

**TWENTY-NINTH MEETING OF
THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF
CARIBBEAN STATISTICIANS**

SCCS/2004/29/8

Hamilton, Bermuda

22-24 November 2004

8 November 2004

EFFORTS AT ACTIVATING SIMDG COMMITTEES IN MEMBER STATES

1. Introduction

One of the key strategies employed in order to achieve the main outputs of the CARICOM programme on social and gender statistics was to establish SIMDG committees in the respective Member States. Presently, committees have been established in all Member States except Haiti and the Cayman Islands. The merits of the SIMDG approach cannot be overemphasised. This approach seeks to involve all major stakeholders in the process of collecting, compiling and disseminating Social Statistics as a consequence of which, ownership, commitment or 'buy in' to these processes is maximised and interest in achieving the outputs is much higher. Another merit of the approach is that since these agencies comprise both users and producers of data, the quality and timeliness of the final outputs can be significantly enhanced through feedback by the users to the official sources of the information, the producers, on problems and challenges experienced in using the information.

2. The Status and Operations of the SIMDG committees in Member States

Since the establishment of these committees, their operations have met with mixed success. It was very encouraging to note that at the introductory meeting, in all of the Member States, the attendance was very good; there was active participation by the attendees and rich and stimulating discussions. In most cases, the committee was established at the meeting itself, and in the cases of a few others, the nucleus of the committee was identified with the intention of obtaining the approval or endorsement of the Cabinet of the respective countries to formalise and sanction its formation. Member States that were able to form their committee at the first meeting included: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname. Some Member States that undertook to make recommendations to their respective Cabinets included Trinidad & Tobago and associate member states such as Bermuda and the Turks and Caicos Islands. To date, both Bermuda and the Turks and Caicos Islands have gotten the endorsement of Cabinet for the establishment of their SIMDG committees. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, final endorsement by Cabinet is yet to be achieved.

The success stories of SIMDG establishment include, Belize, Suriname, and Bermuda. In the case of the Belize model, the Social and Indicators' Committee is part of the wider committee, a larger National Human Development Committee with direct access to the Cabinet. Suriname has also had very promising results in terms of teamwork and cooperation. Barbados is another Member State where the committee has met a few times since its inception, and quite a few urgent matters have been successfully resolved. In addition, Bermuda was the last Member State visited by the Secretariat to establish the process, they seem to be the fastest moving Member State relative to energising the SIMDG.

However, the SIMDG committees in most other Member States have not been functioning as ideal. In a few cases, the committees hardly ever met since its formation. Very often, criticism is directed at the chairperson for not as have either never met since the convening of the initial meeting or efforts to meet have been weak. In addition, in cases where it is reported that one or two meetings have been held, the committee's primary task of completing the core social indicators as far as the available data will allow, is far from complete.

Among the reasons that can be attributed to this state of inactivity of the SIMDGs are:

- the separation of the CARICOM programme;
- the additional burden these formats pose on already stretched human resources;
- apathy in strategising to get the work completed;
- an apparent general disinterest in the entire CARICOM programme which is seen in isolation to the work of the department in the area of Social Statistics.

In a few Member States, not a single indicator has been submitted to date, and this is after several follow up contacts. Very often promises to prepare and submit the indicators are made, but little or nothing follows these conversations and promises. Attempts have been made to directly contact Directors of Statistical Agencies at every opportunity available but the process of making promises and failing to deliver on these promises recurs. In several cases, it is known that the data exist and require time and sustained effort, commitment and effective coordination to compile the statistics and to construct the indicators. It was in this context that the Secretariat developed strategies that can further build capacity to produce the relevant social statistics and indicators.

3. Strategies to Activate the SIMDG Committees and to Compile the Core Indicators

- (i) Providing in-country training to members of the SIMDG committees;
- (ii) Producing reliable and timely indicators on a sustained basis and promoting their use, can be best done through the cooperation of all stakeholders involved. It is therefore critical that the SIMDG committee functions as a team, since this committee comprises both users and producers of data. Realising that most of the raw data required for the core indicators emanate from agencies represented on the committee, and noting the fact that except for the National Statistical Office itself, the other agencies' capacity to collect and compile data is quite limited, a strategy was developed to enhance this capacity through in-country training of the members of the committee. This training focusses on the basics of data organisation and raw data collection including form and questionnaire design, treatment of non-response and managing the quality of data collected. Participants are also thoroughly trained on the actual compilation of the core indicators with emphasis being placed on the MDG indicators as a subset of the list of core indicators. This approach has been used in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada and Dominica.

Other areas incorporated in the training sessions were down the chain of the use of the information and use of Life Tables and Basic Fertility Analysis as examples of linking the data compiled to its effective use. These sessions attracted considerable attention and interest with participants from Dominica also benefiting in an introductory session on sampling procedures based on their request.

One of the highlights of the workshops has been their practical orientation whereby visits are made to the three of the main data producing agencies, namely the Ministries of Education, Health and the Police. In all three countries

visited thus far, participants got first-hand exposure to the challenges and successes of these departments in compiling the indicators. During follow-up discussions, suggestions for improvement have been put forward. These workshops again reinforced how effective the teamwork approach, as engendered in the SIMDG can be. There is no doubt that these workshops have been very instrumental in reinvigorating the SIMDG committees, and participants are now seeing the need for this approach to foster the collection and compilation of reliable and timely social indicators. Hence, these training sessions, in addition to their principal objectives of helping to enhance capacities to collect and compile the relevant data, also provides the opportunity to clarify the process of the SIMDG committee. Further, as stated before, the practical approach of visiting the appropriate units while they are actually involved in the collection and/or compilation of the data and learning of their strengths and weaknesses has been very useful in developing sensitivity to the practical problems facing the various agencies. The rich discussion that followed these visits offered many useful advice and suggestions.

Other efforts at activating the SIMDG committees

At every stage of the implementation of the CARICOM programme on Social and Gender Statistics, all key members of the SIMDG committee are being involved. The regional workshops that have been held to date have involved, in addition to the participation from the National Statistical Office, at least one other member of the SIMDG committee. The planned study tours and exchange visits will also involve the broader SIMDG committee and the user manuals that are being prepared have members of this committee, among others, as a prime target. Exposure and training like these will play a critical role in adequately sensitising these individuals in order to more able function as a key agent of Social statistics and indicators at the national level.

4. Conclusion

It is critical to coordinate and harmonise Social Statistics, both at the national and regional levels. The mechanism recommended through the SIMDG committee presents a convenient and viable method to achieve these objectives. However, for this model to work, all parties must be willing to collaborate and cooperate in a much more tangible fashion. Member States are therefore urged to note and recognise the strengths of the SIMDG model and to make every effort activate and implement the model's recommendations and strategies.

ACTION REQUIRED

The **Meeting** is invited to -

- (i) **consider** the efforts of the Secretariat to enable the development of Social Statistics through initiating of coordination;
- (ii) **also consider** the mechanisms used by respective countries to establish these committees;
- (iii) **further consider** the slow pace of operation of the SIMDG committees in most Member States;
- (iv) **note** the rationale for the poor showing with regard to these committees;
- (v) **also note** the merits of the SIMDG process;
- (vi) **urge** Member States to set a time schedule for the activation of the SIMDG process and for the achievement of outputs.
