

The Role of the UNDP Sub-regional Office for Barbados and the OECS in Statistical Capacity Building

Remarks

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Good afternoon everyone and thank you to PARIS 21 for inviting the UNDP Sub-regional Office for Barbados and the OECS, to share our experiences on statistical development, in the Small Island Developing States of the Eastern Caribbean.

As I was preparing my remarks and reading through the guidance notes provided I realised that in my work we are asking the same questions.

We are all familiar with the challenges of limited funding, taxed statistics offices with limited human resources, national statistics systems which are not well supported and general challenges in dealing with more controversial issues related to data sharing, the autonomy or lack of, of statistics offices, outdated legislation etc., and we have been working on these issues for several years.

Where are we now?

The focus is on data harmonisation, the development of an OECS Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (which aims specifically to support the implementation of the OECS Economic Union), automisation of data collection and processing, increasing the quality and availability of social data (with a focus on multi-dimensional approaches to poverty measurement) and on increasing the overall capacities of national and sub-regional statistics systems.

What has worked well?

When I really thought about it, my answer was quite anti-climactic because it wasn't complicated. In our work on data, what has given us the best possible results has been our investment in **communication**.

Communication through existing member state based, sub-regional statistical governance mechanisms, communication with development partners working in the same area and communication with Member States.

Communication in its broadest terms includes

- Information sharing or as we term it in the development world: transparency
- Connection: which we can describe as collaboration towards the same goals
- And also:
- The successful conveying of ideas and social contact: which we can understand as maintaining an investment in relationships with our partners.

In terms of our work on the regional strategy for statistics, for which PARIS 21 has been an anchor, the UNDP and World Bank are working together with funding from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, DFID, to support the OECS Commission with their first regional statistics strategy. This collaboration also includes the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, as well, the Pacific Community has provided advice and remains a supportive technical partner. Furthermore consultation with the CARICOM Secretariat is prioritised as we progress, to ensure that sub-regional and regional goals are aligned.

UNDPs statistics work is grounded in a sub-regional governance mechanism, the OECS Living Standards Measurement Committee, or OECS LSMC, which is mandated to support efforts to generate social statistics among OECS Member States, and for which we depend to indicate priority areas for development, and through which development partner work is coordinated. This ensures that processes and priorities are defined and led by Member States.

It is a key forum for communication about what is being done, what needs to be done and how we can best achieve our collective goals to support statistics development in the sub-region.

The OECS LSMC comprises of persons leading statistics departments in Member States and representatives from the OECS Commission, as well, other UN agencies such as the ILO, UNICEF, UNECLAC, FAO and UN Women are invited to contribute as observers and with other development partners like the Caribbean Development Bank, the CARICOM Secretariat, the World Bank and Statistics Canada.

A partnership of note:

Through the OECS LSMC the UNDP and the World Bank have formed a very effective partnership where we aim to strengthen and reinforce each other's work in the area of poverty measurement and the implementation of the OECS annual harmonised Labour Force Survey inclusive of the multi-dimensional poverty index, or LFS-MPI. We also have supported together with funding from DFID, what we termed an expanded LFS inclusive of the MPI and consumption indicators for calculating a monetary compliment to the MPI. This 5 year survey was developed and implemented by the Statistics Department of the Government of Saint Lucia, and we also helped to broker additional funding support from the Caribbean Development Bank to support its completion.

Apart from providing funding for these surveys the collaboration between UNDP and the World Bank also ensures we often contact Member State Representatives together, not only to make sure that we are clear on what we are doing, but also to reduce 'development partner dialogue fatigue' on the parts of our country partners as there is often one person managing everything.

UNDP has also provided hardware, software and supported training to Statistics Offices for the implementation of Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) Software and while we do work with Member States separately as part of our country agreements with them, it is imperative that the work we support is contributing to the wider goals and priorities as agreed on the sub-regional level through the OECS Commission, as part of the economic integration of OECS Member States.

Further, increasingly it is becoming apparent that development partners must work more effectively together to avoid duplication and also, to avoid a reduction of or inconsistency in applied standards. Rather than compete for resources we really should be collaborating more consistently.

Data harmonisation and efforts towards sustainable data programming cannot be achieved for adequate monitoring of development results, if we are not working together towards the same standards.

The report of the UN Secretary Generals Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development “A World that Counts” notes: “Data are the lifeblood of decision-making and the raw material for accountability. Without high-quality data providing the right information on the right things at the right time; designing, monitoring and evaluating effective policies becomes almost impossible.”

An obvious statement perhaps, but quite powerful if we read it as “unless we have timely, high quality data used to design, monitor and evaluate development progress, sustained effective policy making is impossible.”

The implications of a weak policy landscape in a system which supports access to human rights through legal entitlements are obvious – we can only achieve sustainable and equality based living, if we have a strong system of evidence based policy development and a commitment to policy implementation and the consistent monitoring of results.

With the persistent challenge of securing funding, I have heard often from colleagues and others that development has become increasingly transactional in nature. This challenge of mobilising resources is compounded by the middle income status of OECS countries, while at the same time it is acknowledged that SIDS are particularly vulnerable, and as emphasised in the SAMOA Pathway “ ... small island developing states remain a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities and that they remain constrained in meeting their goals ... we recognise ownership and leadership of small island developing states in overcoming some of these challenges, but stress that, in the absence of international cooperation, success will remain difficult.”

Scarcity of financial resources tends to characterise discussion on implementation of the sustainable development goals: Who will fund SDG implementation? How will we measure progress without the funding necessary to develop statistics systems?

Governments and others working in the field of human development come to see making advancements in development as a struggle and burden because the process of resource mobilisation and the accountabilities of implementation along

strict timelines and reporting frameworks, while necessary for accountability, strains already scarce human resources of OECS Member States.

Further, there is the risk that human development is in danger of being redefined by the funding environment which is not always rights based, with equality and sustainability becoming more peripheral than central to our efforts. Specifically, as we look to move to the Solar Economy, we would want to ensure that those who are on the periphery of the current market systems, will be included moving forward.

This is the time that we must be most vigilant in realising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, rather than risk maintaining the current structures and behaviours which, rather than take us into a sustainable future, would see exclusion, deprivation and suffering as characterising the state of the world.

The particular task then for the UNDP working with the SIDS of the OECS is to ensure that capacity building in data, also takes with it a clear mandate towards evidence based decision making and a high value placed on communication and transparency, development coordination and the collection of data for the achievement of sustainable human development.

In the absence of a clear source of funding, how do we achieve this?

I believe that we must continue to forge strategic partnerships and engage in joint work, but also, we must encourage catalytic and critical thinking so that we can engage in interventions which have a sustained impact. Interventions cannot be limited to funds, but must also draw on the vast technical expertise that UNDP has to offer in a number of areas, including for the integration of the SDGs into sub-regional and national planning strategies, alongside our other UN agencies.

Further, a deeper reflection on what capacity exists and how innovations can be made in existing systems would yield better results, particularly as, if we continue define capacity within the confines of our deficits we will continue to be deficient.

A good lesson in this for me was realising that in the absence of funding for training in STATA software, several statisticians across OECS Member States are self-taught in order to advance with the OECS multi-dimensional poverty index.

We are also ensuring with other partners, to provide open source software options where possible that meet internationally approved quality assurance standards.

While we should not depend on the above as the primary problem solving approach to resource scarcity for capacity building, we cannot discount the potential of considering a more inclusive and expanded approach to utilising existing human and material resources.

Thank you.