic as data from government offices other than the Statistical Office were late in coming. Among the reasons for the lateness were delays in production data and in some manufacturing data as the relevant establishments had head offices outside the country and had to wait on data from the head office to pass on to the Statistical Office. Quarterly GDP estimates were not yet prepared. The national accounts estimates were prepared under the guidance and with the active support of the ECCB. St. Kitts and Nevis signaled the need for training in national accounts and balance of payments statistics. Not much progress had been made in the move to the SNA 1993 version.

Antigua and Barbuda had named a GDDS coordinator one week after the IMF meeting in St. Kitts and Nevis in 1999. To date, there had been one full meeting of the committee, after which meetings were held on an "as-needed" basis. Antigua and Barbuda followed the Saint Lucia model. The national accounts and balance of payments were coordinated throughout the OECS by the ECCB. Concepts and definitions were therefore unified in the OECS countries. The Ministry of Planning coordinated the GDDS exercise. The committee had received support from agencies, especially in the area of social data. The ministries and agencies shared their metadata more easily than their statistics. Some of Antigua and Barbuda's metadata had been

placed on the Bulletin Board. Antigua and Barbuda had prepared trade data with respect to 1999 and was attempting to introduce the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA). Antigua and Barbuda registered the need for technical assistance in many areas.

Trinidad and Tobago subscribed to the GDDS. All divisional heads who prepared statistics on the real sector decided to post their reports on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), producers' prices, national accounts and their quarterly production data, as well as the related metadata for incorporation into the GDDS exercise. Trinidad and Tobago, in addition, prepared a note on the procedures governing the release of data and reports. Nothing further developed. There existed the need, therefore, to revive the exercise. The representative of Trinidad and Tobago stated that the Statistical Office had no autonomy and needed a measure of operational independence to achieve more. The Central Bank, on the other hand, had produced metadata for the financial, fiscal and balance of payments statistics as well as the quarterly GDP estimates. It was awaiting the Central Statistical Office (CSO) portion of the metadata to complete the GDDS compliance exercise for Trinidad and Tobago.

Some discussion followed the presentation of country experiences with the GDDS.

The perennial problem of non-response to data collection activities was cited as a major cause for late or deficient statistics. Participants discussed the imposition of penalties for non-compliance but agreed that a combination of education programmes, the development of informal interpersonal relationships with the private sector and subtle penalties might be the preferred way in which to treat non-compliance with the Statistics Act.

Participants all acknowledged the need for the preparation of metadata and the establishment of standards of operation so that the integrity of the Statistical Offices would not be compromised.

Some participants were seeking solutions to their problems of data collection from remote areas where access posed a serious problem.

Several participants described their data release procedures. In no case was there overt interference by government in the release of data, but some country situations were not as clear and free as others in respect of the release of data.

In response to the indication that there were still instances of agencies not sharing their data freely with other ministries, a model for greater networking was shared by ECLAC with the participants. The sharing of information in the public service should be institutionalized and should not depend on personal relationships between heads of departments, as those could change at any time.

The representative of Antigua and Barbuda informed the meeting that that country was in the middle of a public sector reform project. She saw the relevance of the GDDS despite the ongoing project objectives.

Agenda item 6
Closing session

Mr. Lancelot Busby of ECLAC thanked the participants for a day of intense participation and sharing of information. He expressed the feeling of the participants that the discussions had been illuminating and useful and looked forward to further sessions of the kind. He promised that he would engage in discussions with the IMF, through CARTAC, in the interest of advancing the Caribbean compliance with the GDDS.

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ECLAC system

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