

**CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY**

**SECRETARIAT**

**TWENTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE  
STANDING COMMITTEE OF  
CARIBBEAN STATISTICIANS**

**RESTRICTED**

**SCCS/2003/28/12**

**Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands  
3 - 5 November 2003**

**29 October 2003**

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**THE CONFERENCE OF DIRECTORS OF  
STATISTICS OF THE AMERICAS – IMPLICATIONS FOR  
STATISTICAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG CARICOM MEMBER STATES**

**1. Introduction**

This paper reports on the structure and functions of the Conference of Directors of Statistics of the Americas and summarizes the proceedings of the Second Meeting of the conference held at the UNECLAC headquarters in Santiago, Chile, during June 18-20, 2003.

2. The paper first presents some background information relating to the history of the establishment of the conference, after which it highlights some of the more substantive statistical issues discussed at the meeting.

3. Some implications for statistical development of the Region are then highlighted in the concluding remarks.

**2. Background Information**

4. It is instructive to note that for several years before the Directors of Statistics of the Americas adopted the current structure and functions, and commenced to operate under the auspices of the UNECLAC, there existed an International Statistical Conference (Spanish acronym CIE) for Directors of Statistics of this Region which operated under the auspices of the Organisation of American States (OAS), based in Washington D.C. This forum used to meet at least once annually, but at times convened special meetings in addition to its annual meeting. All Member States of the OAS were automatically members of the CIE and could therefore, attend the meeting as observers, unless they were elected to the governing committee. The CIE had an elected governing committee (Spanish acronym COM/CIE) comprising representation from all the different sub-regions, including the Caribbean. At that time, the UNECLAC was an ex-officio member of the CIE.

5. In July 2000, the United Nations Economic and Social Council adopted a resolution, which established the Statistical Conference as a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, which will contribute to policies in the area of statistics and statistical activities among countries of the Region.

6. The main objectives of the Conference are: (i) to promote statistical development and harmonization with international standards; (ii) to promote cooperation and collaboration between statistical offices, international agencies and regional agencies; (iii) to draw up a relevant biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities to meet the needs and demands of the countries of the Region, subject to the availability of resources.

7. All countries which are members of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean are automatic members of the Conference which will hold meetings every other year;

8. The Conference will elect an Executive Committee in accordance with the regulations of the Commission. This committee will comprise a representative from each of the sub-regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Caribbean being one such sub-region;

9. The Secretariat of the Commission will serve as Secretariat for the Conference;

3. **The Second Meeting of the Conference of Directors of Statistics of the Americas, June 18-20, 2003 – A summary of the main proceedings.**

10. The Conference met for the second time in June, at the headquarters of the Commission in Santiago, Chile. The following are some of the highlights of this Meeting:

11. The Meeting was first briefed by a representative of the Commission on the successes and challenges of the previous biennium programme for the period 2001 to 2003. He then introduced the current programme, which is targeted to be completed by the year 2005.

**SUB-PROGRAMME I: Adoption and production of basic statistics within the framework of a regional strategy for the implementation of the System of National Accounts 1993 (SNA 1993)**

12. Sub-programme I addresses the very important strategy for Member States to adopt and produce basic statistics within the framework of a regional strategy to implement the System of National Accounts 1993 (SNA '93). This sub-programme emphasizes three (3) substantive aspects i.e. implementing the SNA '93, statistics on Tourism and the harmonization of the various economic statistics in the Region. In connection with the last aspect, special consideration will be given to the work done on

the International Comparison Programme. In view of the fact that some countries have made substantive progress in implementing the new SNA '93 international standards, the work programme will include more activities geared towards harmonization. Even though a major effort has been made in the region to implement the SNA '93, the completion of the SNA central framework has only partially been realized. ECLAC will, therefore, concentrate efforts in the organisation of seminars and in the exchange of experiences and outputs. Much more emphasis will be placed on the standardisation of methodologies used by countries.

13. ECLAC and the WTO will continue the collaborative efforts in the biennium 2003 to 2005 to develop tourism satellite accounts for the countries of the Region;

14. ECLAC will serve as the regional ICP coordinator, setting regional goals and objectives. ECLAC will liaise with countries to appoint national coordinators to collect the data at the national level, and liaise with the regional coordinator. At the time of the conference, twenty six (26) countries had expressed their desire to take part in the ICP activities in the year 2004.

15. Several rich interventions followed when the floor was opened for discussion. Among these, it is worth noting that Spain reported that she intended to sponsor several workshops on Tourism Satellite Accounts during the biennium 2003-2005. The CARICOM region has already benefited from one such workshop held in Barbados in October 2003.

### **SUB-PROGRAMME II: Improvement of the Production and Use of Statistics on Social Variables and Well-being**

16. This sub-programme will focus on the improvement of the production and use of social variables and well-being.

17. Under this topic of the agenda, the representative from CELADE, ECLAC, reported on a Meeting held the previous day on the 2000 round of population censuses. He informed the main Meeting that among other issues, the census Meeting discussed new techniques for processing and disseminating census information, the democratisation of the access to census data banks, the possibility of marketing census information and the need to find better ways to maximise the use of census data. The CELADE representative further informed the Meeting that due to an acute shortage of finances, the institution could no longer offer long-term training in Demography. However, in view of the fact that there is a shortage of Demographers in the Region, it will continue to offer short-term training and liaise with other institutions which may be able to bridge this critical gap.

18. Both the IDB and World Bank representatives reported on the support they had provided to countries through the **MECOVI** project, and reported that due to insufficient participation by the English speaking countries in the MECOVI project as expressed at the first Meeting of Directors of Statistics of the Americas, a separate programme has

been developed for the English speaking sub-region. We now know this programme to be called **SPARC**.

19. During the discussion which followed the formal presentations under this sub-programme, Argentina reminded the Meeting that in our efforts to develop an integrated system of social indicators, we should not lose sight of the potential of administrative sources.

20. The representative of the Andean Community informed the Meeting of their efforts to harmonise social statistics as well as statistical methodologies in their Region. They also reported on their efforts to produce indicators on 'Governance' and on the 'Informal Sector' and suggested that financing of surveys and censuses should be on the Agenda of the next Meeting of Directors;

21. The representative from the CARICOM Secretariat expressed some satisfaction with the present work programme for the biennium 2003-2005 in that it displayed a marked departure from the previous programme in terms of tangible benefits for the Caribbean sub-region. It was noted that a few of the activities of the programme are directly targeted to Caribbean countries and the CARICOM sub-region in particular. This is a welcomed change from previous work programmes. The representative also noted with satisfaction, the fact that the World Bank is taking up the challenge to more directly assist CARICOM Member States through a project similar to the MECOVI project. He then briefed the Meeting on the efforts in the sub-region to assist Member States to develop capacity to produce reliable and comparable statistical data and indicators on the environment, gender, social development and other areas.

22. The representative from the ECLAC Secretariat informed the Meeting of the main features of the REDESA project, which is funded by the United Nations Development Account, and which seeks to set up a network of experts and organisations working in the areas of social and environmental statistics.

23. The Secretariat's representative also recalled the high priority, which the UN system attaches to the development goals articulated at the Millennium Summit. These goals are significant since they focus on quantitative targets to be achieved in a specified time frame set by the countries themselves. This approach to development highlights the importance of accountability and transparency in public administration.

24. On this topic, the representative from Bolivia expressed concern about the gradual reduction in budgetary allocation to statistical offices of the Region and the consequent need by some offices to use substitute or indirect indicators. Since governments made commitments to achieving the Millennium goals, they should also provide the necessary resources to measure their progress, in so doing.

### **SUB-PROGRAMME III: Improvement and Extension of the Production of Statistics on Specific Issues**

25. Under this sub-programme, one of the substantive issues raised by the representative from the secretariat is the increased growth in demand for Environmental statistics in terms of international, regional, governmental as well as civil society organizations. Evidence of such an increased demand has been made clear in the deliberations and outputs at forums like the Millennium Summit and recently at Johannesburg. A major challenge is the fragmentation and dispersion of environmental data. This highlights the need to bridge the gap between users and producers of data and to facilitate training and exchange of experiences. Three favourable occurrences to date, in this connection, include the report on the progress made by countries in developing environmental statistics, the work being done by REDESA and the revision of the UN handbook on environmental accounting.

26. In her presentation, the representative from the Women and Development Unit of ECLAC referred to some of the activities with which ECLAC is currently involved together with national women's offices, including the processing, analysis and use of gender statistics. The representative stressed the need for countries to move swiftly to build capacity in the area of 'Time Use Surveys'. Efforts are being made to promote the use of these surveys as an important policy-making tool. She mentioned initiatives being taken to develop indicators on 'Violence Against Women' and the efforts made by ECLAC to measure poverty on a more gender-differentiated basis. Cuba offered to share her expertise on the subject of 'Time Use Surveys'.

27. The subject matter of Science and Technology and in particular, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was then introduced by the secretariat and there was considerable discussion on this topic as well. The linkages between ICT and productivity and economic growth in the Region were strongly emphasized in the discussion. An interdisciplinary approach involving the use of common methodologies that would foster cross-country comparisons is at the basis of the work in this area.

28. The representative from Peru informed the Meeting that work on developing indicators in the area of ICT is ongoing jointly by Mexico, Peru and Brazil supported by ECLAC and other partners and stresses the objective of identifying common methodologies, which may be adopted by other countries. These efforts are strongly supported by other relevant international agencies including EUROSTAT who was also able to share some of the European experiences with participants at the Meeting;

29. However, the representative from Peru warned that in light of severe budgetary constraints faced by statistical offices of the Region, there is an urgent need to define priorities. He suggested that ECLAC play a leading role in this endeavour;

30. The OECD representative informed the Meeting of the progress made by his organisation and other entities in the area of Science and Technology and innovation in the field of statistics. He stressed the importance of adopting common international definitions and standards to ensure comparability.

31. The Meeting noted the very successful work carried out by UNSD and CARICOM resulting in two publications on social, gender and environmental statistics and indicators.

32. Finally, of significance under this programme was the announcement by Bolivia of the planned technical meeting to be hosted by his country. This meeting was entitled “*Second meeting on the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the measurement of poverty*”. The CARICOM Secretariat participated in this forum in the persons of the Programme Manager for Statistics and the Deputy Programme Manager, Caribbean Community Development and Women affairs.

#### **Sub-Programme Iv: Modernization Of Statistical Systems And Data Dissemination**

33. The representative of the Secretariat described this sub-programme as the most political of all and appealed for countries’ full cooperation in carrying out the activities identified. Some of these activities involve the credibility of national statistical offices, advocacy to promote statistics, institution building, as well as governance.

34. In this connection, it is instructive to note the mission and vision of PARIS21, i.e. Partners in Statistics for Development in the Twenty First Century. PARIS21 was launched “to increase political support for statistics, integrate statistics into poverty reduction strategies, promote strategies for strengthening statistics and improve dialogue between producers and users”. In partnership with ECLAC, its proposed activities include workshops and meetings to promote a “culture of statistics” in the region. The representative from Canada welcomed the initiatives of PARIS21 and referred to similar initiatives with which Canada had been involved in Central Europe and China. Canada stressed the need to involve political authorities as well as civil society together with statisticians, which had good results in these countries mentioned.

35. Honduras reported that in carrying out the research agenda of its statistical institute, PARIS21, as well as ECLAC would play a very important role. In this connection, the representative made reference to the recent initiative to formulate a Central American Statistical Council, and a proposal to this effect will be put to the next Summit of Central American Presidents for their endorsement, with Honduras becoming the pro tempore secretariat for this council.

36. Both Mexico and Uruguay argued that the assessment put forward by PARIS21 was not reflective of the real situation in the region and the history of the countries’ national statistical offices should not be ignored. Spain, even though agreeing, noted that the situation varied from one country to the other, but a common feature is the need to strengthen national statistical offices.

37. The Meeting then engaged itself in several discussions on issues relating to institutional strengthening, management and data quality. The representative of Chile was the moderator for this session during which two papers were presented on data

quality – one by Canada and the other by Spain. There were several interventions on the issues raised in these papers. The last substantive discussion topic was on the paper presented by Bolivia focusing on public credibility of national statistical offices. Discussion here was also very substantive and was a logical extension to the discussion in the previous session.

38. The Meeting then formulated and adopted its recommendations and elected a new executive for the biennium 2003-2005. Chile was elected to chair the new executive. The representative from Trinidad and Tobago was elected as representative for the Caribbean Region.

#### **4. Conclusion**

39. The Conference of Directors of Statistics of the Americas is very important for the CARICOM sub-region since many of the initiatives highlighted at this forum, are very relevant for this sub-region. Attendance at this Meeting by more Member States is, therefore, very crucial, especially since the deliberations at this forum set the pace for the entire region, including the Caribbean sub-region. A considerable amount of funding is channeled via this forum and if we are not present at these meetings to voice our concerns and argue for our fair share, the interpretation is that we are not very interested in the work of the Conference. Further, it is obvious that by attending this Meeting, the Region can also benefit from the rich networking, which occurs at the forum. There can be bilateral as well as regional networking, which can work in the interest of the overall statistical development of the sub-region. Finally, considerable benefits can be accrued not only from the programme of work itself, but from the contacts developed. Member States should take note of the advantages, which are possible via this forum, and to be encouraged to attend the next meeting in 2005.

#### **ACTION REQUIRED**

**The Meeting is invited to:**

- (i) **note** the report of the the Conference of Directors of Statistics of the Americas.

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