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An Approach to the Coordination of Statistical Systems in the Compilation,  
Analysis and Dissemination of Social Statistics: The Caricom Experience -  
Initial Insights \*

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# **AN APPROACH TO THE COORDINATION OF STATISTICAL SYSTEMS IN THE COMPILATION, ANALYSIS AND DISSEMINATION OF SOCIAL STATISTICS: THE CARICOM EXPERIENCE - INITIAL INSIGHTS**

## **SUMMARY**

In an effort to improve the production of Social/Gender Statistics on a sustained basis the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat has embarked on a programme in the Region which includes the establishment of statistical coordinating committees at the national level in Member States. The Programme, entitled, “Strengthening Capacity in the Compilation of Social/Gender and Environment Statistics and Indicators in the CARICOM Region”, originated out of a UNSD/CARICOM Project, and is seeking to strengthen capacity of national and regional statistics offices in collecting, evaluating, analysing and disseminating relevant data in support of policy development and decision-making and to assist in the instituting and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies. In recognition of the need to continue capacity building in these areas of statistics beyond the lifetime of the Project, a CARICOM Advisory Group was established comprising Directors of Statistics/ Chief Statisticians of Statistical Offices in the Region, as well as representatives from the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD) and the CARICOM Secretariat. This paper provides a brief overview of the development of the programme before focusing on the issue of statistical coordination in the production of Social/Gender Statistics through the initial work currently being implemented to establish social indicators committees in Member States. Inevitably there are challenges and opportunities in this approach. It is envisaged that the involvement of the producers and users of Social/Gender Statistics in a single committee with regional and international level support will engender an improvement in the production and timeliness of these statistics, increase the confidence and transparency in the procedures and practices, promote the use of these statistics and attract much needed financial resources to strengthen statistical capacity.

## **1. BACKGROUND TO THE CARICOM PROGRAMME**

In 2000 the UNSD and the CARICOM Secretariat jointly commenced implementation of a Project, *Strengthening Capacity in the compilation of Statistics and Indicators for Conference Follow-up in the CARICOM Region*. This Project emanated from a number of commitments in the Social/Gender area that was endorsed at Conferences at the international level and included activities of data compilation at the regional and national level supported by regional workshops in social/gender and environment statistics and in the area of information communication technology (ICT), in-country-support in ICT, provision of computer equipment and connectivity capabilities and the production of regional publications. It was essential therefore to develop the capacity to enable the assessment of these conference goals and to support at the regional and national levels decision-making, programmes and policies that have implications for the allocation of resources and the satisfaction of basic needs of the population of the Region. During the process of implementing the UNSD/CARICOM Project, it was evident that a more comprehensive programme was required to institutionalise the compilation of Social/Gender Statistics on a sustainable basis and to treat with the resource constraints experienced at the national and regional levels.

This led to the formation of the CARICOM Advisory Group, the first meeting being held in Nassau, The Bahamas to review the implementation of the UNSD/CARICOM Project and to develop terms of reference for the operation of the

advisory group. This group was endorsed by the Twenty-Sixth Meeting of the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians (SCCS) which was also held in Nassau, The Bahamas, and was mandated to develop a programme to institutionalise the compilation and dissemination of social/gender and environment statistics to take into consideration, the sustainability aspects of data compilation, the collaboration and integration of statistical initiatives of regional and international organizations, the possibilities for the acquisition of funding, technical assistance and training to support the Programme, the identification of specific outputs and the monitoring and assessment of achievements arising out of social policy development.

## **2. ELEMENTS OF THE CARICOM PROGRAMME**

The main objective of the CARICOM Programme is: *To institutionalise the production of social/gender and environment statistics in the national statistical systems in order to inform policy formulation, that can improve the conditions of women and men and enable the sustainable development of the Region.*

The Programme is divided in two main components: (i) social /gender and (ii) environment statistics, supported by a data dissemination strategy, based on latest developments in ICT. The Programme is being implemented and coordinated by the CARICOM Secretariat supported by the CARICOM Advisory Group and specifically with the involvement of our partners, the UNSD. The CARICOM Secretariat has also sought financial support to implement the activities of the Programme. It is anticipated that grant support would be obtainable from the World Bank, other financial support from the United Nations Development Programme under a project to compile statistics to monitor poverty reduction strategies in the Region including the indicators for the Millennium Development Goals.

At the national level in Member States, the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) will coordinate the data compilation activities. In the formulation of the Programme consideration was given to the establishment of *Working Groups/National Statistical Coordinating Committees* as an integral feature of the efforts to strengthen capacity of the statistical systems at the national level. Other major elements of the Programme are: the formulation of the framework for the activities of data compilation, the institution of a strategy to sustain the Programme and the actual implementation schedule of activities.

The framework for the data compilation and dissemination included the processes of preliminary data compilation activities, the documentation of data sources, concepts and definitions, the detection of data gaps and the suggestion of measures to address the data gaps, the identification of a list of statistics and indicators and the production of data formats for data collection. These activities are being implemented from January to December 2003 with some overlap in 2004 to complete the process of dissemination of the statistics. The Programme also includes, the production of manuals and guides, regional and national publications and the facilitation of data analyses. The development of a core data set for the Region in all areas of statistics, a Project component of the Work Programme in the Statistics Sub-Programme of the Secretariat will be more achievable through focused attention in the area of social/gender statistics that have often lagged behind economic statistics in the Region.

The sustainability of the CARICOM programme was approached through consideration of staffing implications for the production of the social/gender statistics, the need for priority to be given to training to develop skills and expertise to support and maintain the activities of data compilation and to facilitate the application of research and analysis on social issues relevant to the region. The Programme as developed, was endorsed by the Twenty-Seventh Meeting of the SCCS which was held in Grenada in November 2003.

The main themes for data compilation are: Population, Families and Households, Work, Economy, Education, Health, Crime, Decision-making, Poverty and Information and Communication Technology. While the area of migration has not been included as a specific theme it is envisaged that in the context of the implementation of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy and the need to compile statistics on International Trade in Services which include the movement of natural persons, the area of migration will be one of a number of new concerns which would undoubtedly be incorporated as part of the core statistics required in the Region. Already in our first meeting to establish the social committees this issue of migration was raised relative to the movement of persons across the Region and the implications for the provision of social services at the national level.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CARICOM PROGRAMME – ESTABLISHMENT OF SOCIAL INDICATORS COMMITTEES IN MEMBER STATES**

#### **3.1 Proposal for the establishment of a committee to coordinate the production of social/gender statistics**

##### *Overview*

In the approach to formulating the CARICOM Programme, consideration was given to the fact that some of the data are the products of statistical agencies outside of the NSOs and therefore it was thought necessary to establish at the national levels working groups or statistical coordinating committees to bring together statistical agencies to improve the response, quality, timeliness, adequacy, relevance and comparability of the data to be compiled at the national level and to feed into the regional programme.

The proposed membership of this committee include persons from Government Departments, NGOs, and major users of social statistics, all of whom can play a vital complementary role in guiding the relevance of these statistics and who can possibly play a role in being able to obtain funds for the development of the process at the national level. It was recognised that continuity and sustainability of the Programme not only depended on the strengthening of the NSOs, but also on continuous monitoring and evaluation, and on the ties that NSOs are able to establish and foster with the statistical agencies that are engaged in the production of social statistics. As a consequence of this proposal at the implementation phase a strategy to develop these committees was developed and is currently being executed in the Region.

##### *The inclusion of the MDGs*

During the third Meeting of the CARICOM Advisory Group, consideration was also given to the indicators that are required to monitor the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs). These were thought to be critical indicators to be included in the core set of social statistics and indicators to be compiled in the Programme. To emphasise the inclusion of the MDGs in the Programme the suggestion was made that the national committees to be set up should be named the Social Indicators and Millennium Development Goals Committee (SIMDG) which would further enhance the link between the compilation of the statistics and indicators and the national and global development goals, highlighting in the process the need to strengthen capacity of the national statistical systems. A key issue therefore, is the enabling of the statistical systems to measure the progress being made in the fight against poverty. It is hoped that the incorporation of the MDGs in these committees would lead to greater priority by governments in the Region in allocating human and financial resources to developing statistical capacity in general which can be beneficial in the formulation of appropriate policy for social development.

While a great deal of social statistics are available in the decennial censuses which are the responsibilities of the NSOs, in the inter-censal years the statistical agencies provide the backdrop for social statistics from administrative records to support data available from surveys conducted by the NSOs. In some Member States there is an absence of survey capabilities implying that there is almost complete reliance on administrative records from ministerial departments and other national organizations for the collection of social statistics. The enhancement of survey capabilities in those member states where they are not present will also be required and can be implemented in the planned regional workshops, technical assistance and study tours or in the accessing of training at the international level during the course of the programme.

#### *Major Objectives*

The SIMDG committee has a major role to play in the production and maintenance of core data in the area of social/gender statistics, ensuring that these data are accurate, harmonised, internally consistent, and are produced by the various agencies in a timely manner. The committee will also enable the networking of expertise at the national level to facilitate the sharing of information and in strengthening capacity in the effective use of these statistics in analysis, research and in guiding policy and in the dissemination of outputs. In effect the implementation of the CARICOM Programme is targeting and making use of existing statistical capacity at the national level and simultaneously is aiding in the development of this capacity.

#### *Expected Outputs*

Primarily, the committee is expected to ensure that the data that are required at the national, regional and international levels are collected, compiled and disseminated including to the Secretariat for the formation of regional databases. Completed data sets with the required data, comprise the main output of the committee. The issue of having a coordinated approach to the fulfilment of data requests from international and regional organisations was raised and it is expected that the committee would make recommendations on this issue. In addition, recommendations to improve the quality of the data will be another output of the committee. Since the committee is to comprise producers and users of data, it would be feasible that they can identify gaps and deficiencies in the data and to devise ways to improve the quality and timeliness. It is also proposed that at the national level an annual publication of the indicators with

analysis can be produced to monitor and assess social development and to be complementary to the other major assessments that are required such as the MDGs. Out of the analysis it is expected that the committee can point to priority social actions that are required. It is anticipated that national workshops and seminars to disseminate the findings of the outputs and to encourage the use of social statistics will also be the responsibility of the committee. These initiatives of the committee at the national level will be complementary to the regional strategy for the dissemination of these statistics.

#### *Composition of the Committee*

The committee comprises major producers of these statistics such as the NSO, representatives of various Ministries/Departments in which there are statistical producing agencies, such as Health, Education, Gender Affairs; departments/institutions concerned with using social statistics; Ministries of Planning, Social Development; and where these exist within Member States, the University of the West Indies, PAHO/ the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC), United Nations Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean and similar organizations and institutions including NGOs. The committee is therefore bringing together producers of social statistics and also users of these statistics relative to policy formulation, research and analysis.

### **3.2 Experience with the establishing of coordinating committees in the area of Social Statistics**

The first meeting to establish a social indicators committee at the national level was held in St Kitts and Nevis in March 2003. The meeting agenda is given in Appendix I. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together the statistical agencies and users to coordinate an approach to compiling Social/Gender statistics and indicators. The approach served to inform the agencies of the CARICOM Programme and to inform them as to their role in ensuring the availability and accessibility of Social/Gender Statistics and Indicators. There was also an instructive presentation on the use of Social/Gender indicators in policy formulation.

The proposed terms of reference of the SIMDG committee was also discussed. The Terms of Reference are found in Appendix II of this paper. The proposed list of indicators that are to be compiled in the CARICOM programme were also discussed and feedback were obtained from the meeting relative to the adequacy of the statistics and indicators based on the areas of expertise of the participants. A presentation was also made on the Millennium Development Goals and the indicators that are to monitor the achievement of the goals. Finally the question of the coordination of requests for data made to the statistical agencies, which place a burden on these organizations due to the number and frequency of these requests, was discussed. Representatives of the various statistical agencies also informed the meeting of the involvement of their agencies in data compilation activities and on the current status of data availability and technology considerations.

Amongst the outcomes of the meeting was that it served to inform users and producers of social/gender Statistics of the initiative currently in place to establish comprehensive social statistical databases and their role in ensuring the successful compilation of the data and to gain their support in institutionalising the collection of

these data sets in this regard. The agencies were made aware of the role they should play in improving the quality and timeliness of the indicators, in the dissemination of these statistics as well as in research and analysis. Out of the agencies represented at the meeting, a SIMDG committee was formed with the Director/Chief Statistician of the NSO as Chairperson.

It was proposed that committee members or their representatives should be included wherever feasible in regional training programmes in social statistics which would also assist in strengthening capacity at the national level. In this context the identification of opportunities for training, which has been so far compiled by the CARICOM Advisory Group, would be made available to the agencies involved in the production of social/gender statistics with a view of giving the representatives of these agencies an opportunity to access training.

The Chairperson is to inform the CARICOM Secretariat of the meeting schedule of the committee and will also report on the progress of the work performed. The CARICOM Secretariat will be submitting to Member States the formats for data compilation that will constitute part of the work of the social indicators committee. Evidently the strategy that has been instituted is to implement the compilation of data in social/gender statistics through the establishment of social indicators committees at the national level. The CARICOM Secretariat will be involved in monitoring the work of the committee and in the future will be organising regional workshops, study tours / attachments and technical assistance subject to the availability of funding that can assist in the development of statistical capacity at the national level. The social committees will also be proactive in obtaining technical assistance and funding to support its activities.

#### **4. Conclusion – Advantages and Challenges**

There are advantages as well as challenges in the setting up of social indicators committees to coordinate the compilation of social/gender statistics. A significant amount of the increased demand for information on NSOs and other agencies results directly from international conferences to which Member States have made commitments. Often these commitments do not take into consideration the existing capacity of the statistical systems. It is hoped that the formation of these committees will both serve to stimulate the agencies to produce / improve the production of Social/Gender Statistics as well as to sensitise governments on the implications of the commitments made at the international level relative to the existing productive capacity of the statistical agencies. The standardisation of social statistics at the national level and a movement to harmonization at the regional level to enable comparison across Member States are other advantages of this approach which will be possible through the involvement of the regional organization that can monitor the adherence to internationally recommended guidelines.

Another advantage is that the outputs of these committees can only redound to their benefits through increased attraction of resources at the national level to maintain the processes of data collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination as well as to develop their productive capacity, once outputs are realised. The committee can also enable the collection of data to measure new concerns in the area of social/gender statistics and to expand the use of these statistics in the public and the private domains. In addition, the establishment of a social indicators committee to coordinate the production



of social statistics and to promote its use in policy development can result in greater confidence and transparency in the statistics and in the procedures and practices pertaining to the compilation and dissemination of the information. The promotion of the use of the information in social policy and development will also fall under the ambit of this committee.

Among the challenges will be the ability to sustain the interest of committee members to realise the improvement required in the production and use of social statistics. The question of incentives to committee members was raised at the first meeting held to establish these committees. It was suggested that the improvement in the statistical systems might attract financial resources to underwrite any costs that may arise in the implementation of the activities of the committee. Partnerships with international and regional organizations that are resident in the various Member States can also provide funding to implement activities at the national level.

Proposals to enable the production of analytical publications, the inclusion of the statistical agencies in the training programmes at the regional level and the provision of assistance in the organization of national seminars and workshops to promote the use of these statistics will no doubt contribute to the continuity of the work of this committee. Ultimately the role of the Director of Statistics/Chief Statistician with respect to the coordination of the production of all statistics inclusive of social statistics will have to be reinforced. The issue of the availability of sex-disaggregated data was also discussed. In the area of crime statistics for example, there was a perceived need for the introduction of processes to obtain this data disaggregated by sex.

Ultimately the “national coordinating committee” approach will succeed to the extent that committee members are able to sustain the data collection activities at their various agencies and to contribute to the operations of the committees. Having set up these committees, performance indicators based on the intended outputs will be monitored to assess the success of this approach in coordinating the systematic collection of social/gender statistics in the Region.

**CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY SECRETARIAT**

Meeting of members  
Of the social indicators and millennium  
Development goals committee

RESTRICTED

SIMDGC/2003/3/1

Montserrat  
16 April 2003

April 11, 2003

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**DRAFT AGENDA**

1. Opening
2. Election of Chairman
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Procedural matters
5. Introduction of participants and brief statements by each on their involvement with social and gender statistics.
6. Overview of the Caricom programme on strengthening capacity in the compilation of social/gender and environment statistics and indicators in the Caricom region:
7. Presentation – the usefulness of selected key social indicators in policy formulation and decision
8. Discussion of terms of reference of the Social Indicators and Millennium Goals (SIMDG) Committee
  - 8.1 Consideration of the goals, objectives and scope of work of the Committee
  - 8.2 The need for team work
  - 8.3 Expected outputs
  - 8.4 Outcomes
  - 8.5 Frequency of committee meetings
  - 8.6 Duties and responsibilities of members of the committee
  - 8.7 Monitoring and evaluation by responsible agencies
  - 8.8 Reporting procedures
9. Discussion of actual social and gender indicators
  - 9.1 Indicators in group I
  - 9.2 Indicators in group II
10. The coordination at the national level of responses to requests for data from regional and international organizations
11. Any other business

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## Terms of Reference

### **ESTABLISHING COMMITTEES TO PRODUCE SOCIAL INDICATORS ON A SUSTAINED BASIS, AND TO FACILITATE THE CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT OF ACHIEVEMENTS RELATED TO THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs)**

#### **1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians (SCCS), the main forum through which the Caribbean Community engages in discourse relating to the statistical development of the region, at its Twenty Seventh (27<sup>th</sup>) Meeting held in St. George's, Grenada, in November, 2002, endorsed the programme to "Strengthen Capacity in the Compilation of Social/Gender and Environment Statistics and Indicators in the CARICOM Region.

In the approach to formulating the programme, consideration was given to the fact that some of the data are the products of agencies outside of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) which necessitated the setting up of national level working groups in statistics/statistical coordinating committees to bring together all national statistical agencies, to improve the quality, relevance, timeliness and response from surveys and administrative sources of information and to feed into the programme at the national and regional levels.

The implementation plan for the programme therefore includes the establishment of Social Indicators and Millennium Development Goals (SIMDG) committees within each member state, in order to enhance the process of collecting, compiling and analysing the agreed set of indicators, on an annual basis.

Social Indicators and MDGs Committees, when adequately staffed and reasonably resourced can provide an efficient vehicle for the production of Social Indicators and statistics on a timely and reliable basis.

Such committees are also best placed to monitor developments with respect to set targets and goals.

Hence, these committees are crucial in monitoring and assessing the achievements of targets and goals set by countries, under the umbrella of the MDGs.

#### *Justification for the establishment of the Committee -The Current Situation*

Currently, in all member states of the Caribbean Community, it is recognized that the production of social statistics is quite fragmented in the sense that the NSOs are not currently involved directly, in the collection of all social data, and the subsequent generation of social statistics and indicators.

However, even though the NSOs may not be directly involved with some of the key social statistics, because they often have much greater statistical expertise than personnel working at the social sector ministries, close cooperation and collaboration between these social organizations and the statistical authorities, on statistical issues and policy related matters are essential, in order to enhance efficient policy formulation and implementation.

The establishment of the above named committees will therefore bring together both the main producers of data as well as some of the main users. Therefore, all of the relevant stakeholders will be represented on the committees and this will greatly enhance the production of the social indicators in a timely fashion. The inclusion of users and producers of data on the committee, will also enhance the process of policy implementation. In particular, since the committee will be in a privileged position, it will also monitor the MDG indicators, which are already included in the set of social indicators which the committee will generate.

The committee will therefore be in a strategic position to assist in the assessment of progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The full involvement of all stakeholders on the committees is therefore crucial.

## **2. OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this activity is to strengthen the capability of the NSOs of all member states of CARICOM to collect, compile, analyse and disseminate reliable and timely social and gender statistics and indicators on a sustained basis, which will guide policy decisions at the national, regional and international levels.

## **3. SCOPE OF WORK**

In order to meet the above objectives, the members of the committee are required to undertake the following tasks:

Attend all committee meetings;

Establish standard definitions and methodologies to be used in calculating the selected indicators;

Collect the data necessary for their respective sector;

Construct the indicators relevant to their work;

Prepare narrative analyses which should accompany the published indicators;

Make and implement recommendations on how to standardize and improve the quality of data;

Expand the list of indicators, as the need arises, and promote data collection in order to improve the information on new areas of concern;

Meet regularly, preferably monthly in order to:

Arrange and allocate the necessary workload and set targets and deadlines for work to be completed;

Discuss the progress of the work to ensure that deadlines are met;

Exchange ideas on all aspects of all of the indicators in order to ensure a hybrid product and to maximize its usefulness.

Prepare indicators for public consumption;

Promote and disseminate the indicators;

Monitor the MDG indicators and assist in the preparation of the MDG reports;

## **4. EXPECTED OUTPUTS**

The following are the expected outputs of the SIMDG committee:

Improved data collection systems in the field of social/gender statistics;

Increased reliability of indicators published;

Expanded use of the indicators, and enhanced image of the field of Statistics;

Annual publication of a list of selected social and gender indicators, together with basic analyses of the indicators;

MDG indicators for MDG assessment reports;

Recommendations on priority actions to be taken based on the indicators;

Enhanced image of the National Statistical Organizations;

As a consequence of the above, enhanced access to more resources for statistical work.