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KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE PARIS21 ANNUAL BOARD MEETING
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***SDGs, data and capacity development – Perspectives from a Small Island
Developing State***

It is indeed a great privilege today, to address you, my sisters and brothers in Statistics. I believe that we are more than just mere colleagues but a family of statisticians related by common goals, standards, procedures, frameworks and the principles that we are all governed by and to which we adhere.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to PARIS21 for having me as a board member and for facilitating my participation at this important meeting.

Being recently appointed as Chairman of the United Nations Small Island Developing States (SIDS), having been serving as the Prime Minister with responsibility for Science and Technology in CARICOM and working as a professional statistician in another lifetime I can certainly appreciate some of the issues with which you are confronted. Part of my legacy during my tenure as Prime Minister is to advocate for statistics in general, so that more attention is given to it; but more specifically, to help transform statistics in Grenada and in SIDS in ways that would meet ever-increasing demands.

Today, statistics has become an indispensable tool in the democratic process of countries, in all facets of society and in the development of sectors and industry in the economy. Because of the increasing use of statistics in many areas of our lives, it has become very desirable to understand and practise statistical thinking. It is about improving the lives of people.

Statistics creates transparency, as citizens are able to examine the decisions made by the government and local authorities by ensuring accountability.

Small Island Developing States, like Grenada, are all characterised similarly by their small size, remoteness from large markets, narrow resource and export base, and exposure to global environmental challenges and external economic shocks as a result of the impact of climate change. As they journey towards the path of economic recovery and sustainable development, these SIDS are faced with challenges of slow and volatile economic growth coupled with high unemployment, low exports and weak public finances. This is accentuated with vulnerability to natural disasters, the effects of climate change and rising sea level.

In light of the aforementioned, the main challenge for us is being able to optimally utilise scarce resources to provide a better life for all.

Recognising these challenges, Grenada, for instance, is now in the process of designing a National Strategic Development Plan which will be aligned with the SDGS and will incorporate some of the recommendations of the SAMOA Pathway. The situation for the other CARICOM SIDS vary, in that, similar to Grenada, some do not have National Development plans (NDPs) while others have NDPs which may take the form of a medium term development strategy. This is augmented by the Strategic Plan for the CARICOM Community which provides a major overarching context for CARICOM SIDS.

Some of the main issues to be addressed by Grenada's National Development Plan are as follows:

- Fiscal, External Sustainability, Investment Facilitation and Economic Diversification.
- Reducing Poverty and Unemployment
- Education and Human Resource Development
- Technological Capacity and Development
- Reduction in Energy and Transportation Costs
- Lessening the impact of Climate Change on Citizens Livelihood

It is worth mentioning, that the use of reliable statistics was key, in pointing government towards these issues and will be critical in developing the action plan that will help Grenada and other SIDS in addressing these issues. Given that indicators will be required to monitor both the SDGs and the national plan on a frequent and consistent basis, more demands are being placed on the production of Official Statistics and in particular increasing the range and frequency of the statistics being produced.

Ladies and Gentlemen, continuously improving the efficiency of public expenditure and service delivery operations is an important priority of all SIDS governments. In Grenada, this assumes greater relevance as the current focus of our medium term economic policy is on reducing the debt burden to sustainable levels (less than 60% of GDP by 2020).

Hence, clear choices have to be made and opportunity costs of those choices must be measurable in terms of justifying the use of scarce resources to Government, the citizens, and the international development partners as we continue to promote transparent governance.

In light of this, there are 4 important drivers justifying the need to improve statistical quality:

1. **The Management for Results (MFR) approach being pursued by Government:** Over the last two decades, a major paradigm shift was away from the traditional focus on delivery of outputs to the delivery of outcomes or effective results.

2. **The need for policy makers to justify policy and investment choices:** High-level leaders and policy makers need to be prepared to justify their policy and investment choices.
3. **Evidence-Driven proposals to access public financing:** In Grenada, like most other SIDS, financing of public investment involves reliance on grant and concessional loan funding. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, the international resource mobilization environment is very competitive and evidence-driven proposals assume greater importance.
4. **Being Accountable to Donors:** Donor funds are essentially provided by other governments and these agencies have to be accountable to the taxpayers in their respective countries to prove that their funds are being effectively spent.

In all four drivers **solid, accurate, timely and relevant statistics** produced by **autonomous, professional statistical agencies** equipped with **modern technology and staffed by competent, well-trained professionals** are required. This will enable **efficient management and effective prioritisation of the interventions.**

In Grenada, the International Monetary Fund recently concluded the 6th Review of the Grenada Home-Grown Structural Adjustment Programme; a programme Grenada entered in 3 years ago with the support of the IMF to boost inclusive growth and job creation; and to restore fiscal and debt sustainability. To facilitate these reviews, we have relied heavily on data that would speak to Grenada's fiscal and economic performance as well as information that would speak to the performance of the various social programmes which Grenada has implemented.

All the IMF reviews have been positive, and we are committed to monitoring the same data to ensure that we maintain and further improve on our economic performance.

The Samoa Pathway and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda challenge us. Although this challenge is seemingly ambitious and may appear unattainable, it still presents a wonderful opportunity for change, especially for SIDS. We need to put forward our best efforts in trying to achieve the targets set out by the SDG's.

The SDGs are ambitious, not just to achieve, but to measure. For small countries, there is a dire need to expand the range and types of data being measured to accommodate the monitoring demands of this framework. Measuring change in the SDGs requires even more and better data systems.

This speaks to the current status of capacity within the countries' National Statistical Office and its Statistical Systems. A country pursuing the SDGs puts statistics at the forefront and Governments are mandated to develop their statistical systems in order to adequately report on these goals.

I am ever conscious of the challenges of statisticians, the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and other agencies within the national statistical system and regional statistical system of SIDS, who are faced with ever increasing demands and decreasing or stagnating budgets, yet are still expected to fulfil the current demands for statistics and new demands, to ensure that the statistics produced are timely, of high quality, are relevant and conform to international and regional statistical standards. Balancing the desired information against privacy concerns is harder for small economies than large ones.

It is as a result of these challenges expressed by our CARICOM Statisticians at the 2nd High-Level Advocacy Forum on Statistics held in Grenada in 2014 that an Action Plan for Statistics for the Caribbean was developed.

I had the distinct pleasure of presenting this plan at the 37th Regular Meeting of Heads of Government in July 2016. The plan focused on proposals and specific actions to advocate for the Improvement of Statistics in CARICOM which would result in better development outcomes and greater prosperity for all the peoples of CARICOM.

I am confident that the presentation would have created greater awareness among CARICOM leaders of the state of statistics in the region. Hence, this action plan, once implemented, will result in the following:

- **Strengthening the National Statistical Systems** in countries by addressing the issue of funding of the National Statistical Office (NSO) and other producing agencies, staffing, legislation, education, training and development.
- **Revolutionizing our statistical processes through ICT** by enabling the upgrade of the IT infrastructure in the National Statistical Offices and Systems in relation to the production and dissemination of statistics.
- **Promoting careers in statistics through greater infusion of statistics in the education system to lead to the development of data scientists;**
- **Promoting the professionalisation of statistics** in CARICOM; and
- **Supporting a regional approach to the development of statistics.** Especially as it relates to government's support of the Regional Statistical Work Programme and the Overarching CARICOM Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics and by extension the OECS Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics.

I would like to highlight the important role of the Caribbean Community and the efforts we are making as one Community to strengthen regional cooperation in statistics. Some of the regional initiatives that can help in optimising scarce resources include:

- the Common Regional Statistical Work Programme;
- the CARICOM Model Bill;

- CARICOM's Code of Ethics;
- the Resolution on Strengthening Statistical Capacity which was passed in 2005 by Council; and
- Census taking in the Region which is characterised by a regional census strategy to support countries which is a critical initiative given the size of this exercise.

Implementing this Action Plan must be a priority for us in the Caribbean as we seek to develop capacity to deliver on the SDGs and our own National Strategic Plans. This is also a model that could be replicated by all SIDS.

The issue of Capacity Development in SIDS must be a collaborative effort with our Development Partners for there to be sustainability in our initiatives. Although our Governments have an important role to play in the development of statistics and in allocating more resources to this cause, CARICOM alone will not be able to implement its Action Plan for Statistics.

This is why, on behalf of all SIDS, I want to solicit greater support from our development partners especially, as we are required to make huge investments into the development of statistics in order to advance the 2030 development agenda.

The Government of Grenada recognises the importance of statistical development and as such, with the help of PARIS21, has developed a Revised National Statistics Legislation, which will be tabled in Parliament soon.

In conclusion, I would like to advocate for increased collaboration among stakeholders, regional organisations, National Statistical Offices and Development Partners. The issue of capacity-building must be aggressively addressed by SIDS and I therefore make a clarion call to development Partners to support initiatives like the Action Plan for Statistics, which recommends the best approach to capacity building.

Let us join hands as we seek to ensure that no one is left behind.

We need to capitalise on the opportunities of the SDGs and the SAMOA Pathway and for CARICOM countries, the Action Plan for Statistics which our governments have endorsed. Government endorsement of these platforms speaks to our commitment to developing statistics.

I would also like to recognise the great impact that PARIS21 is having on our economies, especially as it relates to creating the enabling environment for capacity-building through the promotion of regional and national development strategies for Statistics. Your contribution to the Statistics world should never go unnoticed.

I would also again like to express my profound gratitude to you for inviting me to be a member of this prestigious body and also for the assistance you have been giving to

Grenada in the review of our Statistics Legislation and in developing a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics.

Finally Colleagues, I wish you a productive meeting, as we forge ahead a path, which will lead us to a destination of improved statistical capacity and sustainable development.

I thank you.