

1st Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

Project: *Strengthening Capacity for Evidence-Based Policymaking and the Economic Resilience of CARICOM*

5 July 2024

Participants:

Delores Francis – OECS; Carlon Walkes, Austin Bell, Nicolas D. Simpson - Barbados central bank; Prunella Charles-Williams – ECCB; Sheldon Maclean – ECLAC; Claudia Andrea De Camino Ferrario - ECLAC ; Maria Alejandra Ovalles – ECLAC; Ekaterina Chernova, Nour Barnat, Dong Wu, Bruno Antunes; Petra Kynclova - UNCTAD

New suggested members: Timothy -CARICOM; Nakeisha London -Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (Policy focal policy); Nella Jules – Dominica (Statistics)

Agenda:

1. Agreeing the agenda and the ToR of Steering Committee (SC). Introduction of Steering Committee Members
2. Main Findings from Barbados Meeting
3. Sectors Focus and Pilot Countries
4. TiSSTAT Implementation Options
5. Statistics Regional Event Planning

1. The SC members suggested 3 more names to be added to a member list and agreed on the **agenda of the meeting and the ToR of the group**. There is a proposal to add also countries representatives for both statistics and policy to the group. This suggestion was accepted. Countries are reminded to submit the name of their policy and statistics focal points that will serve as members of the SC. Delores promised to follow up with countries who have not yet submitted a nomination.

2. Main Findings from Barbados.

A few days prior to the current meeting Dong shared a policy report from the 1st kick-off meeting in Barbados. Any comments/observations are welcome. Based on this UNCTAD can develop a concrete working plan with a timeline.

The report on statistics will be shared with participants shortly.

3. a) Sectors which are of countries' priority based on policy focal points meeting on 25 of June:

The main question that arose was whether there will be a common set of sectors chosen for all countries or the states will be able to chose sectors based on their individual requirements.

Common sectors for all OECS countries:

1. Cultural and Creative Industries
2. Professional Services
3. Business Process Outsourcing
4. Medical Tourism
5. Yachting and Marine Services

If the number of sectors needs to be shortened, countries require guidance.

Considering that CARICOM countries have already went through a through analysis of 10 sectors in the framework of ECOWAS's study which provided a baseline information regarding the institutional makeup, the institutional governance, looking at non-conforming measures and how it impacts market access and competitiveness. So, there is an interest in looking at the value-added contribution of those sectors of priority. This will provide recommendations on how to improve comparative advantage for those sectors.

Discussion:

- To ensure a deeper analysis of the sectors, the most optimal approach would be to select 2 sectors of common interest to countries. Also, this approach is beneficial considering that we would need to form a working team on each country that is prepared to assess and use the proposed assessment methodology. Once this is done for one chosen sector, we can replicate the methodology for other sectors too.

- Dong highlighted the importance of knowledge-intensive services and proposed medical tourism and creative services as priority sectors. That said, UNCTAD will try to align with countries' development goals.

- Sheldon suggested that while it is agreeable to limit the sectors examined, it's not straightforward to choose just two sectors. He proposed determining priority sectors and developing a horizontal approach for analysis and policy setting across member states. The decision should be based on empirical analysis using an analytical framework to identify sectors with comparative advantages, aiming to generate the most growth.

- Prunella emphasized the importance of identifying priority sectors and ensuring that countries have the feasibility to measure these sectors, which requires basic statistics like surveys or questionnaires.
- Nour: The ability of countries to measure the sectors is still undefined and requires further brainstorming and bilateral discussions.
- Delores: Expressed concern regarding the applicability of areas of comparative advantage for each Member State, making a unified approach more complex. The priorities OECS listed are part of the broader CARICOM regional strategic project aiming to assist countries in aligning sector priorities with the CARICOM Regional Strategic Action Plan on services.
- Ekaterina: The issue needs further discussion to ensure alignment on what the project can offer in terms of sector analysis.

3. b) Pilot Countries:

- On OECS and Barbados' requests, UNCTAD is ready to extend pilots into all countries.

4. TiSSTAT Implementation Options:

- Options Presented (also shared in the minutes of the 2nd kick-off workshop):
 - Online training with central server access: Member States could use the tool on a central testing server to test its applicability.
 - Local installation: Install the system in Member States' servers with necessary training sessions.
 - Combination of online and local training: Remote sessions for initial training, followed by in-person workshops.

Prunella supported Option 1 as the best approach, citing concerns about maintenance fees and the need for discussions with enterprises about their involvement in pilot testing. She emphasized the necessity of advocacy with enterprises to ensure their participation, given existing issues with response rates.

Installation and maintenance:

Nour - Installation is part of the project, so there is no fee involved for countries. TiSSTAT running during the project duration is also covered by the project budget. However, at its end, if TiSSTAT is adopted as an official production tool, the maintenance will be country-owned. However, UNCTAD can assist by providing this service for an annual fee. The fee is around 15.000 USD per year which will cover the maintenance and further system development if applied. This cost is normally absorbed by savings made by countries using TiSSTAT instead of traditional data collection methods. UNCTAD will prepare a comprehensive document showcasing TiSSTAT's advantages and potential savings which can be made thanks to it.

UNCTAD can install TiSSTAT in Member States to assess its usefulness as a production tool. This can be done on local servers, owned by the countries, with UNCTAD maintaining the system.

Prunela- There is a need for further discussions with Member States regarding maintenance fees.

Pilot Testing:

- Following the testing of TiSSTAT, countries will be able to decide on TiSSTAT future use and thus their participation in pilot testing.

- Carlon mentioned Barbados plans to enhance their current survey framework instead of adding another survey, citing concerns about the burden on respondents and existing challenges with response rates. It is so not clear if Barbados needs TiSSTAT but he was suggested at least testing it

5. Stat Regional Event Planning:

- UNCTAD proposed organizing a workshop on using TiSSTAT in person, subject to countries' needs in the first quarter of 2025 to allow Member States time to familiarize themselves with TiSSTAT through online sessions first. Before that UNCTAD is ready to organise online sessions to assist countries going through TiSSTAT testing.

- ECLAC confirmed no issues with the event timing.