



Stats News & Views

Facts, Figures and Updates from the Statistics Section of the Caribbean Community Secretariat

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Main Events

Inside The Statistics Sub-Programme – Experience With Compiling Regional Trade Statistics.

The Statistics Sub-programme is a repository for regional statistics, with a large cross section of social and economic statistics and indicators being collected from Member States. These are then compiled and disseminated in various forms by the Secretariat.

Over the past 13 years, I have worked in different areas of statistics, however, merchandise trade was the most significant, so I will focus mainly on this.

The background to trade monitoring followed decisions made by meetings of the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians (SCCS) in the early 1980s. In 1981, the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government mandated the CARICOM Secretariat to continuously monitor the implementation of the Programme of Action agreed to by Member States which was aimed at achieving growth in Intra-regional trade. Further, the 29th Meeting of the Common Market Council in 1992 mandated the Secretariat to continue its efforts to establish a Regional Trade Statistics database. In 1989 when I joined the Secretariat's work force, trade data were being submitted mostly in hard copy, and it was the norm for statistical clerks to painstakingly extract data from voluminous reports. There were attempts to collect trade data in electronic format from Member States and with an increased thrust in this direction in the early nineties, they began submitting detailed commodity level data on diskettes.

Using the database management software dBase IV, a standardized regional commodity level trade database was

created, with the data supplied by Member States being processed individually and then amalgamated to form a regional 'master file' per year. This database could then be queried, resulting in the task of manual extraction being lessened. Of course, this did not abolish the need for manual extraction since the use of computers in those days was still limited and the staff did not always have the capacity then to manipulate the electronic database to garner maximum use of the technology. This actually had a positive effect as staff stayed after working hours in an attempt to upgrade their computing skills. Soon simple dBase procedures were being written as they attempted to make the computer work for them. In part, it is this quest that has made the Statistics Sub-programme relatively technologically advanced today.

On the negative side, the trade data which were supplied on an annual basis by the national statistical offices generally had to undergo the same task of 'cleaning' to arrive at a regional standard. While this was a marked improvement over the previous system, it was felt that something could be done to make this time consuming job a bit easier. And so the Trade Information System, *TradSys*, was born. This programme included modules that dispensed with the chore of having to 'manually' repeat the same set of commands for processing each country's data every single year. This use of information technology enhanced the ease and timeliness with which the data was being processed.

However, trade data processing was not without its own set of problems. Even though Member States were required to submit the data in a certain format using specific codes, this was not always adhered to. Hence in most cases, after

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submission of data by Member States, it sometimes took more than a month to have that data on the standardized regional database. This was generally due to the quality of the data submitted, either in content or format, which required clarifications on various discrepancies, a process which often had to be repeated before the data were considered acceptable. The positive aspect of this process though, was that in the end, the margin of error of the data was minimized, and Member States learnt from the errors committed, pre-empting repetition of these. This means that more and more the data became closer to the standard, and today there are fewer queries to Member States when the data are supplied. This has resulted in data being available on a timelier basis than it was ten years ago.

It should be pointed out that some of the main problems in terms of standardization occurred when Member States implemented different versions of the Common External Tariff (CET) within the same year, or when they did not all implement the CET at the same time when revisions occurred based on international standards. This resulted in there being gaps in the time series. With the increased regional thrust towards the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and the general movement towards a global market, the importance of having clean statistics for decision-making cannot be stressed enough.

If CARICOM is to be a significant player on the world scene, and hopes to look after the interest of its more than 14 million strong population, then the importance of having statistics to guide policy making is absolutely imperative. The Statistics Sub-programme has recognized this fact, and in recent times, there has been tremendous developmental work in terms of regional statistics and to more comprehensive and harmonized data sets.

The Statistics Sub-programme is also continuing to maximize its use of information technology in an effort to serve the region better. This is evident with the revamping of the Statistics web page on the CARICOM web site (see URL at end) and the fact that we are continually trying to upload and update information contained therein. There are plans to eventually have queriable trade and other statistics databases online - once again the importance of having a comprehensive set of harmonized data can be seen.

All in all, I believe the Statistics Sub-programme has come a very long way in the 13 years I have been here and I know that our thrust will, in the long term, be of service to our community. ■

Current Events

Harmonization of Statistics In the Region

Over the past months the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat has been laying the foundation for achieving harmonization of statistics in the Region through two approaches. Member States were asked to document their methodologies and submit them to the Secretariat. Guidelines for the documentation of these methodologies were also prepared for ease of submission to the Secretariat. Methodologies so far submitted are available on the Statistics web page, presented in the original format as submitted by Member States and according to the standard guidelines prepared by the Secretariat. The rationale for preparing a standard format is to facilitate an evaluation of the degree of comparability of the statistics across Member States.

A supporting activity to the achievement of harmonization is the presence of a core set of statistics in all Member States. The establishment of a core data set is considered to be part of the process of having harmonized statistics in the Region. With the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) it is necessary to have statistics to effectively monitor and assess the impact of these institutions and to provide the numbers required for analysing the socio-economic and environmental status of Member States and the Region.

In September 2002, the Secretariat was able to convene a meeting, in Grenada, of the Advisory Group which was set up to establish a core data set, in order to advance this process of identifying the core data set. This Meeting was hosted by the Government of Grenada through the Central Statistical Office, Grenada and was also supported by the European Development Fund.

The Meeting also included a focus on Information Communication Technology (ICT) statistics and the issue of micro data dissemination. Among the objectives of this meeting are:

- * Establishment of the context of the core data set to be compiled by all Member States;
- * Increasing the focus on ICT statistics;
- * Determining the core data set/ICT statistics;
- * Developing mechanisms to enable the timely development of these statistics;

The Meeting was able to consider the context of setting up the core relative to the social, economic and ICT policy framework. Attempts were made to define the core data set, and elements of social and economic statistics and indicators were considered for inclusion in the core. In the area of ICT, the objectives and rationale for the collection of these statistics were articulated but no attempt was made at this stage to establish the elements that should constitute the core statistics

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on ICT. The area of environment statistics is to be developed in the future relative to the elements to be incorporated in the core data set. The establishment of a core data set will enable the facilitation of comparison across Member States and of international comparison through the use of standardized or harmonized concepts, definitions and methodologies.

It is hoped that through this exercise, policy-makers, researchers and other users can obtain relevant, timely and high quality statistics that can be utilized in the decision-making process and research. Future work will include the formalization of time-schedules for data production and coordination at the national level and dissemination and submission to the Secretariat. ■

Past Events and Outcomes

Second Pilot Workshop on Trade in Services in St. Kitts and Nevis

In continuation of its developmental thrust in the area of Statistics on International Trade in Services, the CARICOM Secretariat convened a second Pilot National Workshop in Services Statistics in Basseterre, St Kitts and Nevis during May 7-10, 2002. The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) and the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis co-hosted the workshop which was held at the Conference Room of the ECCB headquarters.

The aim of this workshop was to enable further sensitisation at the national level of the requirements for the production of statistics on International Trade in Services, through enhancing the awareness of the statistical producers of the need for these statistics at the regional level relative to the creation of the CSME and at the hemispheric and global levels for the negotiating of arrangements at the FTAA and WTO. The participants comprised producers, users and suppliers of statistics including members of the private sector and key organizations/associations in the private sector, government policy makers, sub-regional policy makers and the producers of statistics at the statistical office and at the ECCB.

Having established the context and the implications for the production of data as a matter of urgency, selected sectoral discussions were presented on the profile of Financial, Tourism, and Business and Professional services. The presentations underscored the point that countries "cannot effectively manage without measuring", emphasising that statistical programs must meet the needs of policy-makers, trade policy analysts and trade negotiators engaged in fostering and analysing growth and structural transformation in our regional economies. The presentation of the methodological framework for the collection, compilation and analysis of data on International Trade in Services was also one of the main

Past Events and Outcomes cont'd

highlights of the workshop. Discussions were also held on best practices that can guide the production of these statistics and on technical assistance needs. The ability of the national statistical and sub-regional systems to produce these statistics in given time frames was investigated.

The Workshop resulted in a core of trained personnel in the national statistical system with increased awareness of the context and knowledge of the processes of collection, compilation and estimation of statistics on services. Another outcome was the enhancement of in-country co-ordination of various stakeholders to implement and monitor the development of the compilation framework and to reduce non-response. Itemization and discussions of initial plans to be initiated at the national level for the enabling of these statistics on production and trade in services were also achieved.

At the regional level, the CARICOM Secretariat was also able to produce and disseminate a report on Trade in Services based on information available from Member States' Balance of Payments tables. In the case of Barbados and Belize, this data were available in a detailed format. The statistics showed that Travel (72%) was the largest component of exports of services in 2000 while relative to imports of services, Commercial Services (39%), transportation (34%) and Travel (22%) were the main components.

Undoubtedly, there is a great deal of work ahead to facilitate the production of the statistics on services at the level of detail that are required to obtain an improved estimate of all services produced across all industries and for intermediate and final uses, as imports and exports of services including services delivered through foreign affiliates. ■

CARICOM Social Gender and Environment Programme

The CARICOM Secretariat convened its Second Advisory Group Meeting operating in the area of Social Gender and Environment Statistics, in Roseau, Dominica during May 28-30, 2002. The objective of the Meeting was to formulate the CARICOM Programme on Strengthening Capacity in the Compilation of Social Gender and Environment Statistics and Indicators in the Caribbean Region. The main objective of this programme is to institutionalise the production of Social Gender and Environment Statistics in the National Statistical Systems in order to inform policy formulation that can lead to an improvement in the conditions of men and women and enable sustainable development. The Meeting was funded by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and had as background a UNSD/CARICOM project Strengthening Capacity in the Compilation of Statistics and Indicators for Conference Follow-up in the CARICOM Region.

The outputs of the meeting were the establishment of a framework of activities for data compilation and

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dissemination, the production of a proposed list of social, gender indicators to be compiled by Member States, the identification of specific additional outputs such as periodic situational assessment/monitoring and evaluation, and lay person's guide and technical manuals.

Recommendations were also made with respect to staffing, training and technology development and collaborating with regional and international partners. Post the meeting, an implementation schedule for the activities was also produced. The Secretariat has recruited the former Chief Statistician of Belize, Mr. Sylvan Roberts, to undertake the execution of this programme in the Region. Efforts to secure funding are underway and approaches have been made to The World Bank and the UNSD in this regard. At present the foundation activities are being developed for implementation.

Other Past Events

- * Mission to Antigua and Barbuda sponsored by UNSD to assess and diagnose issues related to timely programming of Social, Gender, Environment and other statistics.
- * Twenty Seventh SCCS Meeting.
- * Tenth RCCC Meeting.
- * CARICOM Advisory Group Meeting on the establishment of a programme for Social/Gender and Environment Statistics.
- * National Accounts Workshop. ■

Future Events and Expectations

Meetings Of Importance To Statisticians

- * Regional workshop to be sponsored by PARIS21. ■

Publications

The following are available from the Documentation Centre of the Secretariat for US\$25.00 each on CD, and US\$35.00 each in hard copy:

- *CARICOM's Intra-regional Trade, Vol. I: 1990-2000,*
- *External Debt of CARICOM Member States: 1990-2000,*
- *Women and Men in CARICOM Member States, 1980, 1990 and 2000 Rounds of Population Censuses.*
- *CARICOM's Trade in Services 1990-2000.*

You can expect to see these and other publications within the next six months!

- A Quick Reference to Some Summary Data.
- *CARICOM's Intra-regional Trade, Vol. II.*
- Women and Men in CARICOM Member States: Power and Decision Making. ■

The Regionally Coordinated 2000 Round of Population and Housing Census—An update

Most Member States have already undertaken their census field enumeration exercise. Guyana is currently doing the enumeration exercise, having commenced Monday 23rd September 2002, while Suriname hopes to go into the field during the first quarter of 2003.

Of those Member States which have completed the field exercises in 2000 -The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, and Trinidad & Tobago- Barbados and The Bahamas have clean census data ready to be analysed. Belize and Trinidad & Tobago should, within a short period of time, accomplish a similar position. Jamaica, which conducted its field exercise towards the end of 2001, has progressed and has captured the data from the census questionnaires in electronic format. They expect to have a preliminary census report available by December 2002. The OECS Member States which did their field exercise in 2001 are currently focusing attention on capturing the data from their census questionnaires. This is progressing satisfactorily and should be fully completed during the first quarter of next year.

Most Member States have been employing scanning technology for capturing the data directly from the census questionnaires. Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) as well as Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and Intelligent Character Recognition (ICR) machines have been utilised. The ICR technology has potential for useful application in survey work during the inter censal years - Member States are therefore acquiring valuable know-how during its use in the 2000 round of censuses.

Most states which have undertaken the census field exercise have prepared and submitted preliminary census reports to their governments. The major objective at present is to have clean census data for each Member State and to prepare for analysis of the data.

The census exercise continues to be regionally coordinated and to benefit from this approach. Progress has also been greatly assisted by a considerable amount of technical cooperation among the Member States. ■

The Question and Answer segment will resume in our next issue.

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