

COORDINATING SOCIAL STATISTICS IN SURINAME (A Bird's-eye View)

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Introduction:

In Suriname, just like in other countries there are many users and producers of statistics in general and of social statistics in particular. The problem has always been one of coordinating so as to prevent duplication and to ease the response burden. While we want to prevent duplication, coordination certainly also aims at preventing blanks in certain areas. In Suriname, the problem caused by lack of coordination has been exacerbated by an obsolete Statistics Act (in force from August 1954 to December 2002) and by the fact that all major Censuses were conducted in the 1980's and no Census was taken in the 1990's. After 23 years a Population Census was conducted in 2003, but because of arson only the results of the Census Quick Count, combined with the PES are available.

Coordinating Social Statistics in Suriname

By the end of 1997, the General Bureau of Statistics (GBS) commenced activities based on UNSD's Minimum National Social Data Set (15 Basic Indicators). Late 1998 / early 1999 the UNICEF and the Government of Suriname embarked on the Child Indicators Monitoring System (CIMS) Project. The GBS decided to combine both efforts and the MNSDS working group members became members of the CIMS National Coordinating Committee (NCC), headed by the GBS. Besides the GBS, the following government departments and institutions were represented in the NCC: Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, Medical Mission Suriname, Regional Health Services, Bureau for Public Health, Ministry of Education and Civil Registry Office. The NCC prepared a publication, which was issued by the GBS, jointly with UNICEF in 2001. CIMS/MNSDS provided a fertile practice ground for coordinating activities. CIMS/MNSDS activities taught us that a rotating chair was a simple measure to combat resentment. It also taught us (albeit less successful), to try to attune data collection activities and publication calendars. The CIMS NCC still exists and has resumed its monthly meetings on the premises of the GBS last October.

The UNSD/Caricom Project: **“Strengthening Capacity in the compilation of Statistics and Indicators for Conference follow-up” (SIMDG in what follows)**, which was launched at the 24th SCCS and was consolidated into the Caricom Social Indicators and Millennium Development Goals Programme, since the 26th SCCS, is one of the most successful activities initiated externally and then continued and consolidated locally.

The first visible output was the publication: Selected Gender Statistics Suriname, which was issued in April 2002. It was the fruit of collaboration between: The GBS, the Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Health, The Bureau for Public Health, The Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, the Civil Registry Office and the Police Force.

SIMDG also resulted in a firm cooperation between the GBS and Conservation International Suriname in the field of environmental statistics, with a publication: Selected Environmental Statistics (November 2002) as major output. SIMDG also led to expansion of the CIMS-NCC to the SIMDG Committee, in which many more institutions, both government and non-government, participate.

Interestingly, for both CIMS and SIMDG major goals are eradication of poverty and a better future for all.

After installation of the SIMDG committee, it was felt that a “novel” approach was necessary. The SIMDG approach taken in Suriname is the following. Based on groupings of indicators, the SIMDG Committee is subdivided into 3 Clusters and all the Clusters are further subdivided into Working Groups, with specific, relevant participating institutions.

The situation is as follows:

Cluster	Indicator	Working group
1	Population	Civil Registry Office (CBB), General Bureau of Statistics (GBS)
	Families and Households	CBB, GBS, Bureau for Public Health (BOG), Justice Department
	Education	Ministry of Education, GBS, University (2x)
	Health	Ministry of Health, BOG, CBB, PAHO/CAREC, GBS, National Women's Organization (NVB)
2	Work	Ministry of Labour (ATM), National Planning Office (SPS), GBS
	Economy	SPS, Ministry of Finance, GBS
	Poverty	ATM, Social Affairs and Housing, NVB, Justice Department, GBS
3	Crime	Police Force, GBS
	Decision Making	Home Office, SPS, National Bureau Gender Affairs (NBG) , ATM, GBS, SPS, Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation (PLOS)

The Working Groups meet whenever they deem necessary, but at least once a week. The Clusters meet at least monthly and at most once a fortnight and the SIMDG Committee has a Plenary meeting at most monthly, but at least quarterly, either on the Premises of PLOS or on the premises of the GBS.

The SIMDG Committee is now concentrating on finalizing Suriname's MDG Baseline report and with support from UNDP, a short-term consultant (known to most of us), is contracted to ensure that the baseline Report drafted by the GBS with major inputs of most participating organizations can be updated, in terms of data, policy information and demand for technical assistance from the participating entities. The deadline for finalizing the MDG baseline report is 15 December next. The consultant and the Cluster chairs are also required to produce so-called Next Steps.

The Coordinating role of the General Bureau of Statistics is greatly facilitated by the fact that in December 2002 a new Statistics Act was passed, with stiff penalties for non-responding entities. After the GBS resumed its normal activities as of 1 March this year, we successfully threatened some of the non-respondents with the new Act. It is clear that while this works for (non)respondents of Economic Statistics, it does not work in the field of Social Statistics where most producers are government departments.

Selected achievements of both CIMS and SIMDG

- 1- Close(r) collaboration between major users and producers of Statistics, since 1999
- 2- Comparison of definitions and concepts and acknowledgements of data gaps, as well as of shortcomings of available data
- 3- Training of staff of some participating organizations in Statistics and in the use of selected software (Excel, Access, SPSS)
- 4- Provision of equipment for the most needy institutions
- 5- Joint Publications

Lessons Learned so far¹

- 1- It is possible to obtain a more or less complete picture of what each institution is supposed to do vis-à-vis what they actually do as regards data collection
- 2- Concepts may sometimes seem to be the same but by closer inspection it turns out there are major definitional² or computational problems.
- 3- Some institutions collect data but have no definitions whatsoever

¹ Inputs from Astrid Hunte of the GBS are gratefully acknowledged.

² Harmonization of certain concepts and definitions requires legislation. (e.g.: Live births / still births)

- 4- The model of a rotating chair for CIMS and SIMDG-Clusters works well and splitting up the committee into workable (sub)units has been conducive (please also see 9) to their performance
- 5- Ownership of all outputs is very important
- 6- More work is needed so as to change the attitude of some producers of statistics, as notwithstanding a good cooperation some organizations are still of the opinion that they need to publish whatever they produce first and then they can share it with CIMS or SIMDG.³
- 7- Involvement of participating organizations in every aspect, up to publication of results is key⁴.
- 8- Harmonization is not only required for subject matter concepts, but also for geography at a lower level than the district (different institutions have different demarcations!)
- 9- It may be better to concentrate on a core set of dedicated users and producers, instead of trying to amass a comprehensive body of users and producers of which the majority has a high truancy rate!
- 10- The SIMDG approach is not a panacea and cannot be expected to rectify in a few years what has gone wrong for decades!
- 11- High level support is necessary (but not sufficient), if and when it seems that the process gets “derailed”. This was demonstrated by the “National High Level Dialogue on the Implementation of our International Commitments”, held in Suriname on 27 August 2004 (Presentations by: The President and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Planning and Development Cooperation, Social Affairs and Housing, Trade and Industries, Labour and the Chief Intelligence and Security Officer of Suriname).

Closing Remarks

In addition to Suriname’s commitment to adhere to all resolutions it has ratified, the MDG’s tie in nicely with the strategic policy areas in the MOP 2001-2005⁵: Good (Democratic) Governance, Macro-economic Stability, Public Sector Reform, Sustainable Poverty reduction, Basic Social provisions, Reforms of Social policies (social security, education and health); Supportive conditions for private sector development, Infrastructure, Sustainable Development and Protection of the Environment.

³ It has to be acknowledged also that unlike the GBS the other institution need clearance from either the Minister or someone else in charge to release data.

⁴ For the GBS this used to be problematic. Given a publications and dissemination calendar, agreed with the Minister with Statistics in his portfolio, we could not afford to wait for those that were not ready. Sometimes people felt vexed, only because they received an invitation to be present at a Press Conference launching the pertinent publication (a little bit) late.

⁵MOP= Meerjaren Ontwikkelings Plan, i.e. Multi-annual Development Plan (Constitutionally required).