RETHINKING SOCIAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS IN RESPONSE TO CSME: IMPLICATIONS FOR CARICOM MEMBER STATES

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Introduction
Attempts to forge regional agreements have characterized the Caribbean landscape in earlier periods, for example during the pre-independence era when there was an attempt to establish a West Indian Federation. Despite the failure of the West Indian Federation, subsequent efforts in 1965 in Dickenson Bay, Antigua and Barbuda sought to establish the Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA) that became a reality in 1968. In accordance with the Treaty of Chaguaramas in 1973, the integration effort deepened with the birth of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). In 1989, Caribbean leaders met in Grand Anse, Grenada revising the Treaty of Chaguaramas. The end result was the birth of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) that became a Caribbean phenomenon in 1989. Based upon the 1989 meeting, it was hoped that the CSME would have become a reality by 1993. Such a lofty goal was not achieved and ten years later, the process does not appear to have made much headway.

Blake (2003) noted that the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas has been signed by 13 CARICOM member states excluding the Bahamas and Montserrat. He also noted that the Treaty was given provisional application by 12 member states, ratified by five or six and enacted into domestic law by two. Fourteen years after the idea was mooted, progress with the CSME has been extremely slow, this being a function of the complexity of Caribbean societies and economies. Brewster (2003) has expressed reservations about the ability of the CSME to live up to its expectations unless three main concerns are positively addressed, namely: (i) the fundamental values of the community, (ii) the Community’s intentions with regard to national sovereignty and (iii) financial arrangements for operationalizing the CSME. On the other hand, Yearwood and Drakes (200?) argue that the CSME is a highly desirable framework that could augment processes to promote economic growth within Caribbean countries in a modern era of globalization. To this end, they make substantial references to the importance of countries developing their capacities in areas such as information and communications technology, human capital development, research, skills and educational development and creativity and innovation.

This paper treats with the fact that the emergence of the CSME is likely to challenge the “status quo” within diverse social institutional spheres in CARICOM member states. In
order to closely monitor and evaluate changing scenarios, there will be a need to intensify the production of statistical facts and harmonize requisite social statistical inputs, the latter being essential to permit cross-country comparisons and evaluate global and “bloc” outcomes pertaining to CARICOM member states. The paper strives to prioritize such statistical inputs in accordance with the requirements of the CSME and makes a statement on the prospects of harmonizing the requisite social statistical systems. This is especially important given that National Statistical Offices across CARICOM produce social statistics of variable quantity and quality. In addition to citing some initiatives towards the harmonization of social statistics within the CARICOM Region, the paper offers alternative ideas for rationalizing processes that will make social statistics and indicators available to meet the needs of evidence based planning and decision-making within the context of the CSME.

The CSME and its Proposed Direction

In articulating the notion of the CSME as a concept, Arthur (2003) states as follows:

The creation of a Caribbean Single Market and Economy – as the concept literally implies – is an effort to cause the participating Caribbean nations which have hitherto functioned as 14 separate and distinct markets and economies, each governed by their own rules and divided from each other by formidable barriers, to be organized and to be made to operate in the future effectively as one market and one economy, free of restrictive barriers, and governed by common rules, policies and institutions.

The above conception implies that any attempt to monitor and evaluate the achievements of the CSME ought to transcend national boundaries and embrace the principles of harmonization particularly with respect to defining main concepts of interest to planners and decision-makers, the requisite data collection strategies, data analytical approaches and data dissemination. These four dimensions constitute key elements of statistical systems that are central to this paper. In focusing upon social statistical systems, the main premise is that economic statistical systems are more complete and widespread across CARICOM member states. While there is widespread production of official statistics pertaining to trade, financial activities, national accounts, price indices, international passenger movements and agricultural activities, the production of statistics on labour force characteristics, living standards, education and in particular literacy, information and communications technology and the skills profile of trained personnel is variable in both quantity and quality across member states. In order to determine the social statistics and hence the systems that are likely to meet statistical requirements
emerging out of the CSME, the paper strives to identify the main objectives of the CSME. According to Brewster (2003), these include “enhanced standards of living and work”, “enhanced levels of international competitiveness” and “enhanced functional cooperation”, all of which ought to be instrumental in efforts geared towards prioritizing social statistics, social indicators and their requisite systems.

The CSME is an institutional framework that cannot be realized in the short term. Its implementation requires a range of activities traversing a number of areas including:

(i) A Legal and Institutional Framework that embraces such elements as the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), Competition Policy, Intellectual Property Rights, Company Law, Financial Services (Banking, Insurance and Securities) and Customs Law,

(ii) Government Procurement that embraces Standards and Technical Requirements and dispute Settlement,

(iii) Market Access that endorses the free movement of goods, services, persons and capital and common external protection,

(iv) Sectoral Policies,

(v) Macroeconomic Condition,

(vi) Fiscal Policy Harmonization and

(vii) Monetary Union

Brewster (2003) also notes that the CSME entails the establishment of a new set of institutional organs including the Caribbean Court of Justice, a Standards Organization, a Competition Commission, a Conciliation Commission, a Regional Securities Body, a Regional Intellectual Property Rights Office and a Regional Development Fund. He makes reference to these entities in the context of highlighting the magnitude of obligations to finance the CSME as an operational entity. This reinforces the need to assess the efficiency of the CSME, a property that is gauged in accordance with the goals and objectives of the CSME and the extent to which they are attained based upon the perusal and systematic evaluation of performance indicators. From the standpoint of national economies, Yearwood and Drakes (2002) states that within recent times, global forces have inhibited domestic growth prospects in small Caribbean countries. They contend that the CSME, through its thrust towards the free movement of labour, capital and business, is likely to enhance the competitiveness of the Caribbean in the new global economy and by so doing, foster national development options based upon the potential that resides in domestic settings with respect to human capital development and
innovation. Moreover, Yearwood and Drakes (2002) notes that the Sub-Regional Human Development Report for the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) has reinforced the importance of human resource development as a critical dimension in fostering improvement in the competitiveness of domestic economies.

On reviewing the direction of the CSME initiatives, they appear to focus more on rhetoric and less on systematic criteria for monitoring and evaluating the success of its prescriptions in spawning national and regional development. There has to be some basis for discerning overall growth and progress in member states’ economies and societies. Moreover, there has to be adequate data of satisfactory quality to examine and account for the myriad factors that may shape these outcomes. There also has to be some mechanism for gauging the extent to which the gap between the most advantaged member states and others have been closed. This means that the variable status of statistical systems in National Statistical Offices across CARICOM has to be closed. While there have been initiatives from other quarters to address this discrepancy, it is imperative that CSME initiatives place such concerns on its agenda.

**Official Statistics and CSME Initiatives**

Based upon a re-assessment of the principal areas that have been identified as central to the implementation of the CSME, expanding market access and in particular, the free movements of persons across national boundaries for the purposes of work and establishing business ventures constitute a major challenge to current social statistical systems within CARICOM member states. In keeping with the thrust to strengthen the region’s capacity to compete internationally, member states will have no choice but to develop their domestic human resource capabilities. This means that each member state and the region as a whole have to have some basis for systematically gauging variations in human resource capabilities and entrepreneurial thrusts of its citizens. More important, each member state and the region as a whole should also develop systematic bases for monitoring and evaluating the connection between human resource development, improved living standards and enhanced levels of international competitiveness. Such inquiries target citizens, households, communities, nations and the entire region as units of analysis and in different situations ought to permit the collection of valid data at every level.

In order to evaluate the status of human resource development as a means of meeting the objectives of the CSME, every member state ought to have a systematic process in place
for the production of key social statistics treating with labour force characteristics, literacy, education and training, personal health including disability and personal capacity to interact with information and communications technologies. These exercises hinge upon large-scale sample surveys such as National Labour Force Surveys, National Literacy Surveys, National Surveys of Skilled Personnel (including professionals, technicians, entertainers and media workers), a National ICT Survey (targeting exposure, knowledge, attitude and use) and National Health Surveys. In evaluating the status of living standards, the two principal instruments have been large-scale sample Surveys of Living Conditions and Household Budgetary Surveys. In evaluating variations in levels of competitiveness, member states can use external trade statistics that are produced by their respective National Statistical Offices. Because it falls within the realm of economic statistics, external trade statistics will not be the focus of further discussion in this paper. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that like many other branches of economic statistics, external trade statistics are more widely available in National Statistical Offices across CARICOM member states when compared to a host of social statistics.

The Current Status of Social Statistical Systems

Population and Housing Census

Population and Housing Censuses are undertaken decennially in a number of CARICOM member states. The activities are usually co-ordinated by a Regional Census Co-ordinating Committee (RCCC) under the auspices of the CARICOM Secretariat. The respective governments through their National Statistical Offices have been responsible for census taking within their respective national domains. While the data generally serves the major functions of reflecting social and demographic changes during intercensal periods, they also provide benchmark data for population projections, adjustments of intercensal population estimates and revision of national sample frames of households. Moreover, they enable the satisfaction of wide ranging data needs covering household, housing and population characteristics. With respect to the latter, the data pertain to bio-demographics, education and training, fertility and marital/union status, migration, commuting patterns, labour force characteristics, health and disability. Accordingly, selected census tables are published in population census compendia though additional tables are generated upon request by users.

A wide cross-section of social statistics relies upon the availability of data from population and housing censuses, national sample surveys and data from archival sources. For some member states, the population and housing census is likely to be the
only source of data that can throw any light upon the current states of human resource capabilities. It is often the principal source of data that sets the stage for the collection, evaluation and collation of a range of social statistics and by extension, social indicators. In the Caribbean Sub-Region, the RCCC through its co-ordination function, has been collaborating with member states and facilitating the development of statistical systems with a view to harmonizing processes across countries. Every CARICOM member state (except Suriname) had undertaken a population and housing census in the early 1990s and has again done so in the 2000s. In the case of the 1990 census, ECLAC has captured the dataset for a number of member states as part of its project geared towards the establishment of social databases for the conduct of evidence-based social policy research.

Notwithstanding their success with respect to conducting population and housing censuses, the vast majority of member states does not possess or has not sustained the capacity to conduct sample surveys to collect social statistics such as those pertaining to labour force characteristics, literacy, living conditions, household expenditure, personal health, sexual and reproductive health, family life and crime victimization. In cases where member states have actually embarked upon such sample surveys, systematic differences in survey design abound to the extent that they may actually threaten prospects for harmonization. Table 1 shows countries according to different sample surveys that are routinely conducted and makes reference to the frequency of such activities.

**Labour Force Surveys**

Despite the fact that different countries undertake labour force surveys on a routine basis, the frequency of such enumerations differ and could pose additional challenges to what may otherwise appear to be a simple undertaking. The National Statistical Offices in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, for example, conduct quarterly labour force surveys and produce estimates of national labour force characteristics more frequently when compared to other countries such as St. Lucia (annually) and other member states that undertake labour force surveys on a more sporadic basis. This means that some consideration will have to be given to the establishment of standards for enumeration, a process that should be informed by systematic methodological research that treats with attempts to ascertain the most efficient basis for enumerating the labour force. Harewood (1969) constitutes an attempt to address this issue in the context of Trinidad and Tobago and provides a platform for similar undertakings in other countries that enumerate labour
force characteristics on a routine basis. Insofar as country-specific conceptions of the labour force are consistent with conventions established by the International Labour Office (ILO), it is possible to achieve harmony in cases where evaluation research hinges upon comparisons across member states or gauging regional progress in stimulating employment globally and in different social spheres, for example, in specific realms of economic activity. Currently, the UNECLAC is undertaking such a task as it strives to establish a social statistics database.

**Living Conditions Surveys**
The Planning Institute of Jamaica has been conducting a Survey of Living Conditions annually since 1988. Accordingly, Jamaica has an outstanding track record in the production of statistics and indicators on living conditions and stands out as a model for other developing countries to follow. Though several member states, namely St. Lucia, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, Belize, the Bahamas, Barbados, St. Kitts and Nevis, the British Virgin Islands and Trinidad and Tobago have embarked upon Surveys of Living Conditions during the past decade, none is as sustained as the Jamaican experience. With the exceptions of Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, the other member states have benefited substantially from financial and technical assistance from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). While Jamaica has continued to produce annual statistics since 1988, the other member states with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago, have undertaken one-shot exercises. While they have all benefited from the CDB intervention and are willing to undertake follow-up studies to permit monitoring and evaluation, their efforts have been stymied by scarce financial resources and concerns about the availability of the requisite technical skills. The situation is worst in Trinidad and Tobago where two SLCs were conducted with none producing results of a fully comprehensive nature.

Judging from the data collected and analyzed in the various countries including Jamaica, there has been a thrust towards assessing levels of poverty with respect to individuals and households. The survey findings hinge upon estimates that take into account absolute as well as relative conceptions of poverty to the extent that indicators such as the proportion of individuals and households in poverty or abject poverty relative and the distribution of individuals and households according to expenditure/income quintiles are usually available. Similar findings have emerged out of the CDB-sponsored SLCs conducted in a number of the other member states.
The success of the Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions (JSLC) is partly due to the strength of the quantitative effort resident within the Faculty of Social Sciences in Mona, and in particular the Department of Sociology and Social Work, the Department of Economics and SALISES (formerly the CGS and ISER). The JSLC has benefited from the technical expertise of academics from within the Faculty of Social Sciences. Several students and academics have either pursued thesis topics or published scholarly articles using data emanating from the JSLC. The Derek Gordon Databank is a repository for some important datasets within the Caribbean. The Databank has datasets pertaining to every JSLC conducted since its inception in 1988. Specific fields and records are extracted from the dataset and made available to students upon their requests. This familiarizes students with the datasets and their manipulation. It also assists in building their technical capacity to engage in different types of statistical analyses and contributes to the empowerment of a future cadre of professionals who are expected to either support initiatives or make further demands upon the institutionalization of social statistical databases.

The prospect of enhancing ability to generate data on living conditions on a continuous basis within and across member states is real. This has been demonstrated in Jamaica and may be realized in the other countries if technical support and collaborative arrangements could be sought involving the university and other allied researchers from across the region. Notwithstanding, the desire within public spheres to undertake these exercises, the critical mass deemed necessary to undertake them is usually not evident. In a discussion of the underlying principles of core datasets, St. Bernard (2002a) makes reference to the sustainability criterion that is absolutely essential in any effort to institutionalize the production of living conditions statistics on a routine and continuous basis. Moreover, the metadata underlying the production of statistics and indicators on living conditions is sufficiently transparent to permit some degree of harmonization. In particular, evaluations of living conditions in accordance with the principles of relative poverty constitute a useful mechanism for gauging comparisons across member states and enhanced status at a regional level.

Statistics and Social Surveys: Health and Disability
There is no evidence that any of the member states have been routinely conducting sample surveys to gauge the health and disability status of its population. Such observations are usually made on the basis of analyzing census data. In keeping with agreements at the level of the RCCC, member states would have made provisions to
collect data on health and disability in their respective census enumerations but such data while widespread in terms of breadth are limited in terms of depth. As such, it is quite likely that efforts should be spared to mount routine heath surveys that are likely to produce a wider array of indicators that are deemed to be more relevant, valid and efficient in capturing different aspects of health and disability as key components in evaluating human resource capacity. Otherwise, the majority of member states collect, process and analyze mortality data and to a much lesser extent, morbidity data. Providing that infant mortality rates and age specific mortality rates are available, most member states can generate life tables. Life table functions, in particular, life expectancy at birth have often been used as an indicator of health status. The latter is incorporated in the computation of the Human Development Index (HDI) to measure variation in human resources capability and a proposed social vulnerability index that has articulated a framework for measuring the capacity of social units to not resist threats to their survival but also to exhibit levels of resilience in the path towards recovery.

**Statistics and Social Surveys: Literacy, Education and Training**

Based on some of the principal indices of development, the status of education in member states is reflected through variations in gross enrolment, educational attainment, educational qualifications and levels of adult literacy. By enumerating schools annually, countries can obtain measures tantamount to gross enrolment on an annual basis. However, there are doubts about the completeness of such figures in a number of member states. Nonetheless, gross enrolment is a critical social statistic in member states insofar as they feature in the computation of sub-indices that permit the computation of the HDI and the proposed social vulnerability index. Educational attainment and educational qualifications, on the other hand, can be obtained from the population census that is conducted every ten years or estimated through a host of sample surveys targeting different issues of social concern (e.g. labour force characteristics and living conditions) during intercensal periods. For any given country, differentials in educational attainment and educational qualifications could be evaluated across time but the availability of such data will depend upon the frequency of surveys targeting living conditions and/or labour force characteristics. However, differences in the education systems and timing of such surveys could place limitations on efforts geared towards harmonization.
The rate of adult literacy is a common indicator that is used in the computation of the HDI and has also been recommended as an input variable into a proposed social vulnerability index (St. Bernard, 2002b). It is a traditional indicator of variation in a unit’s capacity to take advantage of initiatives that stimulate human resource development. Such statistics when presented across the member states are of variable quality insofar as some measures are based upon sample surveys while others are based upon census counts or data on educational attainment derived from sample surveys. Among CARICOM member states, the JAMAL studies in Jamaica constitute the only institutionalized process to assess variations in literacy status across time. Other member states such as Trinidad and Tobago and St. Lucia have actually used reading and writing tests to obtain measures of adult literacy but these have principally been one-shot studies.

**Statistics and Social Surveys: Skilled Personnel and ICT**

With respect to ICT, the population and household censuses conducted in CARICOM member states do not permit adequate exploration of the critical dimension of ICT and their functions in the context of fostering human development at individual, household and national levels. Moreover, none of the National Statistical Offices in member states appears to have embarked upon sample survey data collection and analysis to obtain a profile of individuals and household with regard to the different dimensions of ICT and their role in fostering human development. It is expected that variable exposure to ICT will influence material and non-material dimensions in ways that shape nations’ prospects of attaining sustainable development. With respect to skilled personnel such as professionals, technicians, performing artistes, media workers and entrepreneurs, the population and housing censuses are likely to provide reasonably good profiles. However, there does not appear to be any further attempts to update these profiles during intercensal periods.

**Social Statistical Systems in Response to the CSME: A Critical Review**

According to Brewster (2003), the main objectives of the CSME include “enhanced standards of living and work”, “enhanced levels of international competitiveness” and “enhanced functional co-operation”. In the language of logical framework models, the CSME can be deemed a “mega-project” with its objectives being tantamount to “goals”. Such a treatment warrants the development of objectively verifiable indicators to set targets and gauge progress with respect to achieving appropriate magnitudes with regard
to outputs, their respective purposes that are uniquely or collectively linked to the stated goals. To this end, the focus is primarily upon expanding market access and in particular, the free movements of persons across national boundaries for the purposes of work and establishing business ventures. The paper considers the establishment of the CSME as a costly undertaking that has to be evaluated in terms of its efficiency and as such, endorses the principles of evaluation research and in particular, a reliance on systematic data gathering and performance indicators as a means of fulfilling the requirements of evidence-based research.

From the standpoint of social statistical systems, the paper embraces the principles that underlie logical framework modeling identifying the CSME as a “mega-project” with one of its purposes being the expansion of market access and in particular, the free movement of persons across national boundaries for the purposes of work and establishing business ventures. Accordingly, priority areas for the development of social statistics have been identified as the labour force, living conditions, personal health, adult literacy, education and training, ICT and the stock of skilled personnel. These priority areas generally coincide with those articulated by Girvan (1997), an outcome of a Caribbean symposium on social development convened in Barbados in 1995. At that meeting, Girvan alluded to five core areas for which comparable indicators should be available for Caribbean countries. These areas included literacy, educational characteristics, labour force characteristics, poverty and health.

Across CARICOM member states, National Statistical Offices produce social statistics of variable quality and quantity. Within member states, there is a general willingness to improve the quantity and quality of social statistics. This means that there have to be national efforts to overcome the set of limitations that impede the production of such statistics. These limitations usually assume the form of scarce financial resources that render widespread data collection activities as having a low priority. In some cases, the problem is further exacerbated by the absence of a critical mass of technical skills. In some member countries, population and housing censuses have been the only source of a range of social statistics that are only produced decennially. This provides additional evidence in support of limitations due to scarce financial resources. In order to effect change, there has to be a national thrust towards promoting exposure to technical training in applied social statistical analysis for policy analysts. A cadre of well-trained social policy analysts is likely to place phenomenal demands for such statistics and articulate
positions that may be instrumental in elevating the priority given to issues that reinforce the expeditious collection, analysis and dissemination of social statistics.

In order to facilitate the production of a broader range of social statistics of superior quality, it is necessary for member states to explore prospects of ensuring that a critical mass of social analysts acquires skills in quantitative methods and techniques. This should eventually enable such analysts to place demands for data that will feed into their operational and research programmes. In this regard, it is recommended that member states review priority areas for awarding scholarships and advanced training for their populations. However, a critical problem arises insofar as such initiatives may progress at a differential pace across member states. This is further compounded by the fact that the training of social policy analysts may not be given high priority in the scheme of things. In order to obtain some measure of success in this regard, the different campuses of the University of the West Indies (UWI) will have to review the content and quality of all programmes that facilitate the training of personnel in areas akin to public policy in order to ensure that courses such as elementary statistics, research methods and population studies be made compulsory as is the case in the UWI, Mona Campus within the Department of Sociology and Social Research.

In considering the range of institutional organs associated with the implementation of the CSME, no provision was made for the establishment of an intelligence-gathering unit. This is especially critical given the range of shortcomings that place limitations on the production of social statistics and indicators serving the needs of individual member states and meeting the requirements of global data to reflect a regional perspective. In many respects, the CSME has observed the model of integration adopted by the European Union. Despite the fact that member states of the European Union have more sophisticated statistical and intelligence systems than CARICOM member states, the European Union has nevertheless established EUROSTAT, the Statistical Office of the European Communities. The mission of EUROSTAT is “to provide the European Union with a high quality statistical information service” (EUROSTAT, 1999). The process involves the collection of data by National Statistical Offices across the 15 member states of the European Union and their subsequent submission to EUROSTAT where they are consolidated, harmonized and disseminated in either a global or comparative format. In the context of the CSME, no consideration appears to have been given to the creation of a similar institutional organ that is deemed to be absolutely essential given the crisis that has emerged with regard to the production of statistical information in a number of
statistical offices across CARICOM. Such an entity ought to have been entertained when consideration was given to the creation of the host of other institutional organs that have been envisaged as integral to the efficient and effective operation of the CSME.

Given that scarce financial resources have been impeding the collection and analysis of critical social statistics, such a unit consisting of a cadre of regional specialists in the different areas should be charged with the responsibility of producing the respective social statistics for each of the member states. This, of course, should embrace a participatory methodology that entails a full involvement of allied professionals and a National Advisory Team from each member state. In this regard, data gathering should be guided by metadata inputs that permit harmonization across member states. Insofar as some member states have already begun processes, models have been established for embarking upon such a metadata system including the development of core instruments that could be adopted and slightly modified to satisfy the unique requirements of member states. At the same time, methodological processes should permit efforts geared towards harmonization. These thrusts are primarily useful in the collection, analysis and dissemination of social statistics and indicators based upon large scale sample surveys of adult literacy (including ICT), labour force characteristics, living conditions, personal health and the skills profile of populations. With regard to obtaining the skills profile of special sub-populations, a critical concern is to collection of life history data in order to pursue longitudinal inquiries and permit more sophisticated approaches to evaluating the impact of the movement of skilled personnel on the attainment of the stated goals for member states and the region as a whole.

Whether, the CSME is implemented or not, the ideas expressed in this paper constitute a progressive position that would redound to the benefit of sustainable development initiatives undertaken in member states. As a “mega-project”, the efficiency of the CSME has to be evaluated, a process that hinges upon the availability of valid data targeting the myriad dimensions that underlie its goals. In the context of this paper, mechanisms have been proposed as prospective options for realizing such a process with regard to data systems targeting areas such as the labour market, living conditions, personal health, literacy, education and training and ICT. These areas are consistent with the overall thrust of the CSME as a vehicle to promote human resource development within member states and the region as a whole.
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