

CARIBBEAN

COMMUNITY

SECRETARIAT

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

RESTRICTED

CARIBBEAN STATISTICIANS

SCCS/2003/28/30

Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands

3 -5 November 2003

5 November 2003

BELIZE COUNTRY REPORT

Attached for the attention of the Meeting is Paper entitled Belize Country Report.

Following is a summary report on the major activities undertaken by the Central , Statistical Office (CSO) of Belize in 2003. As far as possible, efforts were made to highlight the triumphs and challenges faced; since these will encourage and guide fellow colleagues in their own

execution of the various tasks.

1. STAFFING

The Central Statistical Office has thirty officers on its staff These consist of the chief statistician, the deputy chief statistician, an administrative officer, two senior statisticians, four statisticians, five statistical officers, four statistical assistants, a programmer, six district supervisors, two data entry operators, a clerk, a secretary and an office assistant.

After a long and tedious process, we managed to secure replacements for three district supervisors, two of whom were long due for transfer to headquarters.

Due to its burgeoning wage bill, government has instituted a staff containment policy. While there are still prospects for additional staff the CSO is trying its level best at increasing efficiency in every aspect of service delivery.

2. TRAINING

This year, one of the five staff members on study leave completed his course and returned to duty. He has since been promoted to the post of statistician in the Social and Demographic Statistics Section. Early in the coming new year, another officer will return from study leave. She is slated to head the Data Collection and Processing Section. Accordingly, the responsibilities of this unit will be expanded to include further technical assistance to government departments in compiling key administrative data.

In the pursuit of continuous staff development, study leave was approved for an officer to pursue a bachelor's degree in Economics at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. Currently one of the statisticians in the Economic Statistics

Section is on a one-month attachment at the CSO in Trinidad & Tobago. As a ~ component of the national accounts project, the IDB provided funding for this.

As regard short-term training, three officers attended workshops abroad, namely Harmonisation of Statistical Metadata in the Area of Social and Gender Statistics (Grenada), Gender and Health Statistics (El Salvador) and Tourism Satellite Accounts (Barbados). The Caricom Secretariat is duly acknowledged for its persistent efforts in securing training opportunities for national statistical offices in the region.

As the office strives to continue the digitisation of its enumeration district maps, increase proficiency in the SPSS software and in GIS technology are considered high priority areas of training. It is our vision that within one year all of the technical staff will be sufficiently proficient in the use of the SPSS software.

3. POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS

Due to competing demands from other areas, work has not yet started on the analysis of the results of the 2000 Population and Housing Census. The Administrative Report is still outstanding, however, we plan to give this attention next year.

There is continuous inflow of requests for census information. We had hoped to upload the entire census database on the Internet, allowing users to do their own data queries. The obvious benefit of this is that staff would be relieved of the arduous task of responding to lengthy requests that are received almost daily. The CSO would be very grateful for any assistance it can get to improve access to its census data.

In an effort to encourage greater analysis of the census data and other data produced by the CSO, starting next year, all statisticians will be required to produce a research paper annually. It is expected that some assistance in data analysis will be forthcoming from the Caricom Secretariat promised in the 10th meeting of the Regional Census Coordination Committee.

4. LIVING STANDARDS MEASUREMENT SURVEY

While the National Human Development Advisory Committee (NHDAC) is charged with the production of the 2002 poverty report, the CSO is totally responsible for the local coordination of

that activity. The report, which is seven months overdue, is still in draft form. Nonetheless, it has received the full endorsement of Cabinet, who has gone ahead to release the major findings.

In the next fortnight, the NHDAC will give a detail presentation of the results to Cabinet. The Minister of Economic Development, who has responsibility for the committee, strongly believes that his colleagues need to be thoroughly briefed if government should successfully mount a concerted war against poverty.

About a month or so ago, the government received a grant from the Inter- American Development Bank to update its National Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan. As one of the partners in that exercise, CSO stands to benefit from further capacity building.

5. LABOUR FORCE SURVEY

The conduct of this annual activity returned to normal scheduling after three years of forced postponement. A report of the results is current/y being prepared and should be available by year's end. In terms of format we plan to adopt a thematic approach. This should greatly increase the report's utility while providing an opportunity for in-depth analysis of a topical subject matter.

With a ten percent sample size, we believe there is ample room to reduce the number of households interviewed in the survey without sacrificing accuracy and reliability significantly. It is expected that the savings realised from such a measure could be used in other areas of statistical investigation.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL STATISTICS

As mentioned in last year's report, work in this field is limited to updating the existing data series. It is anticipated that when the statistician in this unit returns from study leave in mid-2004, special efforts will be made to reinvigorate it, including the solicitation of technical assistance. Without the leadership that CSO used to provide, it appears that interest in environmental statistics has waned significantly.

7. EXTERNAL TRADE STATISTICS

Since January of this year, the CSO has discontinued key punching the external trade data received from the Customs and Excise Department. It now relies exclusively on ASYCUDA for such data. Since there is not any quality control mechanism at the Customs Department, each month the CSO spends about five person-days querying the data. Much of this time is spent on the export transactions of export processing zones.

Due to the absence of an electronic link between the Customs Department headquarters and its various stations, data have not been available in real time. Nonetheless, the timeliness of the generation of the external trade statistic has improved this year by a full month, as they are now available up to September 2003.

8. NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

The Inter-American Development Bank-funded project, which draws to a close next year, resulted in a complete overhaul of our national accounts system, including the introduction of tourism satellite accounts. During a mission in May of this year, there was an evaluation of the Belize Classification of Economic Activities as it relates to the core tourism goods and services and an introduction of the structure and definitions of the TSA manual issued by the EUIWTO/UN as regard the former, it was discovered that the data necessary for TSA was not available in sufficient detail.

A TSA working group comprising personnel from the Central Bank of Belize, Belize Tourism Board and the CSO was established to coordinate and expedite the compilation of TSA for Belize. It is presently considering a proposal for the construction of a TSA for Belize by the World Travel and Tourism Council.

The CSO also received consultant services for the compilation of an import price index for Belize. The launch of a small test survey, the preparation of excel workbooks for data entry and index calculations and the selection of the sample of items to be included in the index were three of the main achievements.

As for the core national accounts statistics, they now have 2000 as their base year. An attempt to include the activities of practitioners servicing the offshore sector was unsuccessful due to the lack of data.

9. SOCIAL INDICATORS COMMITTEE

As one of the co-chairs, the CSO is actively involved in the activities of the Social Indicators Committee (SIC). The strategic objective of this committee is to facilitate the process of integrated social sector planning, policy development and the monitoring and evaluation of human development indicators.

Members recently took a decision, that the SIC becomes a standing committee of the NHDAC since their objectives are intimately intertwined. The logistical arrangement of this change will be tabled at the next NHDAC meeting. In the meantime, the SIC has developed a work plan for the next year. During that time, the compilation of the Millennium Development Goals statistics and indicators will be the primary focus. Later this month, the committee will receive nine computers from UNICEF.