

Development of the Support Programme for Poverty Assessment and Reduction (SPARC) in the Caribbean: Progress Report

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Origins of SPARC programme

- Surveys of Living Conditions and Country Poverty Assessments (SLC/CPA) → interest in enhancing country ownership and capacity building component
- MECOVI Steering Committee's request to extend the benefit of the programme activities to countries in the Anglophone Caribbean region (1998)
- The World Bank Institute's offering of a Learning Program for SLCs/Poverty Analysis (2000)
- MECOVI/Development Partners for Poverty Working Group (DPPWG) partnership → commitments to development cooperation for a regional program for the Caribbean with MECOVI lessons customized to the Caribbean local conditions

* **MECOVI** is short for “Programa para el Mejoramiento de las Encuestas y la Medición de Condiciones de Vida”, a Spanish acronym for the Program for Improvement of the Surveys of Living Conditions (ISLC)

MECOVI Program for Latin America and the Caribbean

- Jointly launched in 1996 by IDB, World Bank and UN-ECLAC
- With a view to:
 - Improve quality, relevance and timeliness of household survey and poverty data
 - Promote wide use of the improved data for research and policy analysis
 - Promote open accessibility to the household survey and poverty data
 - Improve survey methodologies and poverty analysis
- Through program activities of:
 - Joint country-specific national MECOVI programs of technical assistance operation
 - Regional seminars/workshops on survey methodologies & poverty measurement
 - Regional training courses

MECOVI: Diagnostics

- Anatomy of perpetuation of weak capacity
 - A vicious circle of low-quality data, low data utilization, lack of credibility and low prestige, chronic shortage of funds, low investment and maintenance of statistical capacity, low-quality data, etc.
- Key indicators of weak capacity and low quality
 - Incomplete coverage – substance and geography
 - High non-sampling errors during survey execution
 - Excessive time lag between data collection and publication of results
 - Lack of open data access policy at the unit-record level
 - Low utilization of the data for research and policy work
- Donors not part of the solution, but part of the problem
 - More interested in pushing for short-term agenda by financing quick-fix data gathering activities, sometimes by-passing the NSOs
 - Less interested in coordinating with wider group of development partners to help build the lasting capacity

MECOVI in Effect

- From a Shared Vision for Positive Change
 - A multi-year program to build sustainable capacity by injecting substantial resources to break the vicious circle
 - Building on existing country capacity and statistical system
 - Close program coordination and supervision of program activities
 - All to ensure significant improvement of statistical capacity for household surveys and the poverty data
- To Contribution to Generating Better Data for Better Measuring Development Outcomes
 - Promotion of good practices in definitions, measurement, data collection and analysis (consultancies, workshops, training, etc.)
 - LAC regional data bank made up of micro-data sets from 400+ household surveys – key input to country and regional reports:
 - World Bank -- Poverty Assessments and ESWs
 - IDB -- IPES
 - UN-ECLAC -- Social Panorama

MECOVI Lessons

- NSOs in the driver's seat, and an extensive consultation with key stakeholders help create country buy-in and ownership
- More emphasis on building capacity to plan and implement surveys than on just perfecting survey instruments
- Building on the existing capacity – start from the weakest link
- Interaction of producers (supplier) and users (clients) of survey data increases long-term viability of the program – role of inter-institutional committee important
- Promote “Culture of Statistics” and democratization of data access (open data access policy – pre-requisite conditions for participation in MECOVI program)
- Country commitment to producing high-quality data creates a virtuous circle of: Better data → Better publicity → Increased demand → Increased allocation of resources → Better data

SPARC Programme Development

Milestones in the initial phase 2000-2003

- The MECOVI team and Barbados-based donor group (DPPWG) agreed to collaborate to develop a MECOVI-like joint initiative to support the SLC/CPA in the Caribbean (March 2000)
- PRSP Workshop in Washington, DC (April 2000)
- OECS/WBI Training Workshop on “Poverty Analysis and Social Development” in St. Lucia (May 2001)
- Report to the 26th meeting of the SCCS in The Bahamas (October 2001)
- The 1st Consultation Meeting to identify country demand and seek guidance on program design in Guyana (December 2001)
- CARICOM COHSOD Endorsement (April 2002)
- Dr. Joy Hutcheon’s program support document (PSD) (April-June 2002)
– coined the term SPARC programme
- The 2nd Consultation Meeting to seek guidance on governance and program coordination mechanism in Barbados (January 2003)

SPARC: Vision and Approaches

- Ongoing poverty assessment using regional capacity including
 - Survey of Living Conditions (SLCs) every 2-4 years
 - Interim administrative indicators
 - Other components (such as census, etc.)
- Evidence-based Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Comparable results
- Capacity developed in the region
- Improved regional access and dissemination
- Support to monitoring of MDG progress

SPARC: Approaches to Program Design

- Move away from model where:
 - External consultants own and drive work
 - Country input by non-institutionalized body
 - Little capacity built
- Towards new model supporting countries to:
 - Develop a medium-term plan
 - Build on instruments already in place
 - Assess capacity gaps and plan how to fill them
 - Identify sustainable institutional arrangements
 - Drive program and manage technical inputs

SPARC: Program Component -- National

- **Poverty Support Team:**
 - Support for development of program
 - Support to improve and implement SLCs
 - Support for other assessment components
 - Support for development of PRSs
 - Support for monitoring indicators for achieving MDGs
 - All to include capacity building
 - Establish register of regional expertise

SPARC: Program Component -- Regional

- **Regional workshops**
 - Share experience and best practices
 - Develop common methodologies
- **Regional/subregional training**
 - Where common needs are identified
- **Regional data base support**
- **Support to CARICOM indicators work**

SPARC Programme Status Report

2002-2004

- Introduction of the Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ) as an instrument for monitoring poverty and public services to complement SLC (2003)
- Rolling out of SPARC programme activities in a decentralized manner
 - CBD/DFID – SLCs/CPAs (Anguilla, BVI, Dominica; 2002)
 - EU Support to CWIQ Pilot (October 2004)
 - IDB – Support to SPARC through CDB's SLC/CPA (\$350,000)
 - UNDP – Support to SPARC Consultation Meeting (December 2001, January 2003), MDGs Workshop (July 2003), support to CARICOM, CWIQ feasibility consultancy (April 2004), CWIQ Pilot in St. Lucia with EU (October 2004)
 - The World Bank – IDF Grant for Mini-MECovi for OECS (US\$400,000)
 - The World Bank – TFSCB Grant for the Social, Gender and Environmental Statistics for CARICOM (US\$200,000)

SPARC Programme

Challenges for the Future

- SPARC made important contributions to raising consciousness about importance of taking coordinated approaches to building country and regional capacity in SLC/CPA to support evidence-based policy-making
- SPARC – valuable as a mechanism for coordinating development cooperation and sharing information regarding SLCs/CPAs and support for the Poverty Reduction Strategies
- SPARC – implementation of programme components to be carried out in a coordinated manner to maximize the synergies to be had by sharing information and avoiding duplication.
- Dr. Joy Hutcheon’s recommendations are still valid – many elements of program design could be implemented under alternative scenarios of financial commitments and institutional arrangements