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Coordination of social statistics at the national level – Implications for the
Demographic Yearbook

By

CARICOM

A. Setting up of national coordinating committees

1. The background of this activity of establishment of national coordinating committees in the area of social statistics is a Project that was jointly executed by the United Nations Statistics Division and CARICOM on “ Strengthening Capacity for the Compilation of Social/Gender an Environment Statistics for Conference Follow-up in the CARICOM Region”. This project comprised two components in Statistics and Information Technology and was followed by a regional programme aimed at compiling core social statistics across all Member States.
2. Social Statistics in the CARICOM Region and perhaps elsewhere are the products of several agencies and departments of ministries and of course the National Statistical Offices. For example, the Ministries of Health, Labour and Education as well as the registrar general departments with respect to vital events, all contribute to the content of social/demographic statistics.
3. The past experience shows that the system of statistics at the national level is largely an uncoordinated one, leading to gaps and deficiencies in the data, lack of timeliness in production, an a system that is not internally harmonised and also data that can be collected through the line ministries and other departments but are not, since the appropriate data collection instruments are not in place.
4. The strategy that has been adopted is based on maximising collaboration and co-operation among the various producing agencies and stakeholders such as users at the national level to enhance capabilities in data production. It also seeks to encourage collaboration at the level of agencies operating in the Region and we have involved these agencies in advancing the activities of the regional programme.
5. In fostering this collaborative process, CARICOM has been moving through each Member State to assist them in establishing committees to enable the coordinating process. It is our view that harnessing together these agencies as well as other experts will create an efficient vehicle to produce these statistics, eliminating the current gaps and deficiencies and improving the quality and comparability of these statistics at both the national and regional level.
6. These committees are also best placed to monitor outcomes relative to observed changes in the situations of the population based on set targets and goals at both the national, regional and international levels. The establishment of a coordinating committee inclusive of persons engaged in policy formation can also ensure that the statistics are part of the planning and development process. It should also be mentioned that the social indicators and statistics include indicators required to monitor the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and therefore the coordinating committee is well-positioned towards ensuring the compilation of these statistics and in assisting in the monitoring of the achievement of the MDG. In addition the involvement of multiple stakeholders intensify the sense of ownership and commitment in the process at the national level.

7. Among the *terms of reference* of these committees are:
 - Facilitate the compilation of the core data set;
 - Enhance the attributes of the core such as harmonisation in concepts and relevance;
 - Assist producing agencies in improving data quality including in-country training;
 - Mobilising resources for investment in statistics;
 - Suggest expansion in new areas of statistics based on dynamic changes in the social sectors;
 - Collate, compile and disseminate the indicators in a report which should contain simple analysis that can point to the achievement of targets and outcomes of policies;

8. *Expected outputs* of the committees are:
 - Improved national statistical systems in social statistics;
 - A core set of social statistics and indicators and annual analytical publication with these indicators;
 - Recommendations on priority actions to be taken based on the analysis and findings of the indicators;
 - Evidence-based policies through the increased utilisation of the core indicators in social policy development;
 - Organised training workshops and national level seminars to promote and disseminate the indicators and to maximise the use of these indicators at all levels.

9. In general the establishment of these committees will circumvent severe resource constraints that exist in our relatively small members states, combining resources across agencies to produce the statistics.

B. Compilation of indicators – submission to the regional level

10. Invariably countries have their national priorities with respect to the compilation of indicators and statistics in the social and other areas. However the process of establishing a CARICOM Single Market and Economy demands that countries must have a core of statistics that are comparable throughout the Region and that can be aggregated to give a regional picture.

11. In this regard, in establishing the regional programme on Social/Gender and Environment Statistics an advisory group was established and this was as a result of the United Nations Statistics Division/CARICOM project on capacity strengthening that was implemented in the Region from 2000-2002. Before the end of this project the issue of sustaining the process of data compilation and capacity building was addressed. The strategy was to establish an advisory group comprising directors/chief statisticians, CARICOM, and the United Nations Statistics Division, which had recent experience in the regional thrust. This approach enhanced the ownership of the process and also the

commitment of countries in effecting the result through the involvement of the directors of statistics in the formulation of the programme.

12. The decision therefore on what statistics to compile was addressed through this advisory group which established a core set of indicators which were further refined and discussed with other regional experts. Therefore a priority list of indicators was established. During the meetings to establish the national coordinating committees these indicators even though established were discussed and based on national priorities there were recommendations for additions to the list of indicators.

13. The list of indicators is therefore agreed to through a process of consultation at various levels- an advisory group, experts in the region and national level consultations. The determination of what data countries are to provide is therefore directly linked to the above process

C. Implications for the *Demographic Yearbook* Instructions

14. Evidently there is a need to review the questions and instruction in the *Demographic Yearbook* to focus on a core set of statistics that countries at different levels of statistical development find feasible or manageable. However notwithstanding improvement in the data collection instrument and mechanism if there is no capacity building involved in the process the exercise may be one of futility. The past experience in several areas of statistics showed that sitting at the regional level and asking countries to send the data year after year may not improve the response.

15. It is important to undertake an inventory to find out where are the gaps and deficiencies in the existing response to the *Demographic Yearbook* and to go a step further perhaps with the assistance of regional organizations to assess whether the data are *available but not readily accessible*.

16. In this context, a process of capacity building through technical assistance of groups of countries and *in-country coordination* may go a very long way to improving response to the *Demographic Yearbook* that may not even be possible notwithstanding improvements in the instructions or the questionnaire.

17. The orientation of the capacity building needs to reflect the *reality of multiple data producers in countries*, especially in the area of social statistics and should include a *strong component on statistical coordination at the national level*.

18. It is our view therefore that the process of capturing data for the *Demographic Yearbook* consider a strategy of greater inter-action at the national/regional levels inclusive of country visits for capacity-building to fill the data gaps and to improve coordination. An investment has to be made at this level if the results that are expected are to be realised.