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TWENTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE RESTRICTED
STANDING COMMITTEE OF
CARIBBEAN STATISTICIANS SCCS/2003/28/13

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**IMPROVING NATIONAL STATISTICS THROUGH COORDINATION -THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF A STATISTICS COMMISSION FOR JAMAICA**

(Submitted by Jamaica)

Introduction

In December 2001, The Statistical institute of Jamaica (STATIN) completed the strategic planning process which culminated in the documentation of a development plan, "***The Modernization of STATIN - A Strategic Plan 2002 – 2005***". The process included a SWOT analysis of the Institute. Low response to the on-going quest for data from the data providers was identified as a major weakness and the lack of understanding and appreciation by the public and public sector agencies were identified as threats. There was also some concern about the quality and lack of coordination in the compilation of national statistical information, particularly the statistics in the social sector.

2. Consultant from the IMF under a technical assistance support project reviewed the organisational effectiveness and efficiency of the Institute. He used the Statistical Capacity Building Indicators Questionnaire to assess the position of the Institute and in so doing determined the weaknesses and strengths of the organisation to deliver on its mandate.

3. Among the findings of the Allen Report¹ the following points were made in respect of the area **Pre-requisite for quality** –

- (i) The legislation provides that STATIN promotes and develops integrated statistics and coordinates such integration;

¹ IMF – Report On The Mission On The Organisational Effectiveness And Efficiency Of The Statistical Institute of Jamaica (June 24 – July 6, 2002) By David Allen, Consultant

- (ii) However more specific powers are required to provide for STATIN to develop and maintain a coordinated national statistics programme.
4. In order to address this shortfall, his recommendations were:
- (i) The establishment of an Advisory Council; and
 - (ii) The amendment to the Statistics Act to incorporate the establishment of the Advisory Council in addition to those other sections of the Act that were to be reviewed.

Characteristics Of The Information Infrastructure Within The Public Sector

5. Busby² describes the public sector within the Caribbean as information collecting within a system that is vertical and not integrated. These discreet systems are set up to meet the respective needs of the Ministries.

6. The National Statistics Offices (NSO's) were established to be the centre/hub of the national information systems but the information needs of the public service has out grown the ability of the NSOs architecture. Consequently some of the systems established lack the "rigour and discipline of data management".

7. In more recent times the Central banks have also emerged as collectors of specialised monetary and financial data as part of their supervisory role over the financial sector. They are also responsible for the external sector statistics.

8. Whereas there is some dialogue within the system there is no real coordinated approach to setting standards and a national framework for the production of national statistical information.

The Roles Of The Coordinating Body

9. Item 67 of the Allen Report recommends the establishment of the statistics advisory council with "*broad based membership capable of providing advice to STATIN and to the Minister on the improvement and coordination of statistical services and on statistical needs, priorities and work programmes.*" The paragraph continued to advise on the composition of the membership and on the frequency of meetings.

10. The description provided in this paragraph is a summary of the recommendations outlined in the Handbook On The Organisation Of A Statistical Agency³ on the benefits to be derived from the establishment of Statistical Councils.

² Lance Busby (December 2001) – Information, Information Management and Governance – LC/CAR/G.677

³ Handbook On The Organisation Of A Statistical Agency, Revised Edition, United Nations Statistics Division, December 2001

11. In 1999 the White Paper, **Building Trust In Statistics**, was laid before the UK parliament for debate. The Paper recommended that strengthening the existing arrangements and establishing a governing board could achieve accountability and governance of the national statistical programmes.

12. The **Framework For National Statistics** for the UK was produced in June 2000. The Framework document sets out:

- (i) The aims and objectives of National Statistics;
- (ii) The role and responsibilities of each Minister that has responsibility for the production of statistics;
- (iii) The responsibilities of the National Statistician;
- (iv) The responsibilities of the heads of profession for statistics (the departmental/ministry unit heads);
- (v) The role and responsibility of the Statistical Commission.

13. The National Statistics Code Of Practice – Statement of Principles (UK) was also developed and documented so as to underpin the foundations of good statistical practices.

The Statistics Commission (UK Model)

The Role

14. The role of the Statistics Commission as outlined in the Framework For National Statistics is to advise on quality assurance and priority setting for National Statistics, and on the procedures designed to deliver statistical integrity, to help ensure National Statistics are trustworthy and responsive to public needs. It is independent of both Ministers and the producers of National Statistics, and operates in a transparent and open way - making its operations publicly available for scrutiny

Aims and objectives

15. The Statistics Commission will establish itself as a source of high quality and independent advice on statistical issues. Its advice will be made available to the wider public, who must be able to rely on it as both considered and impartial.

16. The Statistics Commission has freedom in the way it operates, subject to the requirements laid down in this document, the *Financial Memorandum*, and the *Framework for National Statistics*. It will ensure that satisfactory systems are in place for the delivery of its role in monitoring and advising on the quality, procedures for priority setting, and integrity of National Statistics.

17. As set out in the Framework for National Statistics, the Statistics Commission, in conducting its work programme, will:

Improving Quality and Relevance of National Statistics

- (i) ensure that it is able to assess the needs of users;
- (ii) consider and comment to Ministers on the high-level programme for National Statistics, drawing on the views of users and suppliers, taking account of:
 - (a) the resources available for National Statistics;
 - (b) the compliance costs of providers of raw data; and
 - (c) the management needs of organisations required to supply raw data.
- (iii) Proposals by the Commission for modification of the National Statistic programme will be accompanied by a compliance cost assessment;
- (iv) advise Ministers of areas of widespread concern about the quality of official statistics, so that Ministers can take these considerations into account in determining priorities and making decisions about National Statistics

Improving Public Confidence in National Statistics

- (i) comment on the application of the National Statistics Code of Practice and other procedures designed to promote statistical integrity;
- (ii) comment, as necessary, on the arrangements for promoting professional standards across all official statistical offices;
- (iii) comment on the quality assurance process of National Statistics, as well as being able to carry out spot checks on Departmental or other audits of National Statistics, to advise the National Statistician of any areas of concern that merit review and, if necessary, to carry out or commission its own audits;
- (iv) respond to ad hoc requests from the Minister for National Statistics for advice on any matters related to National Statistics, subject to resource constraints;
- (v) review the need for statistical legislation after two years and report back to the Minister for National Statistics, and keep the legislative framework under review thereafter;

Operate Efficiently

- : take account of compliance costs of responding to statistical enquiries and the need to secure value for money when commenting on the proposed annual statistical work programme;

Co-ordination with Government

- : secure effective communication channels between the Commission and the Minister for National Statistics, and between the Commission and the National Statistician;

Devolution

- : advise Ministers on the effectiveness of the arrangements to ensure the consistency and co-ordination of statistics on a UK-wide basis following devolution, as appropriate, and establish working relationships with devolved administrations as it, and they, see fit;

Performance Reporting

- : submit an annual report to the Minister for National Statistics commenting on the annual report of the National Statistician and on the way the Commission has fulfilled its remit.

The Advisory Council *vis-à-vis* The Advisory Commission

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines:

Council as “ advisory, deliberative, or administrative body of people formally constituted and meeting regularly” and

Commission as “the authority to perform a task or certain duties; a person or group entrusted especially by a government with such authority”.

The issues that need to be resolved in naming the coordinating body, whether it be a Commission, a Council or a combination of both should be determined out of the consultative process and should be dependent upon which position that will have more authority in achieving the aims and objectives as defined.

Conclusion

The concerns and issues with the UK system of producing national statistics of high quality and which are acceptable and believed by the public that lead to the tabling of the White Paper, Building Trust in Statistics, mirrors the concern of the statistical system in Jamaica. The process of public and parliamentary debate is one to be emulated, as the objective of “building trust” requires acceptability by the users of the information.

The users must also be assured that quality of the output remains high and that the system provides the mechanisms to do the necessary audit checks.

Data producers must also become aware of the need for the information that is requested and the use to which it has been applied. The need for their cooperation cannot be over emphasised but consideration must also be given to respondent burden and fatigue resulting from several requests, particularly for the same data.

In a coordinated system efforts should be made to ensure that there is compatibility in the data storage and architecture platform. The security and use of the data would also be addressed in a coordinated system.

In the long run the idea is not to have control of National Statistics by the NSO but to have a system that is set on a platform that assures quality and transparency and that is accountable to Parliament through the Statistics Commission.
