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THE STATISTICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

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ACRONYMS

CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CSO	Central Statistical Office
ECCB	East Caribbean Central Bank
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
OECS	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
CDCC	Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee

THE STATISTICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

I. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Executive Secretary of ECLAC was briefed on the statistical capacity of countries in the Caribbean subregion during a visit to the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean in April 2009. The briefing raised the need for a broad scope of reliable, timely statistical data, and focused on the challenges to data collection facing these small Caribbean countries. The Executive Secretary requested an updated version of a Survey conducted in 2005 on the infrastructure of Statistical Organizations in the subregion, for possible presentation at the upcoming conference for Directors of Statistics of the Americas to be held in Bogota in August 2009.

Shortly thereafter, work commenced on the updating of the 2005 Survey. The questionnaire used in 2005 was amended slightly and dispatched immediately to the various member countries of the Caribbean subregion. After intensive follow-up activities, responses were received from twenty-one countries. This report contains the results of the second Survey conducted in 2009. Where relevant, it includes comparisons of the situation in 2005 with those prevailing in 2009 at the time of the second Survey.

The 2009 Survey is designed to obtain current data on the legal and institutional framework existing in the Caribbean countries. It also collects information on staff qualifications and training, available equipment, provides an inventory of data series collected and published, and gives an insight into the level of technology in use in Statistical Agencies at this point in time. These results will help to formulate a list of recommendations aimed at enhancing the work of Statistical Organizations in the subregion. It is hoped that our executive authorities will be able to use the findings of this report to seek further technical assistance to enhance the capacities of the countries of the Caribbean subregion.

The report on the 2005 Survey described Statistical Organizations in the Caribbean as the “Cinderellas of the public service”. The report claims that, even though in the recent past a number of these Offices have begun to shed this image, there are still several issues to be resolved. Among these are the perennial issues of shortages of resources, a high staff turnover, low priority for scarce Government funds among competing departments, and a lack of image. In an effort to raise their profile, some Offices have become statutory bodies. In fact, the 2005 Survey reported that STATIN of Jamaica, the Bureau of Statistics of Guyana, and the Bureau of Statistics of Suriname were all statutory organizations reporting to a board of directors. Between 2005 and 2009, the Central Statistical Office of Belize was transformed into the Statistical Institute of Belize. In the case of Belize, instead of the prior status of a public service entity, this new arrangement features a semi-autonomous body managed by a Director General who reports directly to a Board. The members of the Board come from a broad cross-section, including the Government, but are not dominated by any one entity. However, the shortage of resources remains an issue.

There is an imperative need to promote a new vision of Statistical Agencies and the statistics they produce. In the new information society, statistics is not merely about using numbers for planning and monitoring purposes. In this globalized order, information is a public good: accurate and timely information can be used for planning and decision-making, for transparency and governance. Statistical Offices must be provided with the necessary resources to achieve this.

II. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE 2009 SURVEY

As reported above, Survey questionnaires were sent to the Statistical Agencies of all the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) member countries, and also to Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. The 2009 Survey questionnaire comprised 10 sections:

Section 1 dealt with background information on the Agency and the way in which it functioned within the system.

Section 2 sought information on the legal framework under which the Agency operated.

Section 3 examined issues relating to data collection.

Section 4 investigated the staff complement, qualifications and training. Information on optimum staffing levels was also sought.

Section 5 looked at the equipment needs of these Agencies and enquired as to whether they were being adequately met.

Section 6 sought information on the data series currently being collected as well as new series being contemplated.

Section 7 went a step further to look at the data series being published. Information on future publications was also targeted.

Section 8 probed into the type and frequency of surveys that had been conducted within the last five years and also asked for details on surveys planned over the next two years.

Section 9 explored the issue of the use of information technology applications in the Statistical Agencies.

An intensive follow-up process was implemented in order to achieve a high level of response to the 2009 Survey. Most countries supplied the requested information within a reasonable time and, in a marked improvement over the 2005 Survey, in most cases this information was comprehensive. Nevertheless, official websites and information from previous studies are also being used to supplement the data-gathering exercise, particularly in some of the few instances of non-response to the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire is shown in Annex 5.

III. RESULTS OF THE 2009 SURVEY

Responses were received from 21 countries and, as indicated before, complete information was obtained from 18 of the participating countries. Information available from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and information gleaned from the websites of Statistical Offices in the subregion, is being used to supplement the responses received. Therefore, in some instances, the resulting analysis may not tally with the number of responses received.

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Operation

Fourteen of the Statistical Agencies in the twenty-one countries participating in the 2009 Survey operate as departments within a Government Ministry. Almost all of them report to a Permanent Secretary or to the Financial Secretary. However, in two of these countries, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Turks and Caicos Islands, the Agencies report to the Director of Planning and the Chief Economist, respectively. The fourteen countries include: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. In four of the remaining countries, namely Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Suriname, Statistical Agencies now have the status of statutory bodies and currently report to a Board of Directors. The Survey data show that in the remaining three countries (Aruba, the Netherlands Antilles, and the United States Virgin Islands), the Agencies report directly to a Minister or a Vice Provost. Except in Belize, in which it is now a statutory body, and in Bermuda in which the Statistical Agency now reports to a Permanent Secretary rather than to the Premier as in 2005, Agencies in all other countries maintain the same status as in 2005.

The 2009 Survey shows that, unlike most other countries, the Statistical Agencies of the Dutch Antilles (Netherlands Antilles and Aruba) report directly to the Minister Responsible for Statistics. Likewise, the Statistical Agency of the United States Virgin Islands reports to a Vice Provost who probably has more ministerial rank than a Permanent Secretary. Many experts argue that resources are more easily mobilized when the statistical department or entity has close ministerial links. However, it may be counter-argued that this arrangement could curtail autonomy.

TABLE 1

PARENT ORGANIZATION AND REPORTING HIERARCHY		
Country	Ministry/Department/Agency	Person organization reports to
ANGUILLA	The Ministry of Finance, Economic Development Investment Commerce and Tourism (MOFEDICT)	Permanent Secretary Economic Development Investment Commerce and Tourism
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA	Ministry of Finance, Economy & Public Administration	Permanent Secretary
ARUBA	The Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs	The Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs
BAHAMAS (THE)	Ministry of Finance	Permanent Secretary
BARBADOS	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Empowerment, Innovation, Trade, Industry & Commerce	Permanent Secretary, Economic Affairs
BELIZE	Economic Development	Reports to a Board of Directors
BERMUDA	Cabinet Office	The Permanent Secretary. Cabinet Office
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS	Premier's Office	Permanent Secretary
CAYMAN ISLANDS	Portfolio of Finance and Economics	Financial Secretary
DOMINICA	Finance and Social Security	Financial Secretary
GRENADA	Ministry of Finance	Permanent Secretary
GUYANA	Ministry of Finance	Chairman of the Board, Bureau

		of Statistics (Minister of Finance)
JAMAICA	Office of the Prime Minister	The Chairman of the Board to the Office of the Prime Minister
NETHERLANDS ANTILLES	Ministry of Economic and Labour Affairs	Minister
SAINT LUCIA	Ministry of Economic Affair, Economic Planning and National Development	Permanent Secretary Ministry of Economic Affair, Economic Planning and National Development
SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS	The Ministry of Sustainable Development	Permanent Secretary
SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES	Central Planning Division, The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning	The Director of Planning
SURINAME	The Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation	The Statistical Commission comprising of members of Government (1), Private Sector (2), University (1), Central Bank (1), Labour Union (2), Central Planning Office Suriname (1), and NGOs (1). Sum up to 9 members.
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	Ministry of Planning, Housing and The Environment	Permanent Secretary
TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS	Ministry of Finance	Chief Economist
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS	University of the Virgin Islands	Vice Provost

In 2005, Antigua and Barbuda was the only country to indicate plans to change the current status. A recommendation had been made by the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) to the Prime Minister that the title of the Officer-in-Charge of the Antigua Office be changed to Director of Statistics, and that the incumbent should report directly to the Minister with responsibility for Statistics. This, it was felt, would give the Statistics Office more visibility. However, through the 2009 Survey, it was found that Antigua and Barbuda continued to report to a Permanent Secretary, implying that the status quo remained unchanged. Further, in 2009, Antigua and Barbuda did not indicate any plans to change this status. However, a few countries including Grenada, the Netherlands Antilles, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Turks and Caicos Islands, reported having plans to change the existing status in the near future. Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago did not elaborate on their plans, but the Netherlands Antilles reported imminent plans to change to a statutory body governed by a Statistical Committee. The Turks and Caicos Islands also reported plans to separate the Statistics Office from the Economics Unit and create two separate entities, but these plans had been held in abeyance due to other pressing national issues.

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