**EXPERIENCES GAINED FROM GDDS COMPLIANCE
IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN**

Acknowledgement

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Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the adoption of internationally recognized standards, or codes of good practices, can help to improve economic policy-making and strengthen the international financial system. The international financial community has relied on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other standard setting agencies to develop standards/codes covering a number of economic and financial areas, including data dissemination, fiscal, monetary and financial policy transparency, banking regulation and supervision, securities and insurance regulation, accounting, auditing, bankruptcy and corporate governance. Over the past four decades, several examples abound where the international financial institutions have played the lead role in the formulation and monitoring of standards for statistical development. Some of the more common examples where member countries follow internationally recognized standards and guidelines include the publication, by the IMF, of Manuals for Money and Financial Statistics, Balance of Payments and External Debt Statistics and Government Finance Statistics; the System of National Accounts Manual (Latest Edition: 1993) prepared jointly by the United Nations, IMF, World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU); and the setting of standards by the Basle Committee on Banking Supervision.

The General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) was introduced by the IMF to assist countries in the development of their overall statistical systems. This system is part of an initiative that aims to develop a set of standards that could guide member countries in their production and dissemination of economic data. The purpose of this paper is to review the implications and implementation of the GDDS in the English-speaking Caribbean. The paper reviews regional implementation efforts, to date, and makes recommendations for Caribbean countries to complete the implementation of the system in harmony with the requirements of the IMF.

IMF surveillance

A key aspect of the purposes and operations of the IMF is the mandate, under its Articles of Agreement, to "exercise firm surveillance over the exchange rate policies of members" and to adopt specific principles to guide all members with respect to those policies. In order to carry out this mandate, the IMF examines international monetary issues and analyzes all aspects of members' macroeconomic and related structural policies, since these policies taken together have important implications for the exchange rate system.

The primary objective of IMF surveillance is to promote sound economic growth and an orderly and stable system of exchange rates. The IMF, therefore, encourages members to adopt appropriate economic policies and helps identify issues and problems in a timely manner, so that members can implement suitable corrective measures more quickly.

The IMF carries out its surveillance responsibilities through two main channels: annual consultations with member countries and multilateral discussions held in the context of the IMF Executive Board's twice-yearly World Economic Outlook (WEO) reviews:

(a)   Article IV Consultations are the primary channel for collaboration between the IMF and its members. In accordance with Article IV of the IMF's Articles of Agreement, IMF staff usually hold annual bilateral meetings with country officials in their home countries. During these consultations, IMF staff analyze economic developments and policies; examine fiscal, exchange rate and monetary policies; review balance of payments and external debt developments; and assess the impact of policies - including exchange and trade restrictions - on a member's external accounts.

(b)   Article IV Consultations also focus on the international implications of a member's policies and developments and allow the IMF to deal promptly with a member's request for the use of IMF resources. In addition, over the years both the content and breadth of issues addressed in consultations have been expanded. Apart from purely economic matters, Article IV Consultations have also addressed social, industrial, labour market, governance and environmental issues.

(c)   World Economic Outlook discussions provide a framework for the IMF to review members' policies from a multilateral perspective. Through this medium, the IMF monitors and analyzes the global economic situation and makes projections for the evolution of the international economy.

IMF surveillance depends critically on the provision by member countries of comprehensive, timely, and accurate economic and financial information. If the statistical data necessary for effective decision-making is not available, this could lead to poor policy prescriptions which can have deleterious consequences in the economies of member States. The IMF, therefore, has an important stake in statistical development issues in order to ensure that members' policies are based on sound statistical information and also to ensure efficiency in the allocation and use of IMF resources.

Background to data dissemination standards

In early 1995, the IMF began work on standards to guide its member countries in the provision to the public of comprehensive, timely, and accessible economic and financial statistics. This exercise involved two stages: the first involved the launch of the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) for subscription by Fund members on a voluntary basis. The SDDS was deemed the more demanding standard. The second stage involved the launch of the GDDS with which the Fund will work with all its members.

In response to several international financial crises that began in 1994 (for example, the Mexican and Asian crises), there was heightened awareness that the ready availability of comprehensive, reliable and timely data would facilitate the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of sound macroeconomic policies and investment decisions, thereby reducing the frequency and moderating the severity of future crises.

Thus, the IMF's ministerial-level Interim Committee in April 1995 requested a set of standards to guide IMF member countries in providing economic and financial statistics to the public. A similar request was made to the IMF in June 1995 by the G-7 Heads of State at their Summit in Halifax.

In October 1995, the Interim Committee of the Fund's Board of Governors recommended the establishment of a two-tier standard: the SDDS and the GDDS. The decisions to establish the SDDS and the GDDS were taken in March 1996 and December 1997, respectively. During a review of IMF data standards in March 2000, the Executive Board upgraded specific components of external debt and debt service within the GDDS.

The GDDS and the SDDS

The GDDS was established to guide countries in the provision to the public of comprehensive, timely, accessible, and reliable economic, financial and socio-demographic data. The SDDS was established to guide countries that have, or that might seek, access to international capital markets in the dissemination of economic and financial data to the public.

The aim of the GDDS, therefore, is an improvement in data quality, while encouraging reasonable periodicity and timeliness of data. Data dissemination is an important goal of the GDDS, but it is not a primary consideration. This is in contrast with the goal of the SDDS, where the focus is on disseminating data in countries that generally already meet high quality standards. In this sense, the SDDS is the more demanding standard. Against this background, the GDDS is one of the most important strategic projects for the Fund's policy in the area of statistics, where a long-standing objective has been the improvement of data and statistical practices among the membership.

The GDDS shares several features with the SDDS, particularly the emphasis on the four dimensions of data i.e. coverage, periodicity and timeliness, quality, integrity and access. However, the GDDS differs from the SDDS in a number of ways. In addition to its primary focus on improvements in data quality, the GDDS has a broader data scope as it includes socio-demographic data; it is less prescriptive with regard to periodicity and timing of data dissemination; and it recognizes that improvements in data production and dissemination may only be achieved in the long run.

The GDDS: Key objectives

To provide a framework for improving statistical systems, the objectives set out by the GDDS for data production and dissemination relate to the four properties or "dimensions" of data, as follows:

(a)   *Coverage, periodicity and timeliness* relates to the production and dissemination of economic, financial and socio-demographic data by member countries. This dimension focuses on the basic data that are most important to evaluate economic performance and policy in the real, fiscal, financial, external and socio-demographic sectors;[1]

(b)   *Quality of the data* relates to information that is available to users to assess the data covered by the system. To assist users in assessing the quality of data, the GDDS prescribes the publication of metadata i.e. the disseminating of documentation on the methodology and sources used in preparing statistics; and the dissemination of component detail, reconciliations with related data, and statistical frameworks that support statistical cross-checks and provide assurance that the data are reliable;

(c)   *Integrity of the data* relates to the confidence of the user community in the data produced by the statistical systems. In this case, the GDDS requires the dissemination of the terms and conditions under which official statistics are produced, including those relating to the confidentiality of individually identifiable information; identification of internal government access to data prior to release; identification of ministerial commentary on the occasion of statistical release; and provision of information about revisions and advance notice of major changes in methodology; and

(d)   *Access by the public* relates to the dissemination of official statistics to users in a convenient and equitable manner. In this case, in order to support ready and equal access by the public to basic data, the GDDS prescribes advance dissemination of release calendars and simultaneous release of data to all interested parties.

The data dimension addresses the development, production and dissemination of two interrelated classes of data: (a) comprehensive frameworks for each of the four economic and financial sectors (real, fiscal, financial and external); and (b) indicators for each of these sectors, plus the socio-demographic area.

With regard to comprehensive frameworks, the objective of the GDDS is to encourage the production and dissemination of complete sets of data with the widest coverage, based on internationally recognized methodologies. Particular aggregates and balances are provided for illustration, but the emphasis is placed on complete data sets rather than on specific indicators. Within the GDDS, Table A relates to comprehensive frameworks.

In addition to comprehensive frameworks, the GDDS identifies three types of data categories and indicators, namely, (a) summary measures derived from comprehensive

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[1] See Annexes 1 and 2 for a listing of the recommended Coverage, Periodicity and Timeliness for the GDDS and the SDDS, respectively. The GDDS is summarized in Annex 3.

frameworks (for example, GDP for national accounts); (b) data that permit tracking of principal measures in the comprehensive frameworks (for example, the industrial production index for real GDP); and (c) other data relevant to the sector (for example, interest rates for the financial sector). Within the GDDS, Table B relates to data categories and indicators.

In addition to recommending core comprehensive frameworks and data categories and indicators as first priorities, the GDDS also contains encouraged extensions (from the core). For example, the International Investment Position (IIP) is an encouraged extension for the external sector (with the balance of payments being the core framework), and non-guaranteed private external debt is an encouraged extension of the public and publicly guaranteed external debt data category.

Requirements for participation

The participation by Fund members in the GDDS is voluntary. It involves a commitment to undertake three actions relative to the GDDS:

(a)   The Fund member country must adopt the GDDS as a framework for the development of national systems for the production and dissemination of economic, financial and socio-demographic data;

(b)   Designate a country coordinator who will act as the main liaison with Fund staff on all issues relating to participation and implementation of the GDDS; and

(c)   Prepare descriptions of statistical practices, i.e. metadata, that will be disseminated by the Fund on the Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board (DSBB). The metadata cover: (a) current statistical production and dissemination practices; and (b) plans for short- and medium-term improvements, and, if applicable, associated technical and other assistance required to implement these plans.

It is important to note that countries participating in the GDDS are expected to review and, if necessary, update their metadata at least once a year. The purpose of these reviews is to maintain the currentness and relevance of the descriptions provided and to adapt plans for improvement as progress is made with their implementation and as new initiatives are adopted to address evolving needs. Participating member countries are encouraged to promote local awareness of practices and initiatives by posting the GDDS metadata (perhaps in the national language(s)) on national websites.

Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board (DSBB)

The IMF's DSBB provides access to the GDDS, SDDS and the Data Quality Reference (DQRS) sites which the Fund publishes and maintains as a service to its membership. The latter site (DQRS), which was created to foster a common understanding of data quality, provides

access to contributions in the field and includes a selection of articles and other sources related to data quality issues.

The metadata on the GDDS website describe countries' statistical practices with respect to the production and dissemination of data for the five sectors (real, fiscal, financial, external and socio-demographic). Actual country data can be found in the national publications (electronic or hard copy) that are referenced in the metadata. Data cannot currently be accessed directly through the GDDS site on the DSBB. However, countries posting metadata on their national websites may choose to develop hyperlinks to their data.

According to the latest information taken from the IMF website, as of May 2001, 30 countries have completed all three actions needed for participation in the GDDS, and over 50 others have expressed an interest and/or indicated their intention to participate.

As mentioned, participation in the GDDS is open to all Fund members, whereas the SDDS is intended for member countries having or seeking access to international capital markets. However, some countries may view the GDDS as a stepping-stone toward the SDDS as they make progress to meet the requirements of this more demanding standard.

Benefits of GDDS

The GDDS is oriented towards three main user-groups. First, the countries themselves will benefit from the process of evaluating their statistical systems across the range of economic, financial, and social data and of formulating plans for improvements. Second, the IMF (and other interested international agencies) will benefit from having a framework for assessing the quality of data, for helping to set priorities for improvements, and for organizing technical assistance. Third, the data user community will benefit from detailed information about the statistical systems of participating countries.

Implementation

The IMF staff estimate that it would take approximately 6-7 years, starting from the beginning of calendar 1998, to achieve coverage of all countries that wish to participate in the GDDS. The GDDS is being introduced in two phases. In Phase I, the objective is to explain and demonstrate the GDDS as a workable and useful mechanism to improve data quality. The IMF approach to implementing this phase (through 1999) involved the staging of nine regional seminars worldwide, followed by IMF staff visits after each of the seminars to conduct pilot projects for metadata development in selected countries. At the conclusion of the pilot projects, the metadata compiled by the Fund staff were shared with countries in the respective regions. The Fund anticipates that at the expiration of Phase I, the second phase will materialize in 4-5 years in order to obtain participation by all member countries.

The objective of the second phase is to complete the necessary actions needed for participation for all countries that wish to participate. In Phase II, the IMF is committed to work

with national counterparts in the preparation of metadata, but an IMF staff visit could be arranged after the following actions have been completed by the member country:

(a) A country coordinator has been named;

(b) A commitment made to using the GDDS as a framework for statistical development;

(c) Progress has been made in assembling information necessary for metadata; and

(d) Preliminary work has been done on plans for improvement.

Participation by the English-speaking Caribbean

Phase I of the GDDS implementation plan commenced in early 1999 for the English-speaking Caribbean countries when the IMF, in collaboration with the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB), hosted a regional seminar to inform the countries of the detailed aspects of the GDDS and to assist them in deciding whether to participate in the system. The seminar was held at the Ocean Terrace Inn, Basseterre, St Kitts/Nevis from 18-22 January 1999 and was attended by representatives from 18 countries, as follows: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Belize, Bahamas, Barbados, Curacao, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

The seminar was conducted by resource persons from the IMF and the World Bank and participants represented national agencies that have major responsibilities in the statistical areas covered in the GDDS, such as the National Statistical Offices, the ECCB and other regional central banks and Ministries of Finance. Representatives from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Caribbean Centre for Monetary Studies (CCMS) also attended.

St. Kitts and Nevis Seminar: Main discussions

The IMF/ECCB Seminar presented an explicit explanation of the GDDS. The seminar discussed the development, status and operational aspects of the GDDS. The evolution of the data dissemination initiative was traced from the international financial crises of 1994/95 to the formulation of the SDDS and GDDS in 1996 and 1997, respectively. The seminar discussed the data dimension of the GDDS. The data dimension in the General System is linked closely to the quality dimension within which plans for improving data quality will form an integral part of the system.

The seminar highlighted the required details for the data dimension of the GDDS, which addresses the development, production and dissemination of two interrelated classes of data: (a) comprehensive frameworks for each of the four economic and financial sectors (real, fiscal,

financial, and external), and (b) indicators for each of the four sectors, as well as a range of socio-demographic indicators.

The seminar discussed the requirements for both comprehensive frameworks and indicators and core categories that are recommended as first priorities and encouraged categories that are extensions from the core. Apart from the data dimension, the seminar also addressed the requirements of the other dimensions of the system: quality, access and integrity. Most importantly, the seminar also demonstrated the standard format to be used generally by all countries for the preparation of the metadata. In this regard, the metadata prepared for Sri Lanka was used as a case study.

Implementation

As mentioned previously, countries that participate in the GDDS make a commitment to use the system as a framework for the development of their national systems for the production and dissemination of macroeconomic, financial, and socio-demographic data. Participating countries also commit themselves to provide descriptions (metadata) about: (a) their current statistical production and dissemination practices, and (b) plans for short- and medium-term improvements. Therefore, all participating countries would have completed their metadata which the IMF publishes and maintains on the DSBB.

To date, seven Caribbean countries are listed on the DSBB: Barbados and Saint Lucia (both selected for the Metadata Pilot Project); Antigua and Barbuda; Dominica; Grenada; St Kitts and Nevis and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

At the conclusion of the IMF/ECCB regional seminar in St Kitts/Nevis in January 1999, two countries (Barbados and Saint Lucia) were selected as pilots for the preparation of GDDS metadata. This exercise was conducted by staff of the IMF and the World Bank in collaboration with statistical officials in the respective countries. The IMF has subsequently published the GDDS Pilot Metadata for these two countries and it is the hoped that other countries, especially those considering participation in the GDDS, may find these pilot metadata useful as they set out to provide systematic descriptions of their own statistics and to develop plans for improvement of their statistical systems.

Three recent implementation experiences

This section gives an account of the experiences with GDDS compliance of Saint Lucia, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. It discusses the problems, success factors and the effects on the national information infrastructure of doing the GDDS in these countries. It is hoped that the lessons learnt from these experiences would be useful for those countries that have not yet done the exercise.

Saint Lucia

As indicated, Saint Lucia was represented at the Regional Seminar in St Kitts/Nevis in January 1999 and was one of the two countries selected for the GDDS Metadata Pilot Exercise in the English-speaking Caribbean. The pilot metadata were prepared by official statisticians of Saint Lucia and statisticians of the ECCB in collaboration with staff of the IMF and the World Bank. The pilot metadata for Saint Lucia were published in February 1999 and were subsequently posted on the DSBB with effect from 21 September 2000. Saint Lucia has since completed one full review of their metadata and has updated the information on socio-demographic data. The updated metadata are almost ready for resubmission to the DSBB site.

Saint Lucia is committed to reviewing their metadata at least once per year but it is constrained by limited staff resources. Subsequent to the initial assistance from the IMF/World Bank team on the pilot exercise, Saint Lucia obtained further technical assistance to conduct the recent review and to help update the metadata for the socio-demographic statistics. In this latter area, however, the National Statistical Office (NSO) of Saint Lucia faces a challenge in coordinating activities covering those vital statistics for which the agency does not have firstline responsibility, viz., education, crime and health statistics. In these cases, the NSO does not control the agenda of the different compiling agencies and, therefore, can only perform a coordinating role.

The Saint Lucia experience has shown that the GDDS has provided an opportunity for the NSO to compile a wide array of information on methodology that was not previously available. This information is computerized and is accessible to both internal and external users. The NSO finds that although the GDDS provides vast general information on the internal documentation of methodological information, it is not very specific on particular areas. However, the GDDS metadata provide guidance on the sourcing of relevant methodological details.

Saint Lucia has reported some level of success in terms of adhering to plans for improvements. The NSO has been able to release its publication on labour force statistics with a lag of about two months. This achievement exceeded the target stated in the GDDS submission to the IMF. Work is in progress, in collaboration with the ECCB, with respect to the medium-term objective to introduce Quarterly Real Gross Domestic Product (QGDP) estimates; and plans are afoot to start implementing SNA 1993.

Saint Lucia does not publish a statistical release calendar as no commitments in this regard were made in the GDDS metadata. The NSO has indicated that adherence in this regard would pose a challenge for the agency, given the institutional problems of a relatively small organization. At the time of writing, the agency had an establishment of seven statisticians, but had lost two statisticians who proceeded on study leave.

Saint Lucia has been able to secure much needed technical assistance to develop both time series and cross section type data. In the case of the former, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has provided hardware and software assistance to the NSO to help in the dissemination of the trade statistics, national accounts and other time series data. Through the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE), assistance was obtained in

developing a system to allow online querying of the database for cross sectional data (e.g. socio-demographic information - labour force, census data). The NSO anticipates that these initiatives will have a big impact on the quality and speed of data dissemination and plans are in train to transfer the facility to allow online query of the database to their internet website.

The NSO expects that participation in the GDDS would impact positively on the national information infrastructure of Saint Lucia. The system allows for the identification of specific areas of activity for development and can present the status at any point in time to external funding agencies. There is a recognition by the NSO that specifying a commitment to the GDDS helps the ability of the country to obtain funding for development work, as well as in securing training opportunities for technical staff.

Barbados

The metadata for Barbados were posted on the IMF Website at the inception of the DSBB on 22 May 2000, along with eight other countries. Like Saint Lucia, Barbados also participated in the regional seminar in St Kitts/Nevis in January 1999 and, as indicated, was one of the other Caribbean countries selected for the metadata pilot exercise. The metadata for Barbados were, therefore, prepared by official statisticians of Barbados in collaboration with staff of the IMF and the World Bank. The metadata were updated in October 1999.

The Barbados Statistical Service (BBS) did not encounter any particular problems in preparing the metadata. There were also no critical issues of coordination between different agencies responsible for the different areas of statistics. The metadata were prepared with the assistance of the IMF/World Bank team which visited shortly after the 1999 workshop in St Kitts/Nevis and which met and worked closely with the country representatives. The GDDS representative of the Central Bank has reported that this position is also true for that organization.

In terms of follow-up work, the BBS has continued to update the draft GDP at constant prices and has been following up with other plans for improvement. The BBS does not publish advance release calendars. However, while the Central Bank of Barbados operates on the basis of internal release dates, there are no release calendars for external purposes.

The BBS is currently negotiating for technical assistance in its Continuous Household Sample Survey Programme. This has resulted from the departure of the head of the Census and Surveys Division to another area of the Public Service. The BBS is also planning to arrange short-term technical assistance for the training of additional professional staffers being recruited to work in the National Accounts Section. The Central bank of Barbados has no plans at present for seeking technical assistance.

The GDDS project is coordinated by the designated GDDS Coordinator for Barbados, i.e. the Deputy Permanent Secretary (Budget), Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. Neither the BBS nor the Central Bank has dedicated staff working on data development projects and any such work is done in conjunction with other regular assignments. Other than the designated

GDDS Coordinator, there is also no formal Working Group/Committee of Public Officers in charge of coordinating the GDDS project.

Trinidad and Tobago

As early as 1997, Trinidad and Tobago expressed an interest in participating in the IMF data dissemination initiative. In August 1997, the Minister of Finance issued approval for the Governor of the Central Bank to appoint a national committee to oversee the preparations for participation. This committee comprised members from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (CBTT), the CSO, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Energy, CCMS, the Tourism and Industrial Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Ltd., (TIDCO) and ECLAC.

In October 1998, acting on behalf of the Government, the Governor of the Central Bank communicated to the IMF the country's decision to participate in the GDDS. By this action, Trinidad and Tobago made a commitment to using the GDDS as a framework for statistical development and in the same communication a country coordinator was appointed. However, subscription to participation is not yet complete, as work on the third action (i.e. preparation of the metadata) is still ongoing.

Trinidad and Tobago has been obtaining technical assistance in its efforts to upgrade the national statistical infrastructure. In January 2000 an IMF Multisector Statistics Assessment Mission conducted an inventory of the metadata prepared by the authorities and, based on the framework of the GDDS, the mission identified major improvements that would be needed to bring Trinidad and Tobago's macroeconomic statistics in line with international standards. This review has provided useful insights into areas in need of improvements. The IMF Report on the Multi-Sector Statistics Assessment Mission made several recommendations to improve the statistics compiled by the Central Bank, Ministry of Finance and the Central Statistical Office. Additionally, in January 2001, an IDB-sponsored mission to the CSO also recommended far-reaching improvements in the human and material resources in order to upgrade the statistical output of that organization. Consequently, in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the national statistical agencies are currently reviewing several of their statistical systems in order to bring them more in line with international standards.

Work on the GDDS is currently concentrated on organizing the Trinidad and Tobago metadata in accordance with the recommended format. In this regard, the CBTT has completed a draft (in soft and hard copies) of the metadata for those areas of statistics for which the Bank has primary responsibility: i.e. financial sector (money and banking statistics; interest rates; international reserves; stock exchange); external sector (balance of payments, merchandise trade and external debt statistics); and the Quarterly Real GDP Index. This draft metadata report has been forwarded for the comments of the IMF.

A key aspect of the preparation for the GDDS was the recognition that a country's website is seen as an integral part of the data dissemination strategy. This will ease the data request burden on the various official statistical agencies, and when fully operational, the site could be hyperlinked to the country's DSBB site. The CBTT has launched its website, which presents information on a wide range of economic and financial data.

In order to complete the arrangements for the participation of Trinidad and Tobago in the GDDS, the metadata exercise must be completed for the three areas: real and fiscal sectors and the socio-demographic data.

Conclusion and recommendations

The GDDS framework offers great scope for the Caribbean countries in the area of statistical development. It provides a framework for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the various statistical systems so that necessary corrective actions can be taken and, if needed, technical assistance can be sought. Participation in the GDDS places certain commitments on the authorities in terms of data quality, timeliness, predictability of date of release of information and the need for systems to ensure these undertakings. In addition, successful participation in the GDDS could lead countries eventually towards subscription in the SDDS which is the more demanding standard. As globalization becomes more widespread and Caribbean countries attempt to seek resources from the international capital markets, SDDS subscription may become a key prerequisite in the not too distant future.

The IMF/ECCB Seminar in January 1999 clearly demonstrated the general interest of the English-speaking Caribbean countries in participating in the GDDS. However, apart from Barbados and Saint Lucia (the GDDS metadata pilots), only five of the countries that were represented at the seminar have been formally participating in the system. As demonstrated in this paper, in order to complete preparation for GDDS participation the main statistical agencies in the respective countries must work in close coordination with each other. In most, if not in all, of the countries these agencies would be the central bank, the national statistical office and the ministry of finance. However, as several statistical initiatives are undertaken in the region at this time, the GDDS would be competing for the relatively scarce resources.

It is clear, therefore, that in order for the GDDS initiative to be successful in the English-speaking Caribbean, the active support of the authorities must be obtained and technical assistance from regional and international bodies (to complement the efforts of the IMF) would greatly assist the statistical development efforts in the region.

Finally, member countries must note that GDDS participation is not an end in itself. Indeed, participation in the GDDS is relatively easily achieved once the member country undertakes the three key actions necessary for participation. However, as mentioned in this paper, the Fund anticipates that member countries participating in the system would review and, if necessary, update their metadata at least once per year. It is obvious, therefore, that once a country achieves participation status, the IMF and the international community would be able to assess whether or not follow-up actions are being undertaken with regard to stated plans for improvements. Failure to effect meaningful changes to systems over time may be viewed as an adverse reflection of the country's statistical credibility.

The GDDS is indeed a powerful framework that can play an important role in bringing about fundamental transformation of national statistical systems. It is imperative, therefore, that once participation in the system is achieved, the member country must actively pursue its

statistical development agenda or face the embarrassment of losing credibility in the international community. The task at hand is therefore important and indeed urgent, and in order for it to be successful it would require the full support of regional governments and interested institutions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to assist Caribbean countries in implementing the GDDS as a matter of urgency:

1. **Awareness Drive:** The convening of a follow-up seminar to re-sensitize the English-speaking countries on the benefits of GDDS participation is necessary. The proposed seminar by ECLAC in Port of Spain will serve this purpose.

2. **Support of government:** The active support of the authorities in the region should be sought to give impetus to the GDDS project. In this regard, the proceedings of the Port of Spain Meeting should be forwarded to regional governments.

3. **Technical assistance:** The support of the IMF and other regional and international institutions is needed. As mentioned in this paper, IMF assistance for GDDS is available after certain actions are taken by the member country and some progress is made towards the preparation of the metadata. Given the scarce resources in the region, perhaps other regional and international assistance can be arranged to assist countries in assembling the metadata for their respective systems.

4. **Further technical assistance:** Further technical assistance may be needed to address specific data development issues in member States. For example, technical help might be required to assist in upgrading existing systems, implementing SNA 1993, BPM5, or developing external debt statistics of the public and private sectors.

5. **Role of other regional/international institutions:** Apart from ECLAC and the World Bank, there are other important stakeholders in the region whose work will benefit from an improvement in national statistical systems. In this regard, institutions such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the IDB could be invited to play a role in supporting this data development initiative.

6. **Caribbean Statisticians' Conference:** In order to encourage inter-country dialogue on GDDS/data development issues, this subject can be placed on the agenda of the conference of Caribbean Statisticians.

7. **Website development:** Official statistical providers in the region should be encouraged to develop websites, along with the GDDS initiative. Where necessary, relevant technical assistance should be obtained.

Annex 1

THE DATA DIMENSION OF THE GDDS
A. Comprehensive frameworks

Core Frameworks	Coverage, classification, and analytical framework	Encouraged extensions	Periodicity [1]	Timeliness
National accounts	Producing and disseminating the full range of national accounts aggregates and balancing items in nominal and real terms, yielding gross domestic product, gross national income, gross disposable income, consumption, saving, capital formation, and net lending/borrowing. Producing and disseminating sectoral accounts and national and sectoral balance sheets as relevant.		Annual	10-14 months
Central government operations	Producing and disseminating comprehensive data on transactions and debt, emphasizing: (1) coverage of all central government units; (2) use of appropriate analytical framework; and (3) development of a full range of detailed classifications (tax and non-tax revenue, current and capital expenditure, domestic and foreign financing) with breakdowns (debt holder, instrument, currency), as relevant.	General government or public sector operations data, strongly encouraged where subnational levels of government or public enterprise operations are of analytical or policy importance.	Annual	6-9 months
Broad money survey	Producing and disseminating comprehensive data emphasizing: (1) coverage of all depository corporations (banking institutions), (2) use of an appropriate analytical framework; and (3) development of classifications of external assets and liabilities, domestic credit by sector, and components of money (liquidity) and non-monetary liabilities.		Monthly	2-3 months

Balance of payments	Producing and disseminating comprehensive data on the main aggregates and balancing items of the balance of payments, including e.g. imports and exports of goods and services, trade balance, income and transfers, current account balance, reserves and other financial transactions, and overall balance, with detailed components as relevant.	International Investment Position (IIP)	Annual	6-9 months

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THE DATA DIMENSION OF THE GDDS
B. Data Categories and Indicators

Data categories	Core indicators	Encouraged aggregates and/or components	Periodicity[1]	Timeliness
Real sector				
National accounts aggregates	GDP (nominal and real)	Gross national income, capital formation, saving	Annual (quarterly encouraged)	6-9 months
Production index/indices	Manufacturing or industrial Primary commodity, agricultural, or other indices, as relevant		Monthly As relevant	6 weeks-3months for all indices
Price indices	Consumer price index	Producer price index	Monthly	1-2 months
Labor market indicators	Employment, unemployment, and wages/earnings, as relevant		Annual[2]	6-9 months[2]
Fiscal sector				
Central government budgetary aggregates	Revenue, expenditure, balance, and financing with breakdowns (debt holder, instrument, currency), as relevant	Interest payments	Quarterly	1 quarter
Central government debt	Domestic debt and foreign debt, as relevant, with appropriate breakdowns (currency, maturity, debt holder, instrument), as relevant	Government guaranteed debt	Annual (quarterly encouraged)	1-2 quarters
Financial sector				
Broad money and credit aggregates	Net external position, domestic credit, broad or narrow money	Bank soundness indicators	Monthly	1-3 months
Central Bank aggregates	Reserve money		Monthly	1-2 months
Interest rates	Short- and long-term government security rates, policy variable rate	Money or interbank market rates and a range of deposit and lending rates	Monthly	[3]
Stock market		Share price index, as relevant	Monthly	

External Sector				
Balance of payments aggregates	Imports and exports of goods and services, current account balance, reserves, overall balance		Annual (quarterly strongly encouraged)	6 months
	Public and publicly guaranteed external debt outstanding (with maturity breakdown)		Quarterly	1-2 quarters
External debt and debt service	Public and publicly guaranteed debt service schedule		Twice yearly (with data for 4 quarters and 2 semesters ahead)	3-6 months
		Private external debt not publicly guaranteed	Annual	6-9 months
Socio-demographic data				
Categories	Indicators[4]		Periodicity	Timeliness
Population	Population, population growth rate, urban population, rural population, population by gender, age composition of population			
Health	Population per physician, life expectancy, infant/child/maternal mortality			
Education	Adult literacy, pupil-teacher ratio, primary/secondary school enrollment			
Poverty	Access to safe water/sanitation, number of people per room, income distribution, families below minimum standard of income.			

[1] The GDDS should be viewed as encouraging improvements in the periodicity and timeliness of data dissemination that are consistent with improvements in data quality. Objectives for timeliness are set out in terms of ranges of time in recognition of the diversity of countries covered by the GDDS.

[2] Periodicity and timeliness for labor indicators are recommended after consultation with the Bureau of Statistics of the International Labor Office.

[3] Dissemination as part of a high-frequency (e.g. monthly) publication.

[4] The World Bank, in collaboration with other international institutions, is developing a set of recommended good practices.

<u>Annex 2</u>

THE DATA DIMENSION OF THE SDDS

Coverage		Encouraged Categories and/or components	Periodicity	Timeliness
Prescribed				
Category	Components			
Real Sector				
National Accounts: Nominal, real, and associated prices*	GDP by major expenditure category and/or by productive sector	Saving, gross national income	Q	Q
Production index/indices #	Industrial, primary commodity, or sector, as relevant		M (or as relevant)	6W (M encouraged, or as relevant)
		Forward-looking indicator(s) e.g., qualitative business surveys, orders, composite leading indicators index	M or Q	M or Q
Labor market	Employment, unemployment, and wages/earnings, as relevant		Q	Q
Price indices	Consumer prices and producer or wholesale prices		M	M
Fiscal Sector				
General Government or public sector operations, as relevant*	Revenue, expenditure, balance, and domestic (bank and non bank) and foreign financing	Interest Payments	A	2Q
Central Government Operations #	Budgetary accounts: revenue, expenditure, balance, and domestic (bank and nonbank) and foreign financing	Interest Payments	M	M
Central Government Debt	Domestic and foreign, as relevant, with a breakdown by currency (including indexed) as relevant, and a breakdown by maturity; debt guaranteed by central government, as relevant.	Debt service projections: interest and amortization on medium and long-term debt (Q for next 4 quarters and then A) and amortization on short-term debt (Q)	Q	Q

Coverage			Periodicity	Timeliness
Prescribed		**Encouraged Categories and/or components**		
Category	**Components**			
Financial Sector				
Analytical Account of the banking sector*	Money aggregates, domestic credit by public and private sector, external position		M	M
Analytical Accounts on the central bank #	Reserve money, domestic claims on public and private sector, external position		M(W encouraged)	2W (W encouraged)
Interest Rates	Short-term and long-term government security rates, policy variable rate	Range of representative deposit and lending rates	D	1/
Stock Market	Share price index, as relevant		D	1/
External Sector				
Balance of Payment*	Goods and services, net income flows, net current transfers, selected capital (or capital and financial) account items (including reserves)	Foreign direct investment and portfolio investment	Q	Q
International reserves and foreign currency liquidity #	Total official reserve assets (gold, foreign exchange, SDRs, and Fund position); other foreign currency assets; predetermined short-term drains on foreign currency assets; contingent short-term drains on foreign currency assets; and related items. 2/		M(W encouraged)	W for total official reserve assets; M for all other items (W encouraged)
Merchandise trade #	Exports and imports	Major commodity breakdowns with longer time lapse	M	8W (4-6W encouraged)
International Investment Position	See specifications		A (Q encouraged)	2Q (Q encouraged)
Exchange rates	Spot rates and 3- and 6-month forward market rates, as relevant		D	1/
External debt	Debt of the general government, the monetary authorities, the banking sector, and other sectors.		Q	Q

Coverage			Periodicity	Timeliness
Prescribed		Encouraged Categories and/or components		
Category	Components			
	Data should also be broken down by maturity – short-term and long-term – on an original maturity basis and by instrument, as set out in the BPM5.			
Addendum: Population		Key distributions, e.g., by age and sex	A	…

Periodicity and timeliness: Daily ("D"); weekly or with lapse of no more than one week ("W") after the reference date or close of the reference week; monthly or with lapse of no more than one month ("M"); quarterly or with lapse of no more than one quarter ("Q"); annual ("A").

* Comprehensive statistical frameworks

\# Tracking categories

1/ Given that data are widely available from private sources, dissemination of official producers may be less time-sensitive. Although dissemination by recorded telephone messages or fax services is encouraged, dissemination of these data can be made part of other (preferably high-frequency) dissemination products.

2/ See Data Template on International Reserves and Foreign Currency Liquidity. (see also the Operational Guidelines). The data on total official reserve assets identified in Section I, item A of the data template are prescribed with monthly periodicity and weekly timeliness. The other data specified in the data template are prescribed with monthly periodicity and monthly timeliness, unless otherwise indicated in that template.

<u>Annex 3</u>

SUMMARY OF THE GENERAL DATA DISSEMINATION SYSTEM

1. *The data: Coverage, periodicity and timeliness*: Dissemination of reliable, comprehensive, and timely economic, financial, and socio-demographic data is essential to the transparency of macroeconomic performance and policy.

    Dissemination of economic, financial, and socio-demographic data as described in Table 1.

2. *Quality:* Data quality must have a high priority. Data users must be provided with information to assess quality and quality improvements.

    a. Dissemination of documentation on methodology and sources used in preparing statistics.

    b. Dissemination of component detail, reconciliations with related data, and statistical frameworks that support statistical cross-checks and provide assurance of reasonableness.

    Plans for improvement: The GDDS recommends that plans for improvements be developed for all areas in which shortcomings exist and that these plans be disseminated.

3. *Integrity:* To fulfil the purpose of providing the public with information, official statistics must have the confidence of their users. In turn, confidence in statistics ultimately becomes a matter of confidence in the objectivity and professionalism of the agency producing the statistics. Transparency of its practices and procedures is a key factor in creating this confidence.

    a. Dissemination of the terms and conditions under which official statistics are produced, including those relating to the confidentiality of individually identifiable information.

    b. Identification of internal government access to data before releases

    c. Identification of ministerial commentary on the occasion of statistical releases.

    d. Provision of information about revision and advance notice of major changes in methodology.

4. *Access by the public:* Dissemination of official statistics is an essential feature of statistics as a public good. Ready and equal access are principal requirements for the public.

    a. Dissemination of advance release calendars

    b. Simultaneous release to all interested parties.

Key references

1. *Guide to the Data Dissemination Standards. Module 2: The General Data Dissemination System.* IMF, Washington DC, June 1998.

2. *The Special Data Dissemination Standard: Standards for the Dissemination by Countries of Economic and Financial Statistics.* IMF, Washington DC, April 1996.

3. IMF-ECCB Regional Seminar on GDDS, St Kitts/Nevis: *Seminar Documents*, January 1999.

4. *Barbados GDDS Pilot Metadata.* October 1999 Document.

5. *Saint Lucia GDDS Pilot Metadata.* February 1999 Document.