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CARIBBEAN STATISTICIANS**

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**REPORT ON WORKSHOP TOWARDS THE HARMONISATION OF SOCIAL
STATISTICS IN THE REGION: FURTHER ADVANCING THE REGIONAL
STATISTICAL PROGRAMME**

1. INTRODUCTION

Participants will recall that, as part of the CARICOM Programme on Social and Gender Statistics, was the setting up of the Social Indicators and Millennium Development Goals (SIMDG) Committees in Member States. The scope of work included establishing standard definitions and methodologies to be used in computing the selected statistics and indicators.

2. In this connection, a Workshop was held in Grenada in August 2003, to initiate the process of harmonising existing metadata in the sub-region, in the area of Social/Gender Statistics. The major objective of the Workshop is to start the process of harmonization and to develop a strategy to obtain harmonized concepts, definitions and methodologies to ensure comparability of data across Member States. This process will eventually lead to a harmonized metadata base for the sub-region that can be disseminated to all users.

2. PARTICIPATION AND FORMAT OF THE WORKSHOP

3. Two participants, one from the National Statistical Organisation and the other from the SIMDG committee of nine Member States, namely Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago were invited to attend the Workshop and eight Member States were able to be present.

4. Unfortunately, due to difficulties with the travel arrangements, Suriname was not able to attend this first workshop. It is noted here that all other Member States and Associated Member States will be invited early next year, to a second

workshop in this series to continue the process of harmonising social metadata in the Region. The main objective of this subsequent workshop, will be for the participants to seek to reach agreement on the recommendations coming out of the first meeting, thereby guaranteeing uniformity and conformity, which are hallmarks of the harmonisation process. However, it is recognised that since systems e.g. the education system, vary between Member States, social statistics will take a long time to be fully harmonised.

5. For the first workshop, a team of approximately five experts from within the Region, who have relevant experience on this topic were invited to attend. In addition, representatives from the main UN agencies operating within the sub-region were also invited. The regional experts prepared relevant papers on the main themes reflected in the social indicators and the International Organisations represented, also informed the Meeting of material relevant to their organisations.

6. After the presentations were delivered and discussion of these entertained, the participants were then assigned to groups to have more focussed discussion directly relating to harmonisation of the indicators identified. One group focussed on the Health indicators, another on Education, a third on Population and the Family, Work and the Economy and the fourth group discussed Poverty, Crime and Decision Making. Each group was then invited to report back to plenary and a summary of their recommendations is highlighted in the next paragraph.

3. MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENTED TO THE PLENARY SESSION

Group I: Education

- (i) It was imperative to appoint a working group of experts to look into definitions and make recommendations for the way forward. UNESCO guidelines were to be reviewed from this national standpoint. It was also noted that special schools should be integrated into the school system rather than treating them as separate entities;
- (ii) The role of the SIMDG Committee should be fully recognised and focal points within the committee should be established for all sectors. The focal points should then follow up issues relating to areas of concern. The Committee should promote ownership of the process so that it could be sustained at the national level. The media should play a leading role in promoting this. SIMDG Committees should share experiences across the Region, and 'best' or 'good' practices should be used as models for other territories to adopt. The case of Belize in developing Terms of Reference for the Committee, and for the adoption of an appropriate legislative

framework, was cited as a very good development, which other countries could adopt.

- (iii) The group also recommended that indicators should provide information to guide policy e.g. placing specialists to assess children based on performance resulting in the identification of children with special learning disabilities e.g. dyslexia etc. Also, the inclusion of private education data was necessary for the assessment of overall educational achievement. It was noted that international definitions and calculation methods should be used in producing these indicators at the national level. Students attending private education institutions should not be excluded from the total enrollments. Also countries should be encouraged to include footnotes if there were deviations from the standard guidelines. It was stated that the group was of the view that a standard structure was necessary to facilitate regional comparison. The equivalencies should be clear, e.g., Primary 4 in Guyana should be classified as equivalent to Grade 6 in Grenada;
- (iv) The group also suggested that a cross-regional expert group should be established to review the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) within the regional context in discussion with national focal points;
- (v) It was noted that most of the indicators are already quite harmonised. However, one indicator, which continued to be puzzling, was the Literacy Rate. It was imperative that guidelines be adopted in order to foster harmonisation of this indicator, as well, across the Region. The case of Belize was cited where the education level attained is used as a proxy for the Literacy Rate. It was noted that other Member States use different definitions, whereas the definition used by some States remains vague.

Group II: Health

- (i) The group was of the view that since many organisations are involved with the search for strategies to combat the HIV/AIDS disease, the group thought that these organisations might be better placed to effectively deal with indicators related to this disease;
- (ii) The group recommended that the methodology used to assess and make adjustments for under registration should be documented as part of the metadata for the Health sector. Also there was need for consistency checks for variables including “incidence” and “prevalence”. More dialogue between CAREC and the various Member States was essential in order to enhance the harmonization of the data;

Group III: Population, Households, Families, Work and the Economy

- (i) The group informed the Meeting that most Member States were using ILO standards for most of the indicators here. However, some countries, taking local conditions into consideration, have relaxed a few definitions to suit their local circumstances. An example here is the indicator on “Unemployment”. Some countries use only the ‘Seeking’ criterion whereas others use either ‘Seeking’ or ‘Available but not working’ for a person to be classified as unemployed. The ILO has a website with all the definitions and it is recommended that countries examine this site to see how far their own definitions varied or not. ILO is in the process of developing a standard classification of occupations within the Region.
- (ii) Some other differences are as follows: The minimum age for work was different across the Region. School leaving age was also different among countries. According to the definition of **Child Labour**, the age of a child started at 15 years. However, in the Rights of the Child promulgated by UNICEF, all persons up to age 18 years were considered children. To overcome these issues, ILO had allowed the countries to determine their own minimum age to work. The compulsory school ages were also different across the Region and it was recommended that they be synchronized with the minimum age for work;
- (iii) The implementation of **Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)** had been done in Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and Guyana, supported by UNICEF with the assistance of other regional bodies. Other countries should consider implementing this in between population censuses to produce updated information. The group noted that NSOs and CSOs did not entertain high status and some times funding to conduct surveys was far below the demands;
- (iv) On the issue relating to the concept of “Head of Household” it was noted that persons under 18 years of age could not be treated as a reference person and that more discussion was needed on this subject. The Meeting was informed that the concept used by the statisticians conforms to the UN standards and it was pointed out that comments made on this subject by non-statisticians were also taken into consideration at this Meeting.

Group IV: Poverty, Crime and Power and Decision Making

- (i) The group reported that most countries have a clear understanding of the indicator ‘Crime Rate by Type’. This also has national coverage. In terms of categories two types of crimes were identified: crimes against person and crimes against property. Under each category, the indicator could be further defined as major or minor crime as the case may be. It was also

- stressed that the countries should come together to determine which crimes were major, which crimes were minor, in order to achieve harmony. Also, it was imperative to investigate how countries differ across the Region with respect to definitions of those two terms. While respecting countries' wishes to satisfy their own domestic ends there was need to harmonise the definitions and methodologies. The report also indicated that in terms of use the methodologies and formulas adopted by statisticians were pretty much the same;
- (ii) In terms of crime by urban/rural, place of occurrence, the group looked at the frequency distribution of different types of crimes, in order to investigate which types of crimes were more prevalent or less prevalent at the national level by urban/rural or other geographical location, as the case might be;
 - (iii) Victims of violence by type of crime and age of the victim was another indicator that the group looked at and came up with some kind of assessment, and made some recommendations. In this regard, not only data collected from police, but also records from hospitals, probation departments and NGOs could be very useful. The crime of domestic violence can be better captured and analysed by using these sources. Data on domestic violence can be obtained from police, hospitals, NGOs and domestic violence shelters. Sex of the perpetrators should have also been incorporated in the data collection instruments. It was reported that there were cases of domestic violence going un-reported due to reluctance on the part of the victims. He suggested that the Meeting can adopt alternative approaches to gather data on domestic violence, such as a Victimization Survey exercise done in the USA. Some of the shortcomings of the official data could be overcome by data from victimisation surveys such as that above, or self-reporting studies. The group noted that "offenders by type of crime and age" might be termed as "accused by type of crime by age";
 - (iv) Based on the above observations, the group recommended the bringing together of major stakeholders to discuss country-specific definitions of key concepts with a view to arriving at consensus. These should include national statisticians, representatives from the Police Records Bureau, representatives of the courts and representatives from the legal affairs arm of the government;
 - (v) Training of statisticians, officers in the courts and police officers in the principles of research methods and statistical procedures and techniques akin to analysis and decision-making to treat with all aspects of crime and the administration of justice;

- (vi) Foster joint research initiatives between staff of NSOs, the courts and national police services with a view toward participating in annual meetings that will discuss country-specific and regional developments within the sub-region. Moreover, these officers should also be encouraged to attain membership and forge links with organizations that host seminars and conferences to address these issues at international levels;
- (vii) Member States should explore the feasibility of undertaking national victimization surveys, and self report studies in Caribbean countries given their size and the rarity of some criminal event;
- (viii) Forging links with ECLAC who have already embarked upon a process of developing and harmonizing data collection initiatives and evaluating prevalence as it relates to domestic violence.
- (ix) For the indicator on “**Persons in high managerial positions**” in the public and private sectors, including selected public order and safety occupation, the group suggested that data could be obtained from both the public administration and human resource development sectors, as well as from Employers’ Association for the private sector;
- (x) In the area of **Poverty**, much discussion, in the group, centered on the indicator “**The proportion of population below \$1 per day**”. The group thought that in most of the Caribbean countries this percentage was very low, even below 1 per cent. It was questioned whether the indicator in this form should even be included. What was certain was that such an indicator could be obtained from exercises such as Living Conditions Surveys and Household Budgetary Surveys. In terms of cross variables, data could be gathered at the national level, place of residence, urban/rural and for individual islands as in the case of The Bahamas, and parishes, in the case of Jamaica. In the case of categories for analysis, one could look at household size, age and sex of head, as well as by the individual’s sex;
- (xi) “**Poverty Gap**” was another very important indicator which can be obtained through Living Conditions Surveys and other Household Surveys;
- (xii) The indicator “**Share of the poorest quintile in national consumption**”, is a national level indicator which can be obtained from the two types of surveys mentioned above. The method of calculation for this indicator was pretty straightforward;
- (xiii) “**Prevalence of under weight under five years**” could be obtained through anthropometric studies using data from Living Conditions Surveys. Some countries had also done Mixed Multiple Cluster surveys

where anthropometrics could also be facilitated. The formula for calculating the indicator with some references was given by the Trinidad & Tobago representative in his presentation;

- (xiv) The last indicator in this section i.e. **“The proportion of the population below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption (indigent)”** could again be obtained from Living Conditions Surveys. The definition given for the minimum level of dietary requirements was the cost of the basket of goods that satisfies minimal nutritional requirements. The coverage and the categories of analysis were the same as for other indicators discussed above;

4. CONCLUSION

7. Some general recommendations can be summarized as follows:

- (i) There is a crucial need for cooperation and collaboration at the national, regional and international levels;
- (ii) There is also need for a vigorous national response in promoting the usefulness of statistics and promoting the SIMDG committees as a viable mechanism to collect, compile, analyze and disseminate social statistics and indicators;
- (iii) Further, the need exists to sensitize and promote advocacy not only at the Cabinet level, but also at all levels of governance nationally;
- (iv) In addition, cooperation and collaboration are crucial among international organizations globally, especially at the regional level, and there was an urgent need for international organizations to continue to work directly with ministries, but should involve other appropriate agencies at the national level;
- (v) There is also the need for Member States to set targets and to identify gaps at the national and regional levels;
- (vi) Also, a very salient feature coming out of the deliberations was the need to harmonize CARICOM indicators with other indicators coming out of other international agencies such as PAHO, UNESCO etc. in order to avoid duplication of efforts;
- (vii) In this connection, the need exists to build on existing mechanisms and guidelines, such as the Regional Coordinating Committee for Population Censuses, the ILO and UNESCO guidelines, and so on. More specifically, there was an urgent need for the recently established SIMDG committee to be fully recognised as a very useful beacon for coordinating

this corporation and collaboration and therefore its role and function should be strengthened to ensure that it is recognized at the highest level i.e. at the level of Cabinet, since support at this level is crucial to the success of any initiative;

- (viii) It was also stressed that there exists an immediate need to utilise the universities as research centers and as a central location to take many of these detailed recommendations for implementation. However, Member States should be closely involved and regional organizations should be facilitators of this process. Additionally, the capacity of the Member States needs to be strengthened to enable them to conduct surveys on a continuous basis;
- (ix) Finally, the Statistics Programme of the CARICOM Secretariat will immediately set about the task of putting together all indicators which are already harmonized and engage in discussion on the way forward to harmonize the others, as far as possible;
- (x) As a matter of urgency, it was recommended that immediate action is required to set up smaller technical advisory groups in each of the areas, namely, Health, Education etc. and to pursue more in-depth work in the respective areas, and to offer further timely recommendations to rapidly advance the process.

ACTION REQUIRED

8. **The Meeting is invited to:**

- (i) **consider** the report of the Workshop on the Harmonisation of Social Statistics in the Region: Further advancing the Regional Statistical Programme;
- (ii) **note** the intent to convene a similar workshop in 2004 for the remaining Member States;
- (iii) **also consider** the recommendations arising out of the workshop;
- (iv) **also note** the need to set up technical advisory groups in the area of Social statistics to make operational the process of harmonisation.
