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Paper Titled

*The Harmonization of Household Survey Practice among CARICOM Countries  
Using the Population and Housing Census as Baseline*

by

*Ms Linda Hewitt*

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***Abstract***

Countries of the English Speaking Caribbean have a long tradition of collectively engaging in Population and Housing censuses on a regional basis that is older than the CARICOM itself. Whilst household surveys such as the Continuous Sample Survey of Population of which the Labour Force survey is a sub-set, the Household Budgetary survey, a variant of the household income and expenditure survey, the Survey of Living Conditions and various ad hoc surveys have been periodically undertaken, these have not however enjoyed the benefits of collective regional planning and execution as has been the case with the population census. With the exception of the OECS countries that have engaged collaborative efforts, household surveys tend to be conducted outside of a common regional framework in terms of timing and continuity. But given certain imperatives of regional integration, the world economy, globalization and trade liberalization that are evident with the newer development of the European Partnership Agreement, there is need to extend the practice of joint effort beyond that which obtains for population censuses, to embrace household surveys. This paper therefore, recognizes the need for the harmonization of household survey practice and timing, targeting key areas that are critical to the regional integration effort, using the Population census as a baseline.

**Key words:** harmonization, household surveys, population and housing census, baseline

## Introduction

The recently signed partnership agreement between the European Union and ACP countries to which the CARIFORUM countries (CARICOM and the Dominican Republic) are bound for the next 25 years, is primarily Free Trade centred but has socio-economic and other implications as well. As intimated by an EU official, the full agreement package is allegedly aimed at: the stimulation of trade, investment and innovation; sustainable development and the building of regional markets among countries including those of the Caribbean. Notably, the elimination of poverty has been included as well. This latter is well placed on the agenda, given that there have been a considerable number of studies that have investigated the impact and effects that globalization and trade reform measures have had on less endowed countries and on how they have fared in their response. The subject matter of such studies that have focused on Latin American countries are: Trade Liberalization and Inequality by D J Robbins (1994); Trade Reform, Agrarian Change and Income Distribution and Poverty by CM Sanchez (2004); Balance of Payments, Liberalization in Latin America: the effects of growth, distribution and poverty by Lance Taylor and Rob Vos (2002); Trade Policy Reforms, Inequality and Poverty by Sanchez Castillo (2003); Trade Reforms and Labour Market Adjustments by Currie and Harrison (1994); Labour Markets Adjustment, Poverty and Inequality by R Paes de Burros and Rob Vos (2002) and Terms of Trade, Tariffs and Labour Market adjustment by S.Edwards (1998) and many, many others.

Trade reform measures and the nature of the structures and relations that are indicated have given rise to demands for data and information for assessing the likely impacts. It is significant that labour market adjustment, inequality and poverty have been identified as areas in which there is likely to be far reaching impacts. Not only with developing economies but in the so-called developed ones as well has the need arisen for data to promote knowledge and understanding of the socio-economic dimensions of trade liberalization and the globalization process. Noting that the European Union summit held in Lisbon in 2000 “had placed socio-economic topics substantially higher on the European political agenda,” Keuning and Verbruggen (2003) further noted the need for the benchmarking of member countries on the basis of “reliable, comparable and

timely national statistics in general and meaningful statistical indicators in particular.” These were to be derived by means of an open coordinated method embraced by all.

### **Challenges for the CARICOM Region**

Admittedly, there have been some common features in the design of household surveys in CARICOM countries since these have tended to follow international guidelines established by the UN and the ILO. Sometimes however, there are variations depending on the agency that provides financial support and along with it, their preferred prototypes. Additionally, some regional countries are better endowed financially and are able to conduct surveys on their own accord whilst for others, such surveys tend to lag behind or not get taken at all. But the aim of harmonization is to target new areas of development that have to do with regional integration and globalization arising from which is the need for new types of collective data.

Since the population census ideally serves as a frame and provides baseline data for the selection of samples and for designing household surveys and is common to all countries of the CARICOM, it can be more widely utilized to harmonize designs and to institutionalize the conduct of household surveys along a similar collective line. On the issue of the population and housing census, the latter component has become pegged to what had been initially confined to the demographic and socio-economic dimensions of populations within the region. This has limited the scope and depth of the data and information about housing that have increasingly become more in demand.

The frequent onslaught of hurricanes within the region that occasion damage and at worst, destruction to the housing stock, warrants that data become readily available in order to assess losses, expedite recovery and for making more accurate estimation of the need for replacement that arise. Also, the census data does not reflect ongoing improvements in the housing stock on account of renovations, rebuilding and so on. As mentioned earlier, increased movement between CARICOM countries increases the demand for housing, health care, recreation and entertainment facilities as well. Countries must have information

about the extent of these needs and the extent to which they are able to satisfy demand. Clearly, there is a need for the conduct of housing surveys within the region in their own right, using a common framework design.

### **Integration and Mobility Patterns**

Given the fact that there have been integrative efforts within the region as evidenced by the CSME, along with regional heads of government and inter-country committees on education, human resource development, agriculture, industry and trade, it would be beneficial to have common household survey data so as to inform policy and decision making in a consistent and harmonized way. The benefits of this can undoubtedly be recognized. For example, certain aspects of the CSME have already been implemented but there is a lack of collective comparative data to undertake monitoring and evaluation so as to information about the implementation process and outcomes that are being derived.

Freedom of movement among countries and the classes of CARICOM citizens being afforded employment in each other countries immediately create additional demand for amenities and services pertaining to: the resettlement of individuals and families and the assimilation process; the extent to which health, education and other types of services are able to meet the increased demands; the carrying capacity and extent of resilience of the various regional labour markets and so on. Some countries may possess the infrastructure to accommodate these new demands whilst others may not. Common data on these entities need to be available if presenting problems are to be resolved.

### **Data for Monitoring and Evaluating the Trade Reform and Globalization Process**

Regionally planned households surveys can provide useful comparative data pertaining to individual countries that better inform the negotiation process that leads to the signing of international agreements such as the highly debated European Partnership Agreement (EPA) and in terms of their likely social impact. It is generally known that the globalization and the liberalization of trade give rise to issues of inequality, social exclusion, poverty, labour market absorption and even pertaining to the environment.

Recognizably, in terms of data, the CARICOM Secretariat especially has been expending considerable effort in constituting data series in the areas of economic, social, demographic, trade and even environmental statistics for countries of the regional whilst the ILO (Caribbean) has focused primarily on employment, unemployment and occupational wage surveys. The UNECLAC has expended efforts by means of specific projects such as the constitution of social databases and periodic publications on other types of statistics as well. But given demands of a regional and global nature that require data and information on common issues (maintaining and advancing the CSME effort, signing of trade agreements, appraising inter-country economic and social inequities) harmonized data becomes an imperative.

### **The Population and Housing Census as an Indispensable Benchmark**

The regional Population and Housing census can serve as a common framework that provides baseline data to specifically inform the planning, design and execution of household surveys in a more meaningful, timely and focused way. Such an approach would cater to various dimensions of data needs of the region in a harmonized and unified fashion than currently is the case. Increasing growth in population (not withstanding high rates of outward migration) has rendered census taking and the conduct of household and other types of surveys more costly, time consuming and requiring increased human resource and expertise. Perhaps a more strategic approach would be that of dispersing those detailed dimensions of its contents over the ten years that elapses between one census and the next. This might serve to eliminate the apparent gap that is created whilst waiting for results from voluminous data processing and analysis that render the results more untimely than being interactively online.

### **Benefits to be Derived from a Regionally Coordinated Approach to Household Survey Practice**

In meeting the challenges posed by the regional and global integration initiatives, focus must now be placed on more efficient means of data collection and generation in order to address specific issues that have been brought about. Among these are: the determination of: the state of the regional economies and their production sectors; educational achievement levels and type and levels of training; labour force characteristics; levels of income earnings and housing provisions. The latter, as will health and educational facilities will be impacted by regional policies and especially, the agreements regarding the free movement of population, goods and services and on the issue of intellectual property endowments as well. There is therefore no escape from constituting data and information that must be derived by extending the tradition that has been maintained with population censuses to the planning and execution of household and other types of surveys, using the regional population census as a baseline.

## **Conclusion**

This paper suggests that arising from the initiatives towards regional integration (via the CSME) and the insertion of the CARICOM region into the global economy (via the EPA) there will be a greater demand for socio-economic data in order to address issues of inequality, labour market adjustments, poverty and social exclusion that are likely to arise. Taking pattern from the Population censuses that have been conducted as a cooperative regional effort over many years, household surveys can also be designed and executed along similar cooperative lines. The outcome of such an effort would be sets of data that are comparable, reliable and timely and would enable effective monitoring and evaluation of objectives and outcomes of the integration and globalization process. Given the long tradition given to the conduct of censuses and surveys what will be required is the taking of these to the next level to encompass national, regional and global within a comprehensive framework that will facilitate this multilevel data requirement.

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