

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

SCCS/2004/29/9

**Hamilton, Bermuda
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**INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS GAPS AND DEFICIENCIES IN SOCIAL STATISTICS IN
THE REGION**

1. Introduction

For a very long time, the production of Social Statistics of an acceptable standard in the Region has been neglected. However, this scenario was not unique to this Region. The various international conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) in the 1990's called on Member States to make serious efforts to collect, compile and disseminate social statistics in order to monitor the commitments made at these forums. This call at the global level was with the recognition that there was a clear deficiency in statistics. While Member States of the UN accepted most of the international commitments and despite the recognition that statistical capacities were in need of improvement, little attention was paid to remedy this situation after these conferences. As a consequence, gaps and deficiencies continue to widen in the countries' statistical infrastructure, particularly in the area of Social Statistics.

2. The CARICOM Region's Response

In the CARICOM Region, Social Statistics are the products of a variety of agencies and departments of government ministries, including the National Statistical Offices. For example, the Ministries of Education and Health are the main agents for the primary

data on the Education and Health sectors, whereas the Registrar General's department keeps statistics on vital events like births and deaths. This scenario has led to a lack of coordination leading to many gaps and deficiencies in the data, lack of timeliness in the production and to a system that is not internally harmonised.

The strategy adopted by the CARICOM Secretariat in order to address this situation is to maximise collaboration and cooperation among the various producing agencies and stakeholders such as users at the national level. This approach will enhance capabilities in data production. The strategy also seeks to encourage collaboration at the level of agencies operating in the Region. To foster this collaboration, CARICOM has assisted Member States in establishing committees that have been aptly labeled Social Indicators and Millennium Development Goals (SIMDG) committees. The view is that by harnessing together these agencies as well as other experts, the process will create an efficient vehicle through which statistical capacity can be built and sustained to produce the required statistics, resulting in an elimination of the current gaps and deficiencies that exist. This will also result in improving the quality, comparability and range of statistics at both the national and regional levels.

The strategy involves the participation of all members of the SIMDG committees in all activities geared to develop statistical capacities. Some of these training activities include in-country training of SIMDG members, study tours and attachments, regional workshops and on-the-job training in the actual compilation of the core indicators of the programme. Some of these activities have already started and others are programmed to be implemented shortly. It is hoped that a key output of these endeavours will be the overall strengthening of the capacity to generate social statistics and indicators among the entire national statistical systems of the various Member States. It is also expected that these committees will continue to operate as a team and that the team approach will be strengthened and sustained over time.

3. Existing Gaps and Deficiencies

The Need to Collaborate and Coordinate More Effectively

Even though it is still too early to formally evaluate, the CARICOM response, it has so far has been promising. However, a major hurdle remaining is the urgent need for most Member States to accept the SIMDG strategy. Member States like Belize, Suriname and Bermuda have demonstrated that the team work approach is much more effective than the traditional approach where every entity operated in isolation and in the absence of coordination and harmonisation. Further, Member States should note that it has been shown, time and time again, that collaboration and cooperation among all stakeholders are crucial to the success of any operation. It is therefore expected that very soon, tangible steps will be taken by the National Statistical Offices and the relevant social sector agencies to work together as a team in the production of Social statistics and indicators.

General Concerns Relating to the Gaps and Deficiencies in the Actual Data

- (i) *Timeliness* in the production of Social statistics remains problematic even among the few Member States that have been producing some of the data. Timeliness can be improved if the importance of Social statistics is recognised. Importance, in turn, can be enhanced if we ensure maximum use of the statistics produced;
- (ii) The need to *harmonise* concepts, definitions and methodologies continue to pose a challenge, and will have to be addressed more thoroughly. The process of harmonisation has commenced with a workshop for selected Member States that was held in Grenada in August. It is expected that a second workshop for the remaining Member States will be held shortly in order to promote consensus on the agreements reached thus far;

- (iii) There is also an urgent need to assess the *quality* of the statistics that are being generated thus far. Presently, Member States are being encouraged and assisted to produce a quantum of statistics and indicators. In several cases, little if anything, can be stated about the quality of these statistics. It is expected that harmonisation will significantly assist in ensuring that the statistics produced are also of an acceptable standard or quality.

Specific Concerns Relating to Gaps and Deficiencies in the Actual Data

In the actual data set, there remain several gaps and deficiencies based on user needs. The following features are significantly among these gaps:

- (i) *Crime statistics* are the most neglected of all the various areas. One of the main reasons for this is that the source of this set of statistics is the Police department and very little or no meaningful assistance has been mobilised for the Police in the past. However, most Police departments of Member States in the Region are very interested in developing reliable databases at their respective departments since they recognise the need for reliable and timely information for security purposes. The CARICOM Secretariat has been exerting efforts to mobilise resources to conduct a regional workshop on Crime Statistics and it is hoped that this will be possible in early 2005;
- (ii) There is also a serious lack of up-to-date and reliable statistics on *Poverty* in several Member States. In fact, at least one Member State has never done a Poverty Survey or Assessment before. However, even in countries where one assessment has been done, there is an urgent need to update this as soon as possible. Indeed, most Member States should be updating their key poverty statistics at least on a yearly basis. There is some hope that the SPARC project will begin to address this situation shortly;

- (iii) Other key Social statistics and indicators continue to be lacking in other areas. These include *Domestic Violence, Child Abuse, Child Labour, Family Health and Family Planning*. Statistics on these areas can best be generated through the conduct of household surveys but the truth is that Member States currently lack the necessary resources to conduct such surveys. In fact, household survey capabilities remain a major gap or deficiency in the Region. Of course, strengthening the administrative data recording and the collaboration and cooperation between national agencies can also greatly assist in bridging these gaps and deficiencies. In an effort to address the situation, the Secretariat has been enhancing collaboration and cooperation with our international partners. For example, recently the Secretariat has been engaged in discussions with UNICEF to collaborate on a “Child Protection and Monitoring Database Project” that is being piloted in Guyana. A large component of this project will focus on the organisation of data collection, compilation and analysis on children. It is hoped that the good practices and experiences realised in the pilot will be carried over to other Member States. In addition, the area of household survey capabilities is one that has been identified as requiring critical financing.
- (iv) Of great significance, it was noted that there is an absence of data on HIV/AIDS including the profiles of these persons that can assist in intervention and in the arresting of the spread. The experience of the Secretariat has shown that it is possible to some of these profiles from the national agencies and a good example of this resulted from a mission to St. Vincent and the Grenadines where sensitisation and coordination with the relevant agencies produced some of the profiles on HIV/AIDS required for effective policy formation.

4. Conclusion

During the past two years, significant progress has been made in addressing the glaring gaps and deficiencies that exist in the area of Social Statistics. However, serious challenges remain ahead in terms of sustaining this progress and in terms of institutionalising the good practices and experiences realised thus far. The first

deficiency that must be urgently addressed is the need to **make meaningful efforts to collaborate and cooperate through the SIMDG committees**. This is critical in order to sustain the timely production of reliable Social statistics in the Region. Member States are therefore requested to note this urgent need and to make tangible efforts to immediately convene an SIMDG committee meeting to discuss the way forward.

ACTION REQUIRED

The **Meeting** is **invited** to:

- (i) **consider** the presentation by the Secretariat on the gaps and deficiencies in the data.;
- (ii) **also consider** the identified general and specific concerns;
- (iv) **urge** member states to take action to sustain the process of coordinating social statistics through paying critical attention to the operating of the SIMDG Committees.
