



Concept Note

National Statistics, a Culture of Best Practice, and the Establishment of The National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago (NSITT): Imperatives for Securing National Development

Prepared by:

*Godfrey St. Bernard, PhD
Acting Director*

*The Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies
The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine
Trinidad and Tobago*

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) was established by the Statistical Ordinance Ch. 42, No. 11 of 1952. Within the territorial space of Trinidad and Tobago, the CSO was charged with the responsibility of census-taking; collecting, analysing, and publishing statistical information pertaining to commercial, industrial, agricultural, mineral, economic, social, and general activities, and conditions of the people within the territorial space of Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, the CSO was also responsible for collaborating with other Government Departments that collected, compiled, analysed, and published data and statistical information that were produced within the wider national statistical system.

In the years following 1952, further statistical regulations resulted in the expansion of functions that included the provision of statistics on vital events; industrial establishments; employment, wages, salaries, and earnings; annual land returns; slaughterhouse returns; distribution, transport, and other service establishments; housing and population census; agricultural census; and industrial and business undertakings. The Statistical Act, Chapter 19:02 of the 1982 Revised Laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, replaced the 1952 Statistical Ordinance.

Upon its establishment in the early 1950s, the first Government Statistician was an expatriate, Mr. H. J. Steer, a national accounts statistician who set high standards in the establishment of the CSO. Given thrusts towards localising the public service, Mr. Rupert Jackson (Jack) Harewood succeeded Mr. Steer and became the first national of Trinidad and Tobago to assume the role of

Government Statistician, currently, referred to as the Director of Statistics. In those days, the Central Statistical Office took great pride in emphasising its independence from political interference, a virtuous characteristic that ought to be the hallmark of any National Statistical Office. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Central Statistical Office was a well-respected organ of the public service, championing the national development needs of that early post-colonial era.

A formidable list of young to middle-aged professionals prevailed and loomed large among the early pioneers that served the interests of the CSO. They included the following:

- Jack Harewood – Demographer/Statistician
- Lloyd Braithwaite – Sociologist
- George Roberts – The Father of Caribbean Demography
- Mervyn De Souza – Actuary
- Frank Rampersad – Economist
- Victor Bruce – Economist
- Norma Abdullah – Demographer
- Irving W. Chinnia – CSO Director 1968-1970

This list is a testimony to the human resource power that characterised the early post-Independence profile of the CSO. These pioneers exuded a professional spirit that had all the ingredients to set the stage for the establishment of a noble institution capable of growing and delivering statistical products consistent with the requirements of emergent epochs of national development practice, needs, challenges, and remedies.

During the mid-1960s, the CSO continued to broaden its subject-matter content. In addition to Overseas and Population and Vital Statistics, the repertoire of subject-matter products included the following:

- Monthly and Annual Travel Statistics based on Immigration Documents;
- Education Statistics;
- National Income and Balance of Payments;
- Financial Statistics; and
- Continuous Sample Survey of the Population.

In that early period, the CSO had established a tradition that placed it among the leading national statistical offices in the developing world in an early post-Independence Era. Due principally to the influence of the high-powered team that impacted the growth and development of the CSO during the glory days of the 1960s and especially, their mentorship of a younger cadre of officers, the CSO continued to prevail during the 1970s.

In the early 1970s, Mr. Leo Pujadas became the Director of Statistics and continued pursuing the noble enterprise that had its origins in the 1960s. Novel statistical activities such as the Household Budgetary Surveys, the Continuous Sample Survey of the Population, the Continuous Sample Survey of Establishments, and the preparation of its first Social Indicators Report were among landmark achievements during that period. In particular, the latter was a monumental achievement and deemed a favourable response to the demands of an early Social Indicators Movement that

had its roots in the developed world. The CSO continued being the recipient of tremendous goodwill and respect from all professional bodies, whether local, regional, or international. The period also witnessed interventions from Professor Kari Levitt who spearheaded CSO's adoption of the System of National Accounts based on work that had been commissioned during 1972. In essence, this period permitted the CSO to be restructured in a manner befitting of the challenges of the period.

In recognition of the potential that was characteristic of the CSO during the 1970s and in anticipation of the growing and changing demands for statistical products in a young sovereign nation, a restructured CSO was a worthwhile venture. Restructuring the CSO made allowances for a greater stock of professional and technical officers covering the diverse range of statistical products, and sufficiently equipped to rise to emergent statistical challenges that were expected to befall during the late 1970s and into the 1980s.

Fast-forward into 2022, the structure of the CSO is not far removed, if removed at all, from the organisational structure that was established in the early 1970s. Throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, there had been countless interventions reflecting efforts to restructure the CSO and create management and governance frameworks consistent with regional and international protocols that are known to respond to an evolving culture of statistical activities across the globe. Despite these interventions, there has virtually been no change in management and governance structures in the CSO, rendering the current CSO structure to be almost 50 years in arrears.

In January 2016, the national intelligentsia was heartened by the news of the establishment of a Task Force charged with the preparation of a Report that would inform the establishment of a National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago. That assignment was completed in early 2017 and the ensuing Report was discussed, debated, and commented upon in several national arenas. As of 2022, the CSO is yet to transition into the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago (NSITT). Whatever the obstacles impeding progress regarding this national development requirement, the time has come to revisit the notion of the NSITT with a view to fast tracking its establishment.

To this end, the **Sixth SALISES Virtual Forum** entitled “**National Statistics, a Culture of Best Practice, and the Establishment of The National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago (NSITT): Imperatives for Securing National Development**” is scheduled for Friday 25th March, 2022 at 10.00am. As has been the case for the five (5) previous Forums in this series, there are seven (7) panellists, each having a maximum of 10 minutes to present sober responses to a thematic concern deemed relevant to the panel discussion that will emerge and engage the participation of a virtual audience. There is no doubt that a nation's development thrust and its credibility among major international development agencies run the risk of being eroded if its national statistical systems jeopardize the myriad dimensions of quality that underlie the production of development statistics on a national front.

Six years after commissioning the Task Force to establish the NSITT, the Sixth SALISES Virtual Forum is hoping to re-energise the debate and propel all critical stakeholders into recognising the significance of the NSITT to nation-building as Trinidad and Tobago approaches its 60th

anniversary of national independence. SALISES and by extension, the University of the West Indies, seek to positively impact this progressive development agenda. Since its establishment in 1999, this has been the mandate of SALISES and we do pledge to continue to this mission, and trust that the ensuing discussions and products thereafter, will yield positive outcomes for the nation's development agendas in the 2020s and beyond.

Panel Theme

National Statistics, a Culture of Best Practice, and the Establishment of The National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago (NSITT): Imperatives for Securing National Development

Proposed Panellists

Professor Sir Ian Diamond – The challenges and opportunities of a National Statistical Institute

Dr. Abdullahi Abdulkadri - Best Practice and Integrity in National Statistical Systems: The Significance of International and Regional Mandates for the Caribbean

Mr. Lance Busby – Governance Processes, the Proposed NSITT, and the National Statistical System: Challenges and Remedies in Response to a Global Data Revolution

Dr. Godfrey St. Bernard – Countering the Devaluation of Statistics for Development and Promoting a Modern Statistics Culture through Institutional Strengthening

Mr. Gabriel Gamez – National Statistical Systems in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Mr. Desmond Perry – Statistics for Development – The NSITT, The Tobago House of Assembly (THA) and the Human and Institutional Needs of Tobago in the 2020s and beyond.

Dr. Wesley Yung – The Future of National Statistical Offices – New Wave Content, Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, and the Evolution of the Data Science