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COMPLETING DATA GAPS FOR THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SMDG) (A SMALL ISLAND STATE EXPERIENCE)

THE CASE OF DOMINICA)

Preface

In September 2000 world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations, New York. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for improving human conditions by 2015 are derived from the Millennium Declaration. The MDG broadly embraces eight goals and eighteen targets, (Appendix I). The MDGs are universal human development parameters applied to all countries, with membership in the United Nations, irrespective of their level of development.

Countries have gone a step further with an additional component, localizing the MDG. Broadly, this concept presents other indicators that are also relevant in the context of national socio-economic development. Regional institutions and countries have localized the MDG's on regional and national levels. This achievement (particularly at the regional level) enhances data comparability and harmonization of data sets and creates a move towards regional social and economic equity. MDG indicators are also presented for national assessment and monitoring.

Although several countries have embarked on completing the indicators for the MDG program, data gap exists. For some countries this is a definite challenge considering all the restraining externalities, for example human and financial resources, and even more importantly, beginning the process of completing these gaps.

This report looks at the processes, activities and experiences in completing data gaps from a small island state. The presentation will primarily focus on MDG gaps since "localized" and other social indicators would have been collected or exists in one form or the other.

The Commonwealth of Dominica

Description and General Background
The Commonwealth of Dominica is the most northern and largest of the Eastern Caribbean's Windward Islands situated between Latitude 15. 20 North and Longitude 61. 22 West. It lies between the French islands of Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. The island covers 751 square kilometers (289.5sq miles). Dominica's climate is classified as a partly humid tropical marine, characterized by little seasonal variation between the wet and dry season. Its pronounced high rainfall during the wet season contributes to its lush vegetation.

The island's topography is rugged with steep, luxuriant rain forest mountains, deep river-incised valleys and tree-covered hills that produce and sustain pristine streams and tumbling mountain waterfalls.   The island has great diversity of floral and fauna.   The Morne Trois Pitons National Park (incorporating the central mountain range) is inscribed on the United Nations World Heritage List since 1998, based on the criteria of Outstanding Universal Value to Mankind, its natural aesthetic, rich bio-diversity and irreplaceable contribution to the understanding of science and natural landscape phenomena.

Dominica's relatively undisturbed and rugged landscape, extensive forest, pristine fresh and sea water and overall ecological system have contributed to Dominica's being acclaimed as "the Nature Island of the Caribbean".   This label has impacted favorably in positioning Dominica's global choices as a tourist destination for nature lovers and environmental adventure seekers.   The island is currently promoted and is in its developing stage as an eco-tourist destination. Visitor arrivals increased by 30.0 percent from 1994 to 2006, reaching a total arrival of 84,967 in 2006. The three major markets are the Caribbean, United States of America and Europe.   Cruise lines call in regularly registering 379,643 passengers in 2006. A record 383,614 was set in 2004.

Population
The total non-institutional population of Dominica numbered 69,775 according to the May 12, 2001, Population and Housing Census.

The 2006 end of year population was estimated at 71,180 with people of African descent accounting for 86.7 percent. A small population, 3.2 percent of indigenous kalingo or Carib

people, the survivors of the original or first people of the Caribbean, presently occupy a demarcated area called the Carib Territory, on the northeast of Dominica. The island is subdivided into ten parishes or population zones with the capital city, Roseau, located within the parish of St. George in the south- west. The city of Roseau recorded a non-institutional population of 14,579 or 28.5 percent of the total population in the 2001 Population and Housing Census.

Political and Economic Situation

Dominica attained political independence from England in 1978 and retains a political organization based on the British Parliament multiparty democracy. English is the official language. However, partly due to historical influences, the majority of the population speak a patois "kweyol" composing of African and French linguistic structures.

Traditionally, Dominica's economy has been based on agriculture. Agriculture (mainly bananas) contributed 20.75 percent of Gross Domestic Product in 1996 and 16.88 percent in 2006. The total Gross Domestic Product registered Eastern Caribbean $671.14 million in 2006 , recording a per capita income of $9428.77

Economically, Dominica pursues and sustains a free-market and liberal economy. During the 2006 period the economy recorded an estimated growth rate of 3.98. Tourism, Construction, Manufacturing and Agriculture sectors contributed significantly to this growth. However, the rate of inflation as measured by the Annual Consumer Price Index rose by 2.61 as compared to 1.67 percent in the previous year. Percentage increases were recorded in group indices Fuel and Light, 7:53; Housing and Utilities, 4.68: Educational Expenses, 3.49 and Food, 2.80.

Completing Data Gaps for the MDGs

What are Data Gaps?
Data gaps are statistical information, that is required but cannot be accurately completed because information does not exist, or is unreliable.

Identifying Data Gaps
The MDG indicators are reviewed and where data does not exist or is unreliable and therefore cannot be completed, a data gap is identified.

Concepts and Definitions

Following the identification of a data gap, indicators and terms must be clearly defined and documented. This facilitates data collection and increases clarity and comparability of information. International systems like the International Monetary Fund – General Data Dissemination System (IMF-GDDS,) support such documentation.

As gaps are identified the next steps are methods of data collection, or processes for completion.

The Process

The data gaps of the MDG and other selected indicators of national importance are identified and an assessment of possible sources of information is performed.   This assessment will avoid duplication of efforts, and reduce costs. Where information is not collected a questionnaire or table to capture the information is designed or produced and an appropriate source to collect the required is identified. Sources may be government departments, administrative records, non-government organization or the private sector.

Implementation

An implementing agency or unit must initiate the process. This process must be supported by a central secretariat preferably within the National Statistics Office or Statistical Institute.

Monitoring

A surveillance method or monitoring unit must be established to ensure the completion of the data gap. Constant communication with contact persons is essential for continuity. Monitoring also assist in the sustainability of data collection. Even so, data collection monitoring, following initial completion of data gap , facilitates institutionalization or an established system of data collection for such information. The monitoring system may be part of the national statistical system

Financial Resources

A work plan and budget must be designed for the completion of the exercise. The commitment of funds is key to successful completion . The cost of completing data gaps is dependent on the duration of data collection and the availability of information.

Identifying Data Gaps

Dominica has made progress in data collection in its national database over the last decade. This is evident in the presentation of indicators for Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Core Social Indicators (including the environment) and the Millennium Development Goals (SIMDG). Within this broad data set are sub-set presentations and localized indicators.

Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty

The 2002 Country Poverty Assessment presents data on general Living Conditions recording poverty head count by age, gender and geographic distribution; health, employment, education, access to services and ownership of assets among others. Data on the one dollar a day indicator is not applicable since the Region has already achieved this goal. The survey used a basic poverty line derived from a minimum food basket with an amount allocated to non-food expenditure. The poverty line was estimated at $3,400 per adult per annum and the indigent line estimated at $2,010 per annum. The poverty rate was 39% among the population and 29% at the household level. The indigent population was 15% with approximately 11% at the household level.

The report further presents a qualitative summary on poverty derived from a participatory assessment related by the "not so economically fortunate". Poverty indicators that can provide information for effective national social and economic planning are readily available from data on Living Conditions. However other poverty indicators from the MDG are derived from existing sources, Health Administration in particular. Until 2005 data was collected only on the indicator - underweight for under five (s)- but was not disaggregated by gender. However as the data gap completion process began, underweight by sex was compiled. Data on the other indicators-stunted and wasted was not compiled until 2005 when the process of completing the data gaps began.

Completing Data Gaps – Indicators:

Prevalence of underweight, stunted and wasted children under five years of age

A health administrative role must be activated to record and disaggregate data by gender for underweight, stunted and wasted children (<5 years of age). The first step is to establish the definition of terms underweight, stunted and wasted as adopted by the National Health Ministries/Departments and guided by international standard definition. The appropriate questionnaire is produced with definitions (Appendix II).

Coordination and Collaboration

The implementing unit identifies contact officer(s) within the Ministry/Department of Health particularly at the maternal health unit(s)to begin the process. The parties concern may decide on method of data collection or submission. However where the data is not systematically recorded, the implementing unit collects the data. This increases reliability of data since the implementing unit would already have first hand knowledge of data gap terms and definitions. This may also maximize time and provide an opportunity for capacity building in the receiving Ministry/Department The opportunity for capacity-building will facilitate or establish formal data compilation for this indicator.

Proportion of Population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption

The most appropriate source for this information is Health Surveys.   Although the 2002 Survey of Living Conditions provided this information, there is no sustainable source. However to minimize cost, this indicator can be attached to current and continuous household surveys.

Continuous surveys will assist in completing gaps and provide current information for this indicator. Health Departments and Social Planning Units may collaborate with Statistical Offices and vice versa to ensure that this information is included as household surveys are conducted .Household surveys must be continuous and not on an adhoc basis .Continuous surveys eliminate the occurrence of data gaps.

National Dietary Councils or Units must also be participants of the process providing definitions and concepts particularly for minimum level of dietary consumption; the national minimum food basket, and other dietary well-being indicators.

Coordination and Collaboration
The Health Unit, Social Planning Unit, Dietary Unit, are informed of the impending exercise in completing the data gaps.

Contact officers are informed about the purpose and benefit of the exercise throughout discussion. Prior knowledge and awareness are essential since they facilitate effective time management prior to the data collection period. Units must be aware of impending surveys so that relevant information is submitted in a timely manner for inclusion on household survey questionnaires.

Achieve Universal Primary Education

Completing Data Gaps - Indicator

Drop Out Rate By Reason

An extensive data system on key international indicators on Education are recorded and published yearly. However "Drop Out Rate by Reason" was not collected until academic year 2005/2006. The data was collected following consultation between the National Statistics Office and the National Education Planning Unit (EPU).

The Consultative Process
The data gap completion process continued with the EPU's general consultation with Principals of primary and secondary schools at a one day consultation to discuss the questionnaire (Appendix III). School principals were given the role of completing the information. The result was successful as appropriate forms were completed and returned to the EPU from the end of 2005/2006 academic year. Data from the completed questionnaires was tabulated and submitted to the National Statistics Office. The data was then reviewed by the Central Statistical Office and further discussed as necessary. For example, the EPU was advised about the further disaggregation of data for the category "Other Reason". Therefore the EPU was guided in disaggregating to some specific reasons (those recording higher frequencies) that may be important to education planning. This data gap is presently completed and sustainable since data have been collected for two consecutive years.

Coordination and Collaboration

Officers of the National Statistics Office inform officers from Education Units of the requirement ahead of the schedule data collection period(six weeks before the close of the academic year). Constant communication must be established for successful continuity of the "step" process. The "step" process is where data from primary source follows an hierarchical data submission process before it gets to the user, for example data for indicator, Drop Out By Reason :

Primary Source 1: School Principals
         Source 2 : Supervisor of Schools
         Source 3: Education Planning Unit
         Source 4: National Statistics Office

Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Completing Data Gaps- Indicators

Literacy Rate of 15-24 year olds – Data Gap

Ratio of Literate Women to Men – Data Gap.

Educational attainment, enrollment and completion are collected systematically through administration records and censuses and have been institutionalized, however detailed information on Literacy is not available.

Conducting Literacy Surveys is critical to solving these existing gaps. The Ministry of Community Development, Education Planning Unit, and the National Statistics Office are encouraged to work on a common questionnaire based on recent recommendations from international Education organization for example, UNESCO and information that meets the targets of the MDG ,to begin the process of conducting a Literacy Survey.

Combat HIV/AIDS

Completing Data Gap- Indicators

Condom use rate, contraceptive prevalence rate

Population By Method of Contraceptive use - Age Group and Union Status

Population aged 15-24 years with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS

Coordination and Collaboration

These data gaps can be completed by the coordinated efforts of the HIV/AIDS Coordinating Unit, the Health Department and the National Statistics Office in adding a module to a Household Survey. As with completing other data gaps, coordinating and collaboration are essential. Units must be aware of impending surveys where this information can be included before actual field enumeration. This supports the collaborative efforts between line ministries which definitely produces several benefits including cost-effectiveness and efficiency.

Population treated for HIV/AIDS by Education and Age Group

Number of Newly Confirmed AIDS cases by Risks group/exposure category and age group.

Number of deaths from AIDS By Age Group, Occupational Group and Geographical Area.

Coordination and Collaboration

The national Registry and HIV/AIDS unit administrative records are the most reliable sources for completing these gaps. These primary sources collects other HIV/AIDS and mortality data. Data on risk group/exposure category and occupational group can be extracted from or included on one of these administrative forms capturing AIDS information. In addition data can be disaggregated by geographical area from Population Census area demarcations.

Health Officers can be informed of the additional information required and the appropriate amendments made to existing forms

Anonymity and Confidentiality
In a relatively small island state anonymity cannot be overlooked. This readily presents itself as realized with some indicators for example ,data on HIV AIDS

Number of Newly Confirmed AIDS cases by Risk Group/Exposure *Category and Age Group*

Number of deaths from AIDS By Age Groups, Occupational Group and Geographical Area

Data must be presented only by total for dissemination particularly when identifiers are recorded. The concern is that these indicators may seem to be data gaps. One way of addressing this situation is by providing footnotes for anonymity.

Data Storage and Dissemination
Efforts to increase efficiency in data storage and dissemination have evolved over recent times and continues to evolve. DevInfo, a UNICEF database system created for data storage, facilitates data sharing and dissemination at national and sub-districts levels across government departments and non-government agencies. Dev.Info is an integral tool in assisting countries in reporting the MDG's.

Adaptation of Dev.Info 1.0
On July 11, 2008, NatureIsle Info 1.0, a national adaptation (of Dev.Info) was customized to present a consolidated range of social and economic data including the MDGS.

Institutionalizing Nature Isle.Info**.**
The software adaptation can be installed at various line ministries and adapted to suit their needs and demand.   As data gaps are completed, such information and other unit indicators can also reported and stored ,thereby increasing the use of the customized software.

Summary
Completing data gaps is essential to the realization of the MDGs. Assessment, country achievement and monitoring can only be perform with the availability of accurate and

reliable data . Even so, the appropriate and most effective programs cannot be implemented without such empirical evidence. Therefore completing data gaps provides the platform for effective planning.   Government (policy makers and other national authorities) must pay particular attention to the completion of MDGs for the fulfillment of basic needs and rights of the people. The completion of the MDGs will provide empirical data for sound decisions and efficient allocation of resources. Blunkett (2000) strongly states that 'for government to develop relevant and sustainable overall strategies for good governance , efforts must be based on sound evidence".   Evidence- based decisions therefore assist governments in the equitable distribution of resources .Such decisions based on empirical evidence increases good governance .

Completing the MDG requirements is critical to national assessment and development. In this era of continuous global economic re-visioning and re-positioning this exercise cannot be overlooked. It must be noted that following the completion of gaps and obtaining reliable data immediate action may be required to meet the targets for 2015 or beyond.

References

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