

EDITORIAL

by

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Regional Capacity Building: Environment Statistics in the CARICOM Region

In the CARICOM region most of the 15 Member States are faced with growing competition for limited natural resources, pressures from increasing tourism, and a greater frequency of natural disasters. To ensure sustainable development in the region, sound policy decisions must be made using timely and reliable information. It is well accepted that a major difficulty in assessing the implementation of the commitments emanating from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and the United Nations Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in 1994, has been the lack of basic environmental statistics and indicators to measure the progress made.

Environment statistics is new to the CARICOM region. It is only in Belize and Jamaica that efforts have been made to formally institutionalise environment statistics within the national statistical offices, supported in both cases by Statistics Sweden. Two environment statistics compendia have been published by Belize and one by Jamaica. UNSD has been assisting the CARICOM region since 2000 in the development of environment statistics through the Project “Strengthening Capacity in the Compilation of Statistics and Indicators for Conference Follow-up in the CARICOM Region”. The Project, jointly carried out by UNSD and CARICOM, covers the areas of social/gender and environment statistics, with a supporting component of information technology. Its overall objectives have been to strengthen the capacity of national and regional statistical offices to collect and analyse statistical information, and establish a network of experts to improve intra-regional cooperation. The main outputs will include two regional publications, one on social/gender statistics and the other on environment statistics, and increased capabilities in information technology.

Following a preparatory phase, the environmental component of the Project was launched at the Workshop on Environment Statistics held in Belize in 2000. The Workshop included participants from national statistical offices and environmental agencies, as well as regional and international institutions. The participants agreed upon a list of environmental statistics and indicators to be collected jointly by UNSD and CARICOM, and to be presented in the regional publication. Subsequently, Member States engaged in compiling data, some supported by intra-regional study tours and ad hoc consultancy and advisory services.

The publication “The CARICOM Environment in Figures”, currently being finalized, presents the major environmental issues through textual summaries, tables, charts and graphs together with detailed comments on the data. An Expert Group Meeting to review the draft publication was held in October 2001 (see *WHEN* and *WHERE* below). Collaboration was a key factor in the entire process of the production of the publication. Several regional and international institutions were consulted and contributed data or text to the chapters. Continued communication with these institutions throughout the Project was seen as essential to enhance coordination of activities and to minimize duplication of various on-going capacity-building efforts.

The Project has spurred a number of initiatives in environment statistics at the national level. Several Member States have organized workshops or seminars on environment statistics and have increased inter-agency collaboration. The Project has provided stimulus and support to the existing initiatives of Belize and Jamaica. Grenada published its first environment statistics compendium in 2001. Dominica and St. Lucia have advanced draft versions and expect to publish compendia shortly. St. Kitts and Nevis and St. Vincent and the Grenadines have initiated work on draft compendia. These efforts have been achieved through a combination of Government commitment and the additional technical assistance provided through the Project.

In order to ensure sustainability in the areas of social/gender and environment statistics in the region, a CARICOM Advisory Group was established last year comprising selected directors of statistics from national statistical offices, and CARICOM and UNSD representatives. Two meetings of the Group have been held to date (see *WHEN* and *WHERE* below), to agree on the terms of reference, procedures for its operation and to develop programmes in social/gender and environment statistics to produce outputs in alternate years. The setting up of the Advisory Group clearly shows the commitment and ownership that the Project has spawned relative to sustaining the activities of data compilation, the organization of national workshops, inter-agency groups or committees, and the publication of regional and national compendia in these two fields of statistics.

(Besides the national statistical offices and environmental agencies, the following institutions contributed in some way to the Project: the Caribbean Development Bank, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute, the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre, the Caribbean Planning for the Adaptation to Global Climate Change, the Caribbean Tourism Organisation, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, the United Nations Division for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, the University of Technology and the University of the West Indies Centre for Environment and Development.)

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