Availability of Information and the Implications for Educational Policy in Six Countries of the Caribbean

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Work Document

January 2006

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Executive Summary

This report is based on a limited study done with a questionnaire and interviews with important officers of the Ministries of Education in six Caribbean countries. The study was limited because of time constraints and the type of contacts that were possible with each of the respondents, in the six countries selected. As a consequence the study should be considered as exploratory, trying to identify new lines of thinking.

As several members of the Education Network expressed in the last Policy Dialogue meeting (February 17 & 18, 2005), given the high stakes attached to the evaluation of the results of policy interventions, countries face the need to identify the most reasonable and legitimate measure of progress.

In general, all the countries in the region that answered the questionnaire have manifested that they possess different means of information to support their decision-making processes. There are many similarities, but there are enough peculiarities to justify dealing with each of them as a separate entity. In all cases, there is information but there are also problems and limitations in obtaining, processing and interpreting the data.

All countries have financial information available. But, in most cases, this information comes from the Ministry of Finance and is not generated in-house. It is accurate and gives a fairly good picture of the expenditures covered by the national budget. Nevertheless, because it has a different origin, the information is not always related directly to the education data available in the Ministries and does not cover all the desired topics.

The performance of the students is measured through tests that were primarily designed to place students to the different types of schools in the system, especially when passing from the Primary to the Secondary level. Nevertheless, more and more, the culture is changing and the results are also used to assess the effectiveness of the systems and as a measure of quality for the schools. In some countries, although still a minority, there are assessment measurements that are taken in a periodical basis to see how the learning is taking place and be able to know the progress of the students.

Some countries have started evaluating teacher performance, but how it is done and the scope in which it is done is very variable. In some cases this performance-evaluation system is still a plan in the design stage or in steps previous to implementation. The situation varies in each country but the general feeling is that more work is needed not only concerning the form to acquire the data, analyzed, and used it but also at the conceptual level, to define what are the critical elements of teacher performance and what data is critical to evaluate a particular situation.

As a general conclusion of the analysis of the present situation, it can be said that information is available in many relevant aspects, but it is demographic information and insights on how the system is performing in a general way. Some of the problems and shortcomings that are present in many of the systems could be summarized as follows: The data is insufficient and not always available when needed; the processes are handled most of the time by hand which makes them time consuming; the results are not always reliable and many aspects are not covered.

Some of the ingredients to be able to produce the type of information system that is needed are: "Political will", which not only the willingness to do it but also a conducive environment and the capacity to access resources; technical capacity for the development of the system and its sustainability; a clear view of the desired future for

education in the country, meaning what needs to be achieved; and after having a clear strategic view and a good implementation plan to make it happen.

Two models have been generated to produce the information changes: One is decentralized in which not only the Ministry of Education produces information but actually is the government as a whole. This is a wide range model that it is more demanding but produces information covering education and its linkages with the whole of society. The other alternative is concentrated in the efforts that the Ministry of Education can produce. The coverage is not as wide but it is easier to manage.

As a conclusion from the analysis of possible futures, it can be said that there are problems in the region with the information systems and the data gathering as a basis for policy development and decision-making. But not all is negative; the outlook is far from being totally grim. There are many good signs to take into consideration and there is a future that needs to be constructed.

In the last analysis the answers to some of the most pressing questions like: How to evaluate the impact of policy interventions? What are the best mechanisms and indicators to evaluate progress? How to evaluate particular policies and programs? How to make sharp application of results in policies and programs? How to collect and report data effectively? How to best evaluate student achievement? How to make evaluation results readily available for decision-making? Have to come from the establishment of a well design system of Monitoring and Evaluation based on a comprehensive and shared vision of what should be the future of education in the country, a set of well selected and defined indicators (Quality – Quantity – Time), a baseline study made to establish the benchmarks of the system, a calendar of the interventions and expected results, and a system to collect all the relevant data.

There are a number of steps that can be suggested in order to develop what was presented in the above paragraph. Some of them are related to resources and information technology; others are of a more basic and essential nature and have to do more with attitude and vision. Here is a short list:

- Consider it a priority.
- Formulate outcomes and goals.
- Look for appropriate technical means.
- Select outcome indicators to be monitored.
- Gather baseline information on the current condition.
- Set specific targets to reach and dates for reaching them.
- Regularly collect data to assess whether targets are being met.
- Analyze and report the results.

Introduction

Upon an initiative of its Board of Directors, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) created the Regional Policy Dialogue, which offers to its borrowing member countries a forum for policy discussions and strategic thinking in key areas of the countries' development. The area of education and training of human resources has been organized under the Education Network.

The objective of the Dialogue is to create a forum in which high-ranking decision makers from the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean can share experiences, learn about practices both within and outside the region, and explore opportunities for regional cooperation. The education network has already held seven regional meetings in the last five years.

In this case, the meeting held in Barbados, during the month of September 2005 was dedicated to examine the quality and quantity of information available in each educational system and its use by decision makers in the development of policy. It is a very important topic, especially in the context of a world that is becoming more and more demanding of governments and public services. With accountability becoming a priority for most nations in the world, the use of information must become a concern for all.

This report is based on a limited study made based on a questionnaire sent and interviews with important officers of the Ministries of Education of six Caribbean countries[1]. The study was limited because of the available time and the type of contact that was possible with the respondents in the countries selected. As a consequence the study should be considered as exploratory, presenting the situation of the region through the understanding of the major players and trying to find new lines of thinking and revisit old ones in order to provide a better framework to the analysis needed in the topic. More than to provide complete answers to the problems identified, the paper presents material to be reflected upon and possibly, although maybe untested, develop some avenues for improvement. It is not research oriented but rather policy oriented.

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[1] Originally there were seven countries included but only six were able to respond. Unfortunately Bahamas, dealing with the hurricane Katrina and its aftermath was not able to respond. The others are listed in attachment 3.

Background

After a decade of major education reforms in most countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean regions, the demand for results is growing[2]. While policy makers defend their initiatives, critics of policy interventions are questioning why educational problems seem to persist in spite of high investments in the sector. The debate is fueled by increasing parental and community participation demanding better results and by the lack of agreement among different interest groups over mechanisms of assessment of policy interventions and benchmarks.

As several members of the Education Network expressed in the last Policy Dialogue meeting (February 17 & 18, 2005), given the high stakes attached to the evaluation of the results of policy interventions, countries face the need to identify the most reasonable and legitimate measure of progress. Bearing that in mind and considering the importance of timely and reliable information in the decision-making process, the following questions were raised:

1. How to evaluate the impact of policy interventions?

2. What are the best mechanisms and indicators to evaluate progress?

3. How to evaluate particular policies and programs?

4. How to make sharp application of results in policies and programs?

5. How to collect and report data effectively?

6. How to best evaluate student achievement? How to make evaluation results readily available for decision-making?[3]

Finding answers to questions like these may have implications for the ability of education ministries, or more generally education reformers, to sustain efforts in the medium to long term. It may determine the feasibility of finding the right political support or the required level of funding for education policy. It could have an influence in the way expectations are managed and social marketing campaigns supporting education reforms are designed and conducted. In the end, it may have substantive influence on the content, timing or sequencing of education policy interventions as such.

As a consequence of these needs and the desire of Governments not only to be more effective, but also to be able to show it, Monitoring and Evaluation as a field has been evolving. The current trend is to move away from the traditional implementation based approach to look more for results. The attention has changed from outputs to outcomes. In this context organized and systematic information becomes critical. The need for well-defined indicators and meaningful baseline data is transformed in a necessary ingredient to measure performance and to show how the governments and the different sectors are fulfilling expectations in our case, more directly the Ministries of Education and the sector they cover.

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[2] In fact this is a global phenomenon that goes beyond the Region and Education. In our present world there is a deeply felt need for an effective state. There is a wide consensus that this is a critical element to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development. See Jody Zall Kusek and Ray C. Rist (2004).

[3] The present text is quoting the terms of reference written for the study.

This document addresses these needs and the situation that created them. Based on a questionnaire and a number of interviews with key officers in several countries in the Caribbean, it provides an analysis of the situation and helps to identify what are considered the major problems. Finally, the paper introduces a number of ideas and suggestions to provide solutions or, at least, to start the search for them.

Methodology

The study was defined as an exploratory research directed toward establishing a general frame of reference on what kind of information was available and how it was used by the decision-makers in the Education sector of the Caribbean region. The instrument was designed by a team of IDB officers and consultants, and it was reviewed and approved by several Permanent Secretaries who were also involved in answering the questionnaire.

The sample included seven English-speaking Caribbean countries: Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago. To be a part of the study the country needed to be a borrowing member of the Bank, not to have been included recently in a similar study, and to be a somewhat active participant in the Dialogue meeting. It was not a random sample but rather chosen on the basis of a defined set of criteria. From the group of selected countries, all, with exception of Bahamas, responded to the questions.[4]

To support the questionnaire there were a number of telephone interviews that were included. A significant decision-maker officer was designated by each of the countries. During the time allotted for the written response to the questionnaire, they were all contacted and the interview performed. The average time for the interviews was around 30 minutes.

Another source of information used to develop this paper was the inputs of the participants in a sub-regional meeting that took place in Barbados on September 15 and 16. During those two days an open exchange of information took place widening the scope of the work and adding some more valuable information. A limited bibliography was also consulted in the development of the paper.

It is important to note that terms are loosely used in the questionnaire behind the desire to obtain as many and extensive answers as possible. There are several concepts, like "formal assessment mechanisms" or "information systems" that can be interpreted at different levels. For some of the respondents to have some statistics available at the national level means that there is an information system. Other countries were using a more sophisticated, more demanding definition, in which the term was implying other kinds of tools and instruments in the compilation of data and the use of information. This difference in interpretation was the price to be paid to have more open and easy to answer questions.

Another important note to make here is that the goal of the study was not to establish the objective situation of each of the countries but rather it was the much more modest one of knowing how the officers involved saw their own situation, concerning the information

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[4] Bahamas confronted an emergency situation with the threat of several hurricanes during the period in which the questionnaire was sent, which made the communication process much more difficult and eventually led to the no-answer.

they had and the need to make policy decisions. What was searched for was not the objective truth but rather the subjective interpretation of the subjects involved.

The situation in the region

The region is formed by a number of predominantly small island countries. The major exceptions are Guyana, Belize, Suriname and Cayenne, which are in the continent and are larger, at least in term of extension. The major cultural influence in the area is clearly England, as reflected by the use of the language but there is also presence of other European and Asian countries (France, Holland, Portugal, India, and China). In recent times Canada has become a somewhat significant actor through its Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Different from the rest of North and South America, in some of the countries (especially Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname), there is a fairly strong East Indian influence coming from the importation of manual labor at the time of the English colonies. In Guyana this group constitutes the larger percentage of the population. Overall there are many cultural similarities within the group of countries selected for the study. The two possible exceptions are Suriname because of their different colonial origin and Belize because of the geographical situation and history.

The group is formed by relatively small economies and populations. The table included below gives a general view of the characteristics of the group using some basic statistics.

Table I – Comparative Economic Statistics

Country	Gross Domestic Product*	Percentual GDP growth	Population (000)	GDP per capita US $
Barbados	4,569	2.3	279,254	16,400
Belize	1,778	3.5	279,457	6,500
Guyana	2,899	1.9	765,283	3,800
Jamaica	11,130	1.9	2,731,832	4,100
Suriname	1,885	4.2	438,144	4,300
Trinidad & Tobago	11,480	5.7	1,088,644	10,500

Sources: The World Fact Book. Estimates from 2004 and 2005. *In US$ billions.

All the countries in the region that answered the questionnaire have manifested that they possess different means of data collection and information processing to support their decision-making processes. There are many similarities, but there are enough peculiarities to justify the dealing with each of the countries as a separate entity. In all cases, there is information but there are also problems and limitations in obtaining, processing and interpreting the data.

All the respondents have a system to record general statistical data from the education system. They know the coverage that they have achieved at the different levels, and the dropout and repetition rates. All this gathering of data is achieved generally with the application of questionnaires sent to schools from the central Ministry, by the Planning Unit or an equivalent. In some cases the regional or district offices are included as intermediaries. Here is a description of what happens in one of the countries: "This is a

manual system. The Educational Planning Division (EPD) and other Divisions request and obtain information from other Ministries, agencies, and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) pertinent to decision making in the MOE. There is a move however, to using the electronic mail to obtain and provide information. All Directors / Managers are required to complete annual reports and submit them to the Educational Planning Unit (EPD). This Unit compiles and organizes the information to facilitate decision-making. Since it is a manual system the information is not always timely in submission". [5]

Another example: "Presently there is a Policy Analysis, Research and MIS Unit consisting of three sections: Policy Analysis and Research; MIS and Statistics. Data on the education system are collected through the Annual Census. Different publications are prepared making the data available to both internal and external users. The Policy Analysis and Research Unit analyses existing data as well as undertakes research to provide additional data. There are also the Educational Planning and the Program Monitoring and Evaluation Units, which provide relevant information on the system. There is a formal body, the Senior Policy Making Group that meets monthly to review and discuss the issues, information or policies. Information on student performance is generated by the Student Assessment Unit"[6].

Most countries also have financial information available. But, in most cases this information comes from the Ministry of Finance and is not generated in-house. It is accurate and gives a fairly good picture of the expenditures covered by the national budget. Nevertheless, because it has a different source, the information is not always related directly to the education data available in the Ministries. There are advances but still some improvements are needed. In the words of one of the participants: "…Through the application of modern approaches of financial management in combination with utilization of the possibilities of information technology, the capacity for efficient an effective budgeting may be improved at both the central and the school and institute level"[7].

The region was strongly influenced by the British system, oriented by end of terms examinations that were used to divide the students according to their performance. In present times, the use of tests and examinations of this kind is something found in practically all countries, even those outside the influence of Great Britain. Nevertheless, more and more, the culture is changing and the results are used also to assess the effectiveness of the systems and as a measure of quality for the schools. In some countries, although still a minority, there are assessment measurements that are taken in periodical basis to see how the learning is taking place and be able to know the progress of the students.

Some countries have started evaluating teaching performance, but how it is done and the scope in which it is done is very variable. In many cases this performance-evaluation system is still a plan, still in the design stage or in steps previous to implementation. The situation of course is at a different level in each country but the general feeling is that more work is needed, not only concerning the form to acquire the data, analyze it, and convert it into relevant information; but also at the conceptual level, to define what are the critical elements of teacher performance and what data is critical to evaluate a particular situation.

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[5] Maurice Chin Aleong, Technical Advisor appointed to fill the questionnaire by the Ministry Of Education, Trinidad and Tobago.
[6] Barbara Allen, Director of the Planning & Development Division, Ministry of Education, Jamaica.
[7] Adiel Kallam, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Suriname.

As a general conclusion, it can be said that information is available in many relevant aspects, but is mainly statistics in the demographical aspects of the performance of the education system. Some of the problems and shortcomings that are present in many instances could be summarized as follows:

- In many cases it is difficult to obtain all the necessary data. The systems are not the result of an intentional design but rather an accumulation of sources. In many cases, because the data is produced by different instances there is no coordination and access. This situation could, at times, become a problem. Interpretation is not always easy. The problem has been addressed in different ways in the Region. For example Bahamas has included in the last loan project (still under consideration by the Bank) a very large subcomponent in Information Technology. With the implementation of this project the Ministry will be in a position to develop a large management information system. Guyana did the same with the Basic Education Access & Management Support Program (BEAMS) and the system is being designed.

  One of the stronger information users among the Caribbean countries explains their reality in the following terms:

  "To a very large extent decision-making is done on sufficient and reliable information, well analyzed and shared. The exercise however is generally very time consuming and late in submission given:

  i) The data has to be collated and organized since, the data emanates from different sources outside of the MOE and Divisions of the MOE;
  ii) The obtaining of data takes much longer than is desirable.
  iii) The analysis of the data has to be done by personnel who has several other tasks than analyses of data; and
  iv) The absence of computer networking systems."[8]

- It is important to understand that even in those cases in which a management information system has been developed inside the Ministry, it will still be in need for coordination and support from outside sources. The governments in the region must be capable, if they want to have really effective data sources, to coordinate the effort and produce a coordinate system capable to produce the relevant information. That is the case with some initiatives in the region. For example the Social Statistics Program in Guyana. In this area the consensus in the Region is unanimous the information is generally not enough and arrives somewhat late.

- Although computers and links are available in many countries, the information is still handled manually for the most part. As a consequence it is not always available on a timely basis. Because information technology is not used fully and there is little interaction among the information sources, most of the statistical products come out with delays. In some cases the statistical digests of education are published annually but they come out up to three years late. When done manually this kind of work can become a daunting task, especially when the units in charge are under-staffed and have little means. Some countries that are larger, Guyana and Suriname, and have a more complicated geography to recover the data from the sources and to process them into a coherent whole demand a lot of effort and determination.

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[8] Maurice Chin Aleong, Technical Advisor, Ministry of Education, Trinidad & Tobago.

These complaints appear over and over: "The system in place does provide some basis for policy development but because the data are often not current and sometimes limited, the analysis maybe flawed therefore impacting on the recommendations. In addition, this may sometimes prejudice the type of decisions made."[9]

- Many of the systems have also problems of reliability. Not always the answers are correct and they do not always follow the line intended with the questions. A number of factors contribute to this situation. Number one is the lack of understanding of the significance of the effort to acquire reliable information. Many educators and /or support employees do not fully understand the reasons behind the effort of data collection. They simply do not know the consequences of producing misguided information and do not take enough care. Another reason is the lack of training to understand how the forms need to be filled and how the system needs to be managed. Then there are a number of less transparent reasons that might lead to the provision of inadequate or simply wrong information.

  Another factor that contributes to the lack of reliability of the data is the fact that there are no sufficient resources to authenticate the results. Personnel, time, and traveling expenses are not available to check the data obtained and the only way in which authenticity is checked is through good sense interpretations[10].

- Almost in every educational system there has been the experience of a school map. At one point or another, the existence of schools and their performance has been related to their environment. When technology was limited these tools for planning were completed as individual experiences and a lot of work needed to be done to produce an instrument with very short practical life. To maintain them up to date was practically impossible. Nevertheless their value was recognized. Presently, with the advancement of the computer technology and the type of graphic software possibilities that are available the potential for use are much greater.

  Very little mention was made in the questionnaires and/or interviews about the use of these geographically oriented information systems, called GIS or School Maps. Nevertheless, there are some countries (Guyana, for example) that are developing such systems with the support of the IDB and the Swedish government.

- Financial information although mostly of better quality, is confined to budgetary and cash flow data, together with a description of the expenditures. It is not usual to see this information linked to goals and objectives, to the outcomes of projects or initiatives within the sector. It is also difficult to come with clear data on the full cost of education and to be able to differentiate it by regions or areas. In some countries to come up with accurate information of the real cost of education and what is spent on each student annually would be a very difficult task, impossible for all practical purposes.

- In general, the units in charge of organizing and interpreting the data are under-staffed and have limited resources. Not always the training and knowledge base of its members is at the desirable level. As a result decision-makers do not always receive what they require.

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[9] Barbara Allen, Director of the Planning & Development Division, Ministry of Education, Jamaica.
[10] For example if the information coming out a school is so different that seems impossible in the light of the data received in previous years.

The Answers to the Questionnaires[11]

The first question presented in the questionnaire searched for information concerning the existence of formal assessment mechanisms in areas considered priorities. The second question asked for comments on the positive answers. The following table gives information on each of the aspects.

TABLE I – Coverage of particular areas of concern in each country[12]

1) *Does the Ministry of Education has formal assessment mechanisms in place to follow progress on the following:*

Area of concern	Yes	No
Equity	Ba-G-S-T	Be
Teacher Quality	G-J-S-T	Ba-Be
Teacher Training	Ba-Be-G-J-S-T	
Student Progress	Ba-Be-G-J-S-T	
Costs and Funding – Financial Information	Ba-G-J-S-T	Be
Effectiveness of Management & Administration	G-J-S-T	Ba-Be
Leadership Capacity & Performance	G-J-T	Ba-Be-S
Student Flow	Ba-Be-G-J-S-T	

Before examining the answers obtained from the countries it is necessary to explain that the respondents interpreted the concept of formal assessment mechanisms in a somewhat different way, causing some variation in the answers. This is a consequence of the manner in which the instrument was designed, and the option to have the questions as open as possible, facilitating as many and as extensive answers as possible.

Equity

In the first category, equity, Trinidad & Tobago, talks about their Annual Statistical Returns (ASR), a system that allows them to have gross and net enrollment ratios in the country by gender, age and geographical distribution. A similar answer is given by Guyana that claims that variables related to equity can be follow-up from the annual statistics coming out of the questionnaires sent to schools every year.

Jamaica points out that there is need for more clarification concerning this topic in order to produce better indicators and more information. Suriname says that the country does not have a formal system but that they know their coverage in the rural areas is below what they have achieved in the cities.

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[11] When writing this section of the paper two possibilities were available to the author. One of them was the option taken: To write it by topics giving a better overall view of the situation of the region in each of the issues included in the study. The second possibility was to write it by country giving, in this case, a better description of each of the national realities. Any of the available options presented some limitations. Because the questionnaires are included in the paper, as an attachment, the possibility of knowing the details by country is always possible to the reader. Hence the decision to present a holistic view was taken instead of a country-by-country description.

[12] Ba=Barbados; Be=Belize; G=Guyana; J=Jamaica; S=Suriname; Trinidad & Tobago=T

Teacher Quality and Training

The second and third categories are closely linked: teacher quality and Training. In the first category Barbados comments that there are in the process of implementing a teacher evaluation. Concerning training the Ministry says that these activities are organized with the University of West Indies and the Teachers College.

Guyana says that there are annual appraisals done for all teachers and that the statistical system provides information concerning their qualification. The Cyril Potter College of Education provides the statistics concerning teachers in training, in-service and before. Jamaica says that information concerning teacher quality in terms of qualification is produced by the annual census of the schools and that there is the Professional Development Unit in the Ministry that is responsible to provide in-service training for teachers.

Trinidad & Tobago explains that in their case, the ASR, which indicates the levels of teacher's qualifications, professional preparation and development, captures relevant information in these categories. There is an on-going research at the present done by the Division of Educational Research and Evaluation studying classroom practices and the pedagogy involved. The recently established Professional Teacher Development Unit (PTDU) also monitors and supports these activities. Suriname has the Inspectorate and the Guidance Unit as the entities responsible for the in-service training for the teachers.

In the meeting held in Barbados this item was discussed extensively since the officers at the session agreed that there was lack of clarity as to how quality of teaching should be defined and which indicators could be the best ones to measure it. A regional workshop was proposed and it was readily accepted.

All the countries said that they have some system in place and that they monitor the actions taking place to train teachers and their results. The universities and the Teacher Training Colleges are mentioned several times as participating in the effort to keep teachers up to date. Again, the assessment in many cases is limited to the collection of some statistical data.

Another related issue is taken on by question 16, which asks about periodical evaluation of teachers' performance. Only one of the six countries has periodic evaluations in place, Trinidad & Tobago. Jamaica and Barbados said that the system would be implemented in the near future. Jamaica also says that approval on increments in salaries will be tied to the results of these evaluations

Student Progress

The next topic deals with student progress. As no surprise this is one aspect in which most countries offer a strong response. It has been a tradition in the Caribbean, following the English system, to have examinations at the end of each level of the educational system. Most countries have some kind of test at the end of the sixth grade (Standard 4) and several possibilities at the end of the secondary level (Forms 5 and 6). In the past these examinations were used to divide students, according to their level of performance in parallel tracks, more intellectually or practically oriented depending on the performance of the student. The best ones would continue to the university, the others will have to show promise along the way and return to the upper track or remain at the second level, limited to less demanding technically oriented programs.

Trinidad & Tobago offers a detailed list of the assessment instruments that they use:

- A Continuous Assessment Program (CAP), which is done mainly within schools.
- National tests at standards I, III and at the secondary entrance.
- A new initiative from the MOE to begin a series of tests as Part I of a National Certificate of Secondary Education (NCSE).
- The Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate of Education (CSEC) developed by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).
- Advanced Level General Certificate of Education (A Level GCE, University of Cambridge) examinations.
- The Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) developed by CXC and introduced two years ago.

They explain that the Ministry evaluates the results. This is the case of many of the countries involved in the study. Presently, most of them use the results of the different examinations not only to evaluate the students individually but as a diagnostic instrument for the schools and the system as a whole. Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica report such development. Nevertheless, the traditional idea is still strong and very much in use in the Region.

Belize and Suriname are not a part of this tradition. In the first case the country has a national assessment on literacy and numeracy conducted in two stages in the primary schools. In the case of Suriname, there is an Examination Bureau, which together with the Inspectorate Unit have the responsibility for the assessment of the student progress.

In Jamaica there is a national Assessment Program (NAP) at the primary level, which consists of a Grade 1 Readiness Inventory indicating the children readiness to access primary education; a Grade e Diagnostic Test; a Grade 4 Literacy test and a Grade 6 Achievement Test (GSAT). Schools receive feedback on the first three tests so that corrective measures can be put in place. The GSAT, which is also a placement test, provides information on the performance of the students that are placed in the different schools so that where necessary, measures can be taken to remedy the situation. Students at the secondary level in Jamaica, take the CSEC as well as technical subjects offered by the HEART Trust National Training Agency.

Additional information is provided by questions 12 and 13 and another category in the same question 2: Student Flow also provides additional insights. All the countries involved declare (question 12) that the results are used to compare academic achievement at different times. Trinidad & Tobago says that this trend has been developed recently and Suriname cautions that due to lack of expertise in the matter not many actions are taken.

To the next question (13) four countries answered that they **publish the results of tests and exams,** and also other important indicators of the performance of the system. The other two gave negative answers. Guyana suggests that more analytical work is needed. National and regional trends, in their case, are analyzed but the results could be sometimes misleading in some regions that have very different districts and other times the more numerous population of the coastal regions could hide the results of the hinterland and riverain portions of the country.

Trinidad & Tobago says a significant effort is being made to comprehensively publish the results of all tests. In the case of Jamaica, each school will receive their results. In most cases the results of the examinations are known and generally they spark some kind of public debate, although the discussion is not always well focused.

In the case of the student flow, the answers are consistent with the idea that tests and examinations dominate the passage of students from one level to the other. They also show the concern of many of the national authorities to provide a smooth transition from one level to the other.

Returning to the issue of the publication of results and the situation of the system, question 11 completes the picture on the topic of information sharing. All countries, with the exception of Belize, are producing yearly statistical abstracts. Nevertheless, almost all of them say that they are behind from one to three years. This situation reflects how problematic the data gathering process is for them and that in most cases there are not adequate resources at their disposal: human, financial or technological.

The answers to question 8 help to complete the necessary information on the way in which national examinations and tests are used in the Caribbean Region. Again from these answers it can be concluded that, in general, they respond to the old tradition of channeling the students to different and parallel tracks. Nevertheless, it is also clear that new, and possibly strong, tendencies are emerging and generating lots of attention. For instance, it was mentioned before the awareness of the authorities of the need to provide smooth transitions from the initial levels of education to primary schools and from there to the secondary. There is also the new use give to the results of the tests as tools for the schools, the regions and the system as a whole to make corrections and improve performance. These are important development that could help to enrich and maybe reinvent and old tradition of testing in the Caribbean.

For example, in its answers Suriname[13] gives the following insight: "The exams results are at present used solely to define the entrance of the children to new school levels. However, the disappointing exams/tests results of recent years make it imperative to use the results also as diagnostic tools to improve the performances of the schools. There is a project in execution with a loan from the IDB, with a component to carry out activities in this regard"[14].

Belize's answer, although general, is also very interesting: "National examinations results are used for system analysis as well as some levels of diagnosis of performance at the level of individual students and schools. The end of primary examinations results is also used for placement purposes"[15].

Costs and Funding

The next category is directed to Costs and Funding. Another related question is number 15 that deals with the existence of an effective financial information system. The answer is unanimous in this aspect. All countries have a financial information system of some sort and the all think it works at a sufficiently effective level. In most cases the Ministry of Finance controls this information system outside Education. The information through the development of the budget and the expenditure controls is funneled back to MOE.

Not all the systems are fully computerized and not all information is easily accessible for financial decision-makers. On some occasions the budgetary control of certain units needs to be done by hand and is depending mostly on the good sense and commitment of the officer responsible for the unit.

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[13] It should be noted that the system in Suriname has evolved somewhat independently from most of the rest of the Caribbean.
[14] Adiel Kallam, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Suriname.
[15] Ms. Maude Hyde, Chief Education Officer, Belize.

The main issues here are:

- How to integrate the financial and budgetary information with the other sources, more substantial to the educational work done in the Ministry.

- How to be able to calculate real and total expenditure on the education of each student in the different levels of the system.

- How to keep a sufficient and timely flow of information to those officers with budgetary responsibility.

Effective Management and Administration

The next topic considered in the questionnaire is the existence of a formal assessment mechanism to follow progress on the effectiveness of Management and Administration. Four countries report on this issue. Guyana says it has an Education Management Training Program for school administrators, which are followed up by on the job assessments while Jamaica mentions that a formal evaluation is an annual requirement for all the public sector, but it only covers the administrative staff.

Trinidad & Tobago says that this type of assessment is done mainly through oral discussions at meetings with the top executives and also through reports from consultants. Because of the nature of its sources the system seems to be somewhat informal and not systematic. Suriname explains that the Internal Audit Inspection collects data on the effective use of materials and means but recognizes that there is a need to strengthen this process.

Information System

The next set of questions (3 to 7) is referred to the information system and the availability of information. Again, the questions were formulated without the support of a strict definition of what was meant by an "information system". As a consequence the answers are loose, they give more details and information but their frame of reference varies.

Four of the six countries respond affirmatively and two say they do not have such a system. Guyana talks about three databases that are capable to produce the necessary information: Annual statistics, personnel, and Finances (this one out of MOE, in the Ministry of Finance). Trinidad & Tobago explains that they have a manual system and that information is collected from a variety of other government and non-government sources. At the present, they report, there is a move to use electronic means to obtain this type of information. All directors are required to provide the Educational Planning Unit (EPD) with an annual report and the unit will compile and organize it to provide support for the decision-making process.

Jamaica reports the existence of a Policy Analysis, Research and MIS Unit consisting in three sections: Policy Analysis and research, MIS, and Statistics. They receive the information, analyze and organize it to provide support for a Senior Policy Making Group, which meets monthly to review and discuss the issues, information and/or policies. Additionally the Student Assessment Unit produces the information concerning student performance.

Suriname says that their system is based upon the gathering of annual plans, timetables, budgets, and evaluation papers from all the units at the Ministry. Within the Directorate of Education there is the Planning and Research unit that is responsible for the collection,

analysis, dissemination of information directed to the identification and treatment of educational issues. Suriname explains that "due to brain drain, this mechanism does not function properly"[16], and explains that at the present there is a project in execution to strengthen the capacity of this Division.

The next question (5) asks the respondents to grade the performance of the information system. Four answers were given. They all say that some improvement is necessary. Trinidad & Tobago explains that the system does work to a great extent. They face a problem with the timing of the information because it is not always available when decisions need to be made. They are looking to install a more technologically advance system in order to be able to fill the needs in less time.

Guyana[17] reports the difficulties in obtaining information from the schools in a timely and accurate basis. They also think there is a need to find better indicators, which can include qualitative inputs. For Suriname their mechanism is weak and not all the necessary data can be gathered and analyzed. Jamaica is ambivalent. They say that the system does not always work. The problem again is time but also occasionally the information provided is not what is needed.

Question 6 deals with the quantity of information and 7 with the quality. In general the countries say they have a sufficient amount of information, but there are problems in retrieving it. It takes too much time and effort; there are no sufficient resources. In this context Barbados says that the MOE needs an EMIS system established (possibly referring to a computerized system) that allows getting information from the schools[18]. Trinidad & Tobago talks about the need of a better-structured system. Jamaica speaks about levels of information that are not available to them. Belize talks about having the information but not the capacity to analyze it.

In as far as the quality of the information provided the answers coincide in that the level is good, although sometimes more is needed. Barbados mentions the fact that not always the information is produced according to the standards and levels required by international agencies and hence is not as useful[19]. Belize also makes a significant comment: "What is available is well presented, but the system could benefit more from a deeper level of analysis based on the consideration of realities on the ground. The data collection system can be improved to allow for greater accuracy"[20].

The Planning Unit

Question 14 brings information concerning the Planning Unit and its capacity to provide analysis for policy development and decision-making. Five out of the possible six countries say that it does have that capacity, some stating that are limitations due to staffing inadequacies. Again there are also time constrains mentioned.

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[16] Adiel Kallam, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Suriname.

[17] It needs to be remembered here the drastic geographical differences between Guyana and Suriname on one side and the island countries on the other.

[18] It is important to note that Barbados is a small island country in which access is not a problem.

[19] This comment is very significant and signals how powerful and determinant is the region the influence of international financial agencies in determining what is done in the education sector.

[20] Ms. Maude Hyde, Chief Education Officer, Belize.

Participation

The two items left in the first section of the questionnaire (9-10) are directed to two related topics: Participation (9) and involvement in decision-making (10). In general, the answers to the first question are directed to establish the fact that there is a significant level of participation in the decision-making process. The only exception is Guyana that says that only in the Strategic Plan formulation process there was a high level of participation; otherwise the presence of the Civil Society is limited. Nevertheless there is a National Council of Education (NACE), which MOE uses for consultation, and at present times there is an extensive consultation process-taking place for the formulation of a new Education Bill to be presented to Cabinet and later to Parliament.

Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica talk about different mechanisms of participation and the conclusion is given with this line: "To a large extent one might describe it [participation] as the norm in decision-making"[21].

The case in Belize is particularly interesting because of the participation of the religious groups in the schools and in the system; their opinions and interests are taken into consideration very often and in a systematic way[22].

Suriname describes a consultation process that started in 2001 that provides the education system with a high level of participation from the Civil Society and the different communities and stakeholders. As a result there was a Suriname Education Plan formulated in 2002. Through a similar model the stakeholders have been involved in the formulation of a Five Year Education Sector Plan (2004-2008)[23].

Who participates

Question 10 searches for answers concerning what officers in each MOE are involved in the policy decision-making process and if there are tensions involved in it. There are no surprises. The main officers in each case are involved and of course the nature of the issue will help define the identity of who will be participating. Like the Guyana representative says: "It depends on the decision. In the final analysis however, the decision on what becomes policy is a political decision, the degree to which technical recommendations are accepted could well depend on the Minister's willingness to accept them, regardless of how strongly these recommendations are supported"[24]. Barbados is also straight forward when the say that there always tensions among administrators and educators and among technical and political persons involved.

The last two questions of the second section of the questionnaire addressed again the question of the use of information and the follow-up the system made on the results of policy decisions. To the first concern, repeating something said before, the answer was that information was used, and that it was sufficient and reliable, but it demanded too much effort and time. Jamaica, Belize and Suriname said that although the system produced some basis for the decision-making process, not enough information was available.

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[21] Maurice Chin Aleong, Technical Advisor, Ministry of Education, Trinidad & Tobago.
[22] This is an interesting experience worth of further study and evaluation.
[23] This is again an interesting remark that opens another dominant educational topic in the region. There are many countries in the Caribbean region concerned with the possibility of taking a sector approach in the development of Education.
[24] Ms. Evelyn Hamilton, Chief Planning Officer of the Ministry of Education, Guyana.

In as far as the follow-up of the effects of the policy decisions made, Trinidad & Tobago said that they it assessed through:

- Oral and written reports from the officers involved.
- Monitoring and Evaluation units in the projects
- Formal assessments done by external bodies or consultants.

They also advance that MOE is in the process of establishing a School Inspectorate and a Quality Assurance Division.

Suriname declares that their monitoring and evaluation system is weak and most of this type of activities is carried on through the projects being implemented at the present.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from this brief perusal through the questionnaires and interviews.

- In general, the information in most Caribbean countries is somewhat disperse, not always easily accessible, not fully accurate and not always timely produced.

- The need of improvement is widely recognized. And it involves technical, human and financial strengthening. It is in fact the need to embrace a new culture concerning the handling of data and the use of information as a tool for development.

- The major sources of information are:

  1. An annual statistical questionnaire administered to educational institutions.
  2. A personnel database.
  3. A Finance database recording all financial transactions by activity centers, subprograms and programs. This is an automated system, linked to the Ministry of Finance.

- Monitoring and evaluation is not common and in most cases it is done through projects sponsored by external financial agencies. It is not an extended practice.

Some interesting cases

Part B of the questionnaire asked for examples of policy decisions making. Some of them can offer some lessons to be learned. Here are three examples provided by some of the countries[25].

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[25] It must be understood that the account of the cases was limited to what was included in the questionnaires. The questions are then, in many cases, suggested by ignorance of some of the variables involved in the processes and cannot be, in any case, construed as critical. They are placed there merely to identify critical issues to have in mind.

Trinidad & Tobago

Issue: Universal Early Childhood Care and education (ECCE)

Account:
MOE conducted a research process to understand better the benefits and costs of establishing universal ECCE. There was a white paper presented to the government. Consultations took place at regional and national levels, involving Civil Society and other stakeholders. As a result a Green paper was also developed.
The papers were submitted to Cabinet for approval

Results:
MOE was very satisfied with the results. Information was produced and used extensively during the process.

Lessons and questions:

- Big policy decisions need action-oriented research to be able to handle important data and information.

- Consultation is important to develop consensus in the society and to raise the awareness over certain issues.

- Time is important but there is a process that needs to be clearly established and followed.

- The consideration of the issues needs to involve the indicators based on what is to be achieved and the time-line in which is to be done.

Jamaica

Issue: Fees for students at secondary level

Account:
The Government had announced that school fees at the secondary level would be gradually eliminated by this academic year (2005).
The cost of taking that action was calculated and various scenarios were developed and discussed. After taking all this information into consideration, including making provision for those unable to pay, the decision was taken to underwrite half of the fees. The supporting material and the decision were taken to Cabinet for approval and then the public was informed.

Results:
MOE was satisfied with the level of information that was obtained. It produced a decision based on what could be done financially and on different scenarios that were developed for that purpose. Access to secondary education, as a consequence would probably be improved.

Lessons and questions:

- From the account of the process that was made, it seems the public was informed after the decision was taken. Could a more participatory process be

possible? How could it influence the outcome?

- Were more equitable scenarios considered?

- Was access to secondary education a goal? Were follow-up indicators designed?

Suriname

Issue: Introduction of English in Primary Education

Account:
For many years there was a strong suggestion from different sectors of the society to introduce English in the Primary curriculum. It was discussed even in Parliament.
A task group was formed and some recommendations were made. Still the situation was not ready for a decision to be made.
 The Minister and his staff wanted to start in first grade with a textbook based in only 10-15 words to be increased gradually in the following grades.
Expert information was searched in Holland with contradictory results. On one hand some experts suggested starting the new language in fifth grade, but the government in Holland announced they would be starting an experiment in kindergarten.
After much discussion the decision was made to start English lessons in third grade. This option was consulted even with the President. Cabinet confirmed it.
The curriculum unit developed a book and a teacher's manual.
There is consensus that English teaching should start at the Primary level but even MOE is not sure when. There is no consensus either on how long the experiment should last.

Results:
The decision made has still to be implemented. This is understandable because there are still some gray areas in which not even MOE is sure.

Lessons and questions:

- From the account received in the questionnaire it seems that the decision was taken away from the technical people before they had a clear mind themselves… Hence, the delays.

- Were sufficient sources consulted? Was a thorough research oriented process conducted by MOE? Were many expert agencies consulted? Why only Holland?

Some ingredients to have in mind

Before looking at the future it is important to retake some of the main ideas in the field today. Before deciding what should be done, it is wise to reflect in which direction the actions should be directed. Some of the factors to take into account are:

- First topic to be considered is the so called "political will". How many times the first comment made in a conversation brings up the absence of this factor? Even some of the interviews went over this topic. It is necessary that "political will" is not a simple phenomenon. It needs to be understood as a complex issue, with distinct components. In this case to want to do something is not enough. In many occasions the Ministry and the Government as a whole might be willing to do it, but if all the components are nor in place, it will not happen, the "political will" will not be present.

  One of the ingredients is the recognition of the issue as a priority. In these cases it means that the Ministry and Government in question understand that information is necessary in the decision-making process and in order to sustain an acceptable level of accountability this information needs to be made available to the public and analyzed in a comprehensive and understandable manner. The need to present the desired goals and the strategy to obtain them needs to be accepted.

  Not only the recognition is necessary, there are other factors. The capability of assigning the necessary resources is also an absolute necessity. The Ministry not only needs to have the resources but also the capacity to assign them to this purpose. In many occasions there are simply not enough funds available. But even in cases in which the financial support might be there, there is still the possibility that they cannot be used for that purpose, because of demands from the central government or another variable intervening in the process.

  Another important ingredient of the "political will" is to see whatever needs to be done (in this case, information systems in decision making and accountability) as advantageous for the government and/or the sectors that will give their support for the changes that need to be made, the expenditures and the results.

  Another factor to be considered is the capability of taking the decision to implement whatever measures are deemed necessary. Sometimes a Ministry and even a government are willing to take the measures but the context does not allow it and the "political will" fails to materialize.

- Another factor to be considered is whether the country in question has the necessary human, technical and infrastructure resources for a successful implementation. The use of information at the level it is suggested here, and the technological level required demands a culture to support it. And this culture cannot be present only at the higher levels; it has to be all over the system. Not only the coordinators and the technical support personnel, but also the data generators and even the users have to be part of this way of handling information and distribute it.

  The fact that the computers are there and the need of information is felt is not enough to guarantee a good system or an effective performance. The personnel using it need to believe in its value and to know how to use it for their own advantage.

- Information is important, very important. But even more important is to know what is the information needed, to understand what is necessary to know. If the country is dealing with information to be the framework of policy, information to support the development of policy, it is necessary to develop before a clear understanding of what is to be achieved. Education needs to have a comprehensive and shared vision of what is desired. Only in that framework will it be possible to define what is the information needed to show progress.

  Many times the systems of education provide a significant amount of raw data. Lots of information is produced describing what is happening, sometimes in great detail. But if it is only that, a description, it might not provide much help to establish if there is progress or not. Actually some might think that it signifies a lot of effort, time and resources just for the sake of getting some information that will only be valuable for researchers, who will, most of the time, use it only to be critical of the system.

  Other times it goes beyond the raw data and the records do provide some analysis. Nevertheless it still feels that the results are not valuable enough. These analysis are done out of context providing some comparisons or even looking for causes and explanations of what are individual phenomena sometimes taken out of context or at least in an individual fashion. In these cases the information provided does not and cannot provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation.

  What is lacking in most of these cases is a framework that can provide the basis to interpret the information that would lead to the policy decisions. Said in simple terms what makes the information relevant is the framework in which it is analyzed and understood. If the educational system lacks a vision, lacks a sense of purpose the information will never be understood to its fullest.

  Only when there is a coherent strategic view it is possible to have information that makes sense and that can guide policy. Once the goals are defined and the road clarified, then the indicators can be defined and the numbers can become meaningful.

- But direction and a strategic view, although necessary are still not sufficient. Once the road has been defined the next step is to travel it. Once the strategy has been determined, the next step is to have an achievable and sustainable plan. How many times are the proposed goals and objectives reached? How many times are they really expected to be reached? Experience says that not many. On most occasions because the action plans are unrealistic in the context in which they are to be implemented.

A view of possible futures

In most of the questionnaires and interviews the desire for improvement is to be found together with the sense that something is lacking, that information and decision-making are not moving together causing a number of problems and shortcomings in the education systems of the region. Complains are basically grouped around a few basic needs:

- Information is not produced in a timely way. It arrives late.

- There are not many possibilities to check the data, making it not as reliable as it should be.

- There is not sufficient analysis to provide decision-makers with the relevant information when they needed it.

- Resources are not sufficient to maintain the effort at the required level.

- In some cases the information is produced in different quarters and is difficult to put it together when the time to make decision is very little and the pressure is great.

- With some exceptions monitoring and evaluation are done only in the projects and in most occasions not on a systematic fashion.

But these findings are not to lead us to think that there is no future, that there are no answers to the present problems. The initiatives in the Caribbean Region are many and the situation is likely to improve in the future. Revising what is done now some interesting models can be found.

One of the models to be considered could be called the Decentralized Model (DM). In this case the initiative is not located in the Ministry of Education alone and it covers other areas, and sometimes the whole of the government. One example of this model is Guyana. With a number of initiatives the country is developing an infrastructure that has the capability of becoming a national information system[26]. On the one side is the Social Statistics Project which, in coordination with the ministries and other agencies in the government, is developing a comprehensive data center that will service the entire social sector, including critical areas like Education, Health, Housing, Public Services and others.

This important information provided in coordination with each of the agencies involved in the various areas included, will be complemented with economic and financial data provided by another system that is being developed in the Ministry of Finance. This initiative is still under development and it is only providing the accounting control for the production of all the payments from the government. It is already giving the opportunity to link payments with the tax system giving the opportunity to the government to ask for the necessary taxpayer identity from businesses and/or individuals. With more time and development the system will provide all the necessary information to provide all the officers with budgetary responsibility the necessary information to make their decisions in a coordinated fashion.

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[26] It is here said that "it has the capability of becoming a national information system" because the initiative is still in stages that could be considered preliminary.

These two lines will be furthermore complemented with a monitoring system developed between the Office of the President and the Ministry of Finance with its portfolio of projects and programs financed by the different sources available to the country. The country had the experience with the Poverty Reduction National Strategy in which significant indicators were selected and a baseline was defined. The initiative is not concluded but it does show some advancement.

The Ministry of Education as part of this national initiative and with the support of the IDB[27] is developing a national Education Management Information System (EMIS). This is a complex initiative that involved the following components:

- The development of a backbone system that would provide electronic (computerized) communication for all the public education system.

- The development of a Schools Management Information System that would provide electronic communication capabilities for all primary schools.

- The full rollout of an electronic system that would cover all General Secondary Schools.

- A National Maintenance information System.

- A Geographical Information System (School Map).

- A national human resources data System for teachers and public servants in the Educational sector.

- A project management information system to be used in all projects in the Ministry of Education.

The progress in all these aspects is uneven and there is still a lot to do with pressure growing and concerns about time and resources. It is not possible to predict what will happen, it might not be wise to expect complete success but the ingredients for the future are already there and the possibilities for improvement are significant. The model needs to be fully developed and the parts have to come together.

The obvious advantage of this model is that it gives a comprehensive view of what is happening. Based on a solid strategic view and well-conceived action plans it can become a powerful tool, not only for the Ministry of Education but also for the whole of the social sector and the government. The minuses come from the fact that it is a complicated enterprise, which needs a very solid leadership and many resources.

The second model could be designated as the centralized model. It is the case in which the Ministry of Education develops its own system of education. It seems to be the most prevalent in the region. It is to be understood that in most cases they are projects more than established realities and still they use manually processed information[28].

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[27] The IADB is co-financing the Basic Education Access & Management Support Programme in the Ministry of education.
[28] It should be understood that this paper is not "pushing" for the computerization of the information systems and it is not based on the belief that computers are a sine qua non element of good systems of information. But At this point in time it looks undeniable that in order to be able to perform well a system of education needs to have access to good and adequate information technology. Otherwise information will never be available.

There are comprehensive initiatives like the one that the government of Bahamas[29], with the support of a loan from the Inter American Development Bank (IADB), is considering. It is a project that will input lot of resources in information technology (IT) providing the system with all the necessary tools to develop a very strong information system as support for management and will introduce IT in the classrooms. It will be a significant upgrading. The new initiative, together with what the computerized financial information system that the country already has, will provide the Ministry with what could be a formidable tool for planning and management.

There are other countries that are in the way of producing or are producing this type of initiatives geared to establish a functional and effective information system in the Ministries of Education in the Region. All of them are incorporating a substantial amount of information technology to be used in the retrieval of information (especially statistical data) and the improvement of communication.

The region is well known for its tradition of tests and exams as parts of the normal work of schools. At several levels, sometimes as early as first or second grade, up to the end of secondary school, there are annual exams that the children and adolescents in the schools have to write. In the past, and still now in the majority of cases, the results were use to place the school population in different groups. What they were aimed to measure was the capacity of the students in order to direct them to the more appropriate educational centers. As a result, the system was divided in parallel routes for the different groups of children formed as an outcome of the exams. Although criticized by some, because of their use to establish categories in the student population, these exams became an indicator of success or failure for the school systems. The culture around these examinations has been changed in the recent past. Right now there is a strong tendency well represented in all the countries to start defining these tests and exams as a diagnostic tool, not so much to discriminate among students but to see the performance of the system and the schools in particular, to guide the teachers on what needs to be improved and change rather than to channel students to different levels of schools. This new perspective is very promising because it brings a new outlook to evaluation in the region and provides a clearer emphasis on outcomes rather than inputs or outputs.

Again, this is still a tendency, a work in progress and not a completed and fully institutionalized change in most places. It demands a further development of the notion of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and the creation of baseline benchmarks in order to be able to measure progress in a real and rational way. Probably this type of initiative can be the springboard to establish M&E systems n the regions in order to facilitate the proficiency of the governments. This, of course, would be the ultimate way to use information to measure progress, to make data on performance an integral part of the data gathering process and ultimately link policy decision making to available information on whatever is happening in the system.

As a conclusion, it can be said that there are problems in the region with the information systems and the data gathering as a basis for policy development and decision-making. But not all is negative; the outlook is far from being totally grim. There are many good signs to take into consideration and there is a future that needs to be built.
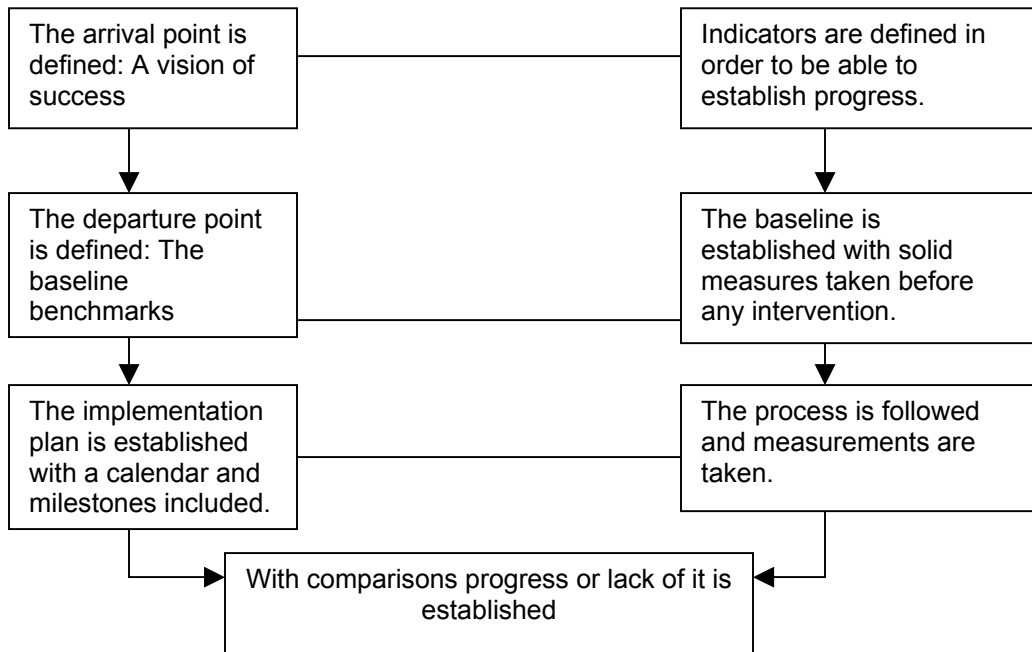
At the beginning of the paper, reference was made to some questions that aroused in one of the meetings held by the group before: How to evaluate the impact of policy interventions? What are the best mechanisms and indicators to evaluate progress? How to evaluate particular policies and programs? How to make sharp application of results in policies and programs? How to collect and report data effectively? How to best evaluate student achievement? How to make evaluation results readily available for decision-

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[29] For Bahamas it was not possible to provide the same information as the other countries because they were not able to answer the questionnaire and/or call for the interviews.

making? In general these questions are to be answered in each individual case; there are no general formulas to apply.

Nevertheless there are certain elements that can be used to provide a general answer to the questions formulated before. Actually four of the six are related to evaluation issues with one of the other making reference to how policies and programs can be applied and the other referring to the collection and report of the data. Evaluation is always a comparison. There are always at least two sides that are compared in order to form a judgment[30]. In this sense the evaluation of the progress made in a program or in an educational system in general needs to provide those terms of comparison.

First a vision of success has to be developed. What is to be understood as a successful education system in the particular country being considered? The criteria to assess have to be clearly defined. From this definition the indicators can be drawn. Then, the second question: What is the situation in which the educational system of the country is now? The point of departure needs to be well established to serve as a point of comparison to establish progress (baseline benchmarks). Information is taken following the indicators selected. Then, the implementation process starts, following a pre-established calendar with milestones established. The M&E system will follow up the performance and progress will be able to be measured.

The arrival point is defined: A vision of success		Indicators are defined in order to be able to establish progress.
The departure point is defined: The baseline benchmarks		The baseline is established with solid measures taken before any intervention.
The implementation plan is established with a calendar and milestones included.		The process is followed and measurements are taken.
	With comparisons progress or lack of it is established	

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[30] It would be outside of the scope of this paper to discuss in depth the meaning of the term "evaluation". The purpose of the paragraph is just to provide a framework to interpret the reasons behind the questions and to provide a plausible general answer to them.

The steps to be taken

There are a number of steps that can be suggested in order to develop better information systems that can be effective tools to support policy development and decision-making processes. Some of them are related to resources and information technology; others are of a more basic and essential nature and have to do with attitude and vision.

The first six steps considered here, could be understood as a preparatory phase in which the necessary ingredients are put together. They do not need to be chronologically sequenced and they could very well overlap with each other.

- Consider it a priority

    This first step has a lot to do with the "political will", a concept analyzed before in the paper. It is not only a desire and/or a declaration. It is a proactive stance that springs from the acknowledgment of the need to be more effective and more accountable, and the understanding that the Ministry and the Educational sector are only parts of a bigger whole to which it needs to be related. Information, and specifically M&E type of information, needs to be considered something useful, *a sine qua non* tool to forge advancement, progress. The leadership in Education, and of course in the Ministries, needs to take steps to help governments and societies to recognize this fact and be able to gather sufficient support to implement the necessary systems, to be able to develop the "political will".

- Formulate outcomes[31] and goals

    Another important step that needs to be taken at the very beginning is to formulate the desired outcomes and goals. Education has to establish a common vision of the road ahead; the direction in which the country wants to go needs to be clear and shared. To achieve this, a strategic plan might be a necessity, understood as what it really is: A participatory process followed in order to determine, in a disciplined fashion, what are the priorities for the system.

    But it needs to be understood that the main factor here is not the document, the strategic plan approved by the Ministry at a certain point. The most relevant ingredient is the participatory process in which, the society as a whole, becomes conscious of its needs and wants and develops a shared vision of a successful vision. The main result is to clearly establish where the education sector of the country wants to arrive.

- Look for appropriate technical means

    With the support of the whole of the government and the society, and with a future path well defined, the next step is to start dealing with the tools for implementation. It is at this time that the questions of system design and technological support need to be faced. In all countries of the region there will be limited resources. In most cases the ultimate technology would be out of reach. But, in reality, in most cases the ultimate technology might not be what is needed. Again, it is important to understand what appropriate technology means. It is, in simple terms, the level of technology that is sufficient and sustainable to achieve the desired function.

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[31] It should be noted here the term used: Outcome and not output. It could be considered by some as a mere technicality but it bears a significant difference. Outcome in this case refers to results obtained, a certain change produced and not only the mere completion of a process.

At this level, the appointed team needs to be creative, knowledgeable and with tons of common sense. The system needs to be simple to use and maintain, but at the same time fast and powerful to be able to handle all necessary information. It needs to be comprehensive and interactive, but not too expensive. It could be considered almost a miracle… but it will always be a human made miracle. It is possible if the goals are clear.

- Select outcome indicators to be monitored[32].

Another important step is to select the indicators that are going to identify progress (or lack of it). It is important to understand that the indicators to be used must be related to outcomes and not to process. The important information here is not so much if there are more books (inputs) in the schools or if they are used by the children (outputs) but, more importantly, how much more learning they are producing (outcome).

This is a very technical and crucial step. The indicators need to be well constructed (Quantity - Quality – Time[33]) and really addresses whatever the goals identified by the educational sector are. They are the basis of a significant system of M&E. Such a system will provide valuable information concerning the behavior of the sector and how the reaching of the goals is made possible.

As it has been stated indicators have a critical technical side and are indeed sophisticated instruments. But they also have a very significant political side. Indicators can be very often related to promises made during a political campaign to win an election. They can also become nightmares if the expected results are not obtained. They could become, for some governments, weapons in the hands of the enemy. Clearly this is a danger, which could be a powerful minus for the level of "political will" that can be obtained. Again, it needs to put in a development perspective. The worst thing is not to fail in obtaining the desired goals; the worst thing is not to know it or to ignore it even when the information is available. If the effort is sincere, corrections are always possible and understandable.

- Gather baseline information on the current condition.

Once the indicators have been identified for each level and/or subcomponent of the implementation the establishment of a baseline database is necessary. In some cases no new field measures will be needed because the system is providing them or can do it just by rearranging some numbers. The baseline provides the term of comparison and makes the information on the levels of the indicators valuable and comprehensible. Some times it might be expensive and demand significant effort but it really is a must.

Again some levels of technical capacity are necessary here to deal with levels of significance, comparability, reliability, validity, etc. The M&E units (or whatever they will be called) have to be in a position to work effectively and produce quality technical results.

- Set specific targets to reach and dates for reaching them.

The starting and finishing points established it is necessary to define the middle points of the road. This is a good basis to develop accountability. Telling society what is expected and when and how progress in being made could be a powerful tool to increase

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[32] The use of the Logical Framework Methodology here could be of great help especially if the most sophisticated forms of a multilevel framework are used because it allows the use of indicators it different levels making the monitoring a simpler, although not less demanding, process.
[33] This Q-Q-T formula is referred to in many of the texts dealing with indicators.

participation and support also will increase the amount and the quality of the dialogue concerning education and policy. If the process is derailed at a certain point explanations will be needed. A very major point to take into consideration is that the accountability level is raised for all.

Once the steps described to this point have been reached, the implementation phase is ready to begin.

- Regularly collect data to assess whether targets are being met.

  Once the road has been clearly defined, the next step consists in being able to collect the necessary data to ensure a good grasp of the situation, an appreciation on whether the objectives have been reached or the expected intermediary levels have been successfully established. If the necessary technology is in place, the information can be obtained and organized to make it comparable to the baseline data already available. The progress (or lack of it) can be shown and the analysis should lead to find the main reasons for success or failure.

  In order to be able to complete this step it is necessary to obtain the cooperation of the agencies at the level of which the data is captured. In the education system that means to deal with the schools, and regional departments. If the strategy adopted was the result of a participatory process, and the information about the implementation plan shared, it will be a lot easier for everybody to understand what needs to be done at the time of the data collection. Nevertheless it is very likely that some preliminary training is done before the actual process starts.

- Analyze and report the results.

  Once the information is obtained and the data organized and ready to be compared to what was obtained in the baseline study, a good analysis will be possible. It is important to understand that because the indicators have been defined and the terms of comparison are clear, the analysis will be easier and the relevancy of the information quickly grasped.

  The analysis cannot be reduced to the process of ordering the data available. It goes well beyond that. It is not sufficient to know that a target was not reached or for how much the effort was short. It is necessary to go deeper and search for explanations, to elaborate causal hypothesis that in turn can become the basis for the revision of the strategies.

Some lessons

A first impression, that has not been formally tested, is that the region offers now a different outlook from what it was several years ago. What was before a fairly closed environment, more concerned with the results of examinations as means of channeling the students toward different educational programmes has become more innovative, with a greater desire of becoming student friendly and more egalitarian? The region looks committed to strategic planning, the use of indicators and statistics and the use of advance technology in the classrooms and in the administration of the education process. It is true there is still a lot to be done but some advancement, at first view, appears to be there.

After considering the answers to the questionnaire and the interviews, it is clear that all the participant countries have a fair amount of information on the system of education at their disposal. There are still some problems in the recollection of data in its processing and analysis. But without exception there is always the possibility to obtain a certain level of information on the issue under consideration. In some cases the information might still not be complete or absolutely reliable. In almost every case the influence of international financial support is noticeable, introducing changes, new concepts and technology. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that there are many common places in the selected strategies for change. The emphasis are very similar, a product of the experience of these institutions. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that in the region national capacity is growing and becoming more independent, although the need for international support still remains.

The subject of "information systems" had several interpretations in the study. In most cases it looks like if some of the participating countries took it as meaning to have certain level of information and/or statistical data available. In some others, the term was taken as something much more sophisticated. In these cases it implies connectivity, fast exchange of information and inter-related databases.

In general there are many complains concerning the timing and availability of information, the reliability of the data, the difficulty in putting together the relevant information that is available but very disperse. There are, nevertheless, certain projects in the region with the potential of improving the overall situation, generating more integrated information systems. Maybe the missing piece is the conceptual work necessary to link the needs of information with the technology available. In another words there is a need for a better architectural design for these systems in order to become more responsive and user friendly to the officers in the Ministry of Education and related agencies.

In some of the countries it seems necessary to develop a users' culture, especially dealing with the local level. Although the development and the increase in participation in the electronic world are very significant, there are still groups of persons that do not sufficiently understand the process and the value of reliable data, information, communication and technology. For many of them a computer is only a glorified typewriter.

As a final statement it can be concluded that in the region, the information is potentially available. The technology is in most cases already there. Why then, there are so many difficulties to use effectively in the decision-making process?

First to be considered is the use of time. The main officers, the ones in charge of the decision-making, have too many issues and tasks to be able to dedicate all the necessary time. The information is dispersed and the everyday tasks take too much time.

The system is not properly design to provide the necessary inputs without a significant investment of time.

Then, there are the environmental issues. Too many external pressures that demand attention that preclude a more technical and elaborated decision-making process. The organizational structure and the institutional culture of the Ministries are usually not in line with the new needs and make the integration of the information more difficult.

Attachments

1) Country profiles

2) Results of the questionnaire

3) List of interviews performed

4) Bibliography

Attachment 1

INTERAMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
CARIBBEAN SUB-REGIONAL POLICY DIALOGUE MEETING
EDUCATION NETWORK

Results[34]

1) Does the Ministry of Education have formal assessment mechanisms in place to follow progress on the following:

Area of concern	Yes	No
Equity*	Ba-G-S-T	Be
Teacher Quality	G-J-S-T	Ba-Be
Teacher Training	Ba-Be-G-J-S-T	
Student Progress	Ba-Be-G-J-S-T	
Costs and Funding – Financial Information	Ba-G-J-S-T	Be
Effectiveness of Management & Administration	G-J-S-T	Ba-Be
Leadership Capacity & Performance	G-J-T	Ba-Be-S
Student Flow	Ba-Be-G-J-S-T	

2) In those areas where your answer was yes, please explain how they operate:

Area	Explanation
Equity	(1) - There are places for all children at Primary and Secondary. (6) - Equity especially in terms of access and opportunity to pursue appropriate and suitable educational program are captured through Annual Statistical Returns (ASR) which reflect both Gross and Net Enrolment ratios by gender, age and geographical distribution. (3) - Equity, in the sense of distribution of resources, can be partially assessed through the analysis of the annual statistical questionnaires sent to all the schools.* (4) - Some clarification is needed on this area, in terms of how equity is defined. (5) - Although there are no obstacles in access to education in Suriname, children in remote areas (interior) may have specific problems in entering school because families live very scattered. Not in every village there is a school. However, the enrolment percentage for pre-primary education is 81, 3 % and for primary education: 78%. (Interior: 621, 2 %)
Teacher Quality	(1) - Now in the process of implementing teacher evaluation. (6) - This is captured through the ASR which indicates level of teacher academic qualifications, profession preparation and development and on

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[34] The answers are given as a fraction. The numerator is the number of answers received in that category; the denominator is the total of all answers. Percentages were not used because of the limited number of questionnaires sent (7).

	going research by the Division of Educational Research and Evaluation through which actual approaches to classroom practice and pedagogy are obtained. This is also monitored through a recently established Professional Teacher Development Unit (PTDU). (3) - Annual Teacher Appraisal. (4) - Teacher quality is defined in terms of teacher qualification. The Annual School Census provides data on the distribution of teachers by qualification. (5) - Within the MOECD the Inspectorate and the Guidance Unit are responsible for teacher quality in education. These units do organize in-service training for the teachers. The quality of teachers especially in the interior is not to everyone's satisfaction. Many qualified teachers do not wish to work in the interior therefore the MOECD has no other option than to work less qualified teachers. Also at junior and senior secondary level there are not enough qualified teachers because of, among others things, the low salaries.
Teacher Training	(1) - Ministry organizes teacher training with the university and Teacher's Training College. (6) - This is in the main assessed through the recently developed PTDU and a Board of Teacher Training within the Ministry of Education (MOE) for the Primary level. (3) - The number of trained teachers can also be calculated from the response of schools. The number of teachers in training and graduating is collected from the Teacher Normal College. (4) - There is a Unit (the Professional Development Unit) which has responsibility for in-service training of teachers in areas such as curriculum implementation. Records of participation are kept. (5) - Pre- service teacher training is sufficient. At present the MOECD is introducing a new program for the Teacher Training Colleges in order to increase the entrance level for a better professional training of the teachers. At the same time the MOECD is working on the establishment of an Institute for permanent in-service training of teachers. (2)– Statistical data is collected annually on the number of trained Teachers currently employed.
Student Progress	(1) - Data are collected on repeaters and dropouts. (6) - This is formally assessed through the following: ▪ a Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP) which is done mainly within schools ▪ National Tests at Standards I, III and the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) at standard V (at the primary level). ▪ recent work by the MOE has begun at the form III as Part I of a National Certificate of Secondary Education (NCSE) ▪ the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) developed by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) ▪ Advanced Level General Certificate of Education (A' Level GCE, University of Cambridge) examinations. ▪ The Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) developed by CXC (introduced tow years ago) The results of the above are assessed and evaluated by the MOE (3) - As at equity above and through the results of assessments. (4) - We have a National Assessment Programme (NAP) at the primary level which consists of a Grade 1 Readiness Inventory indicating the children's readiness to access primary education; a Grade 3 Diagnostic Test; a Grade 4 Literacy Test and a Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT). Schools receive feedback on the first three tests so that corrective

	measures can be put in place. The GSAT, which is also a placement test, provides information on the performance of the students that are placed in the different schools so that where necessary, measures can be put in place to correct the deficiencies. Students at the secondary level sit the CSEC as well as technical subjects offered by the HEART Trust National Training Agency. (5) - The Examination Bureau and the Inspectorate Units for the different levels are responsible for assessment of student progress. However, due to lack of expertise, no direct actions are taken at present. (see answer 8) (2) – National assessment focusing on literacy and numeracy is conducted at two stages of primary education.
Costs and Funding	(1) - The Ministry of Finance through the Ministry of Education allocates Funding. (6) – ▪ Developing of Budgetary Requests from the Ministry of Finance for development and recurrent expenditure, projects by the MOE ▪ Monthly and quarterly appraisals of expenditure ▪ Termly reviews of budgetary allocations, cost of projects and activities and funding mechanisms. (3) - This is now easier because of the new integrated financial management package being used by the Ministry of Finance and other sector Ministries. (4) - There is an Internal Audit Unit as well as an External one. In addition, there is also an Audit Committee with most of the members outside of the Ministry. This Committee evaluates the work of the Internal Audit Unit. In addition, there are various Committees, which determine the procedures for expenditures of different levels. (5) - The MOECD has a Division for Administrative Affairs, which also consists of finance and a budget unit. These units operate in a good way; still the ministry is looking for ways for improvement. Through the application of modern approaches of financial management in combination with utilization of the possibilities of information technology, the capacity for efficient an effective budgeting may be improved at both the central and the school and institute level. According to consultants of international agencies, there is wastage of funds in the education sector. An in-depth analysis is necessary.
Effectiveness of Management & Administration	(6) - This assessment is done in main through oral discussions at meetings with the top executive and also through reports by consultants. (3) - There is an Education Management Training Program for school administrators, which are followed up by on the job assessments. (4) - Formal evaluation has to be done annually on administrative staff. This is a requirement of the Public Sector. (5) - The Internal Audit Inspection is collecting data on the effective use of materials and means. However, institutional strengthening of this unit is also under way.
Leadership Capacity & Performance	(6) - At the school level principals assess teachers through an assessment instrument, the Performance Management Appraisal Process (PMAP). School Supervisions assess Principals using an assessment instrument-the performance Management Appraisal System (PMAS). Also Directors / Managers at the Head Office, MOE are assessed using the PMAS. Heads of Divisions assess performance of their officers with the PMAS. (3) - As above (*). (4) - Performance evaluation for teachers has recently been implemented.
Student Flow	(1) - Data are collected and there are national examinations for transfer

	from Primary to Secondary. (6) - This assessment is made from data captured by the ASR through which are completed by all schools. (3) - As above (*) information on promotion, repetition, dropouts, etc. is requested in the questionnaire. (4) - Through the Annual Census, information is collected on dropouts and repeaters. (5) - As mentioned earlier the Examination Bureau and the Inspectorates for the different levels are responsible for the analysis of progress of students. Four years ago, a project was launched to follow all pupils of the primary education by providing every pupil with a unique number. After the evaluation, this project will be carried out in a revised manner. Based on this number it will be possible to follow every pupil/student during their educational career. (2) – Data collected annually on student enrollment.

3) Does the Ministry of Education in your country have an information system capable to bring relevant information to the decision-makers?

Yes	4/6
No	2/6

 If your answer was No, please go to question # 6

4) If your answer above was yes, please explain how this information system is organized and how does it work:

(6) - This is a manual system. The Educational Planning Division (EPD) and other Divisions request and obtain information from other Ministries, agencies, and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) pertinent to decision making in the MOE. There is a move however, to using the electronic mail to obtain and provide information. All Directors / Managers are required to complete annual reports and submit them to the Educational Planning Unit (EPD). This Unit compiles and organizes the information to facilitate decision-making. Since it is a manual system the information is not always timely in submission. (3) - There are various databases, which should be more, integrated and work is being done to improve this. The major sources of information come from: (1) An annual statistical questionnaire administered to educational institutions. The data requested includes student enrollment by age, grades. Performance, repetition / promotion, attendance, achievement at exams; teachers' age and qualification (academic and professional), intake and loss, etc. Number of graduates, etc.; Physical facilitation of materials (books, etc.). (2) There is the personnel database, which is constantly updated. (3) Finance database recording all financial transactions by activity centers, subprograms and programs. This is an automated system, linked to the Ministry of Finance. (4) - Presently there is a Policy Analysis, Research and MIS Unit consisting of three sections: Policy Analysis and Research; MIS and Statistics. Data on the education system are collected through the Annual Census. Different publications are prepared making the data available to both internal and external users. The Policy Analysis and Research Unit analyses existing data as well as undertakes research to provide additional data. There are also the Educational Planning and the Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Units, which provide relevant information on the system. There is a formal body, the Senior Policy Making Group that meets monthly to review and discuss the issues, information or policies. The Student Assessment Unit generates information on student performance. (5) - On the basis of annual plans of actions, time-tables and budget and evaluation papers of all

different units of the MOECD, information is gathered for decision making.
The MOECD has four Main Departments or Directorates:
-Education
-Culture
-Youth Affairs
-Sports.
The Directorate of Education comprises of a number of divisions headed by an assistant permanent secretary. The Development Services with the important Planning and Research Unit is in general responsible for the collecting, analyzing, disseminating and initiating of new activities to address problems in the education sector.
Due to brain drain, this mechanism does not function properly. At present there is a project in execution to strengthen the capacity of this Division.
Generally speaking, the MOECD has at present an executing capacity problem.

5) Is this system working according to expectations and needs? Is it providing the information it is expected to?

(6) - To a great deal the system works. However, there is room for improvement. While in general the system provides adequate data for decision-making, provision and analysis of the data are generally not completed on a timely basis. At present the MOE is addressing the need for reformatting of information as well as installing a computerized system, which will augur well for timeliness.
(3) - The system could be improved if data was received from the primary source (schools) in a timely manner and if all the schools gave full and accurate responses. The Ministry also needs to rethink what are the important indicators. At the moment quantitative data has been the priority. However some improvements are coming and in the future more qualitative data will be collected. In general, however the system does provide fair data on enrollment, the number of teachers by qualification and training, attendance, promotion, repetition, etc. Exams results and finance data can also be accessed. The big issue is timeliness.
(4) - Not in all cases. Information is provided but this is not always timely. In addition, it does not always provide the information that may be needed.
(5) - No, the mechanism is weak. Not all the data can be gathered and analyzed.

6) As a decision-maker on policy issues in your country, do you feel that you usually receive a sufficient volume of information to be able to do it effectively?

Mark the answer that best describes your situation:	
Usually we have sufficient volume of information to support our policy related decisions	1/6
Usually we have information available but not in the amount that we would like to have	5/6
Usually the information available is below what we really feel we need to know	0/6

Please explain your answer:

(1) - The Ministry needs to have an EMIS system established to access data directly from schools. This is now being processed.
(6) - While the data generally exists in the MOE in sufficient quantity, it is not easily accessible or readily retrievable. The MOE recognizes this and is working towards the implementation of a restructured information system, in which information will be organized in such a manner conducive to analysis for decision-making and be a computerized information system.
(3) - (See answer to 5) Eventually the Ministry can probably receive all the data it needs by doing special surveys, etc. But data is not always available in a timely, convenient way.
(4) - Because our Information System is not as developed as it should be, we do not have student level data or even class level data, linking a teacher to a particular class for example. It is therefore difficult to make certain decisions at times.
(5) - See answer 4.
(2) – Data collection is done on a regular basis, however little read analysis is done, therefore implications are lost in instances where the data may need some level of description.

7) Do you think that the quality of the information you receive is satisfactory to sustain the policy development and decision-making process? What would be your major complaints? Please explain

Mark the answer that best describes your situation:	
Usually the information available is usually relevant and well organized	3/6
Usually the information available is not completely relevant and well organized	3/6
Usually we do not have relevant and well organized information at our disposal	0/6

Please explain your answer:

(1) – Information is sometimes not provided within the formats required by the international organizations so this makes it irrelevant.
(6) - This is necessarily so, since the data has to be manually organized and reformatted for different purposes/circumstances. The information is gathered from different sources and is received in different formats.
(3) - See above.
(4) - The main problems faced are incompleteness and timeliness of the data.
(5) - See answer 4.
(2) - What is available is well presented, but the system could benefit more from a deeper level of analysis based on consideration of realities on the ground. The data collection system can be improved to allow for greater accuracy.

8) Given the use of national exams/tests at various levels in your country. Are theses tests used as diagnostic tools to measure the performance of the schools and the system, as guides to policy development and decision-making? Or are they used solely to define the entrance of the children to new school levels?

1) - The criterion-referenced tests and the common entrance are used to diagnose and measure the performance of schools/system etc.
The Common Entrance is also used to transfer students from Primary to Secondary.
(6) - Both cases are applicable. The CAP and National Tests at the primary level as well as the results of the SEA are used for diagnostic purposes. The SEA is also used to define the entrance of the student to the secondary level from the primary level. At the Secondary Level the Form III examination (part of the NCSE) is intended to be used for both diagnostic and achievement purposes.

(3) - The use of tests to track student performance and for diagnostic purposes has increased. There are now three national assessments at the primary level and one national and one regional at the secondary level. Analysis of the results is sent to the schools and can be used for decision-making but this is a developing culture. It was not really done in the past. The use of these results as guides to policy development has been extremely rare. One instance however was in the context of providing financial support to students for CXC. There was to be some minimal achievement before government would help with the fees.
(4) - Please see Question 2.   These tests are used as diagnostic tools to measure the performance of the students, schools and the system as well as guides to policy development and decision-making.
(5) - The exams results are at present used solely to define the entrance of the children to new school levels. However, the disappointing exam/tests results of recent years make it imperative to use the results also as diagnostic tools to improve the performances of the schools. There is a project in execution with a loan of the Inter-American Development Bank, with a component to carry out activities in this regard.
(2) – National examination results are used for system analysis as well as some levels of diagnosis of performance at the level of individual students and schools. The end of primary examination results is also used for placement purposes.

9) Are policy decisions made in a participatory manner? Are there mechanisms to allow participation of outside sources? Does Civil Society participate?

(1) - NGOs and other stakeholders participate in the process.
(6) - To a large extent and one might describe it as the norm in decision-making. Policy decisions are always made on the basis of consultations with key stakeholders both internal and external (e.g. the National Parents Teachers Association (NPTA) Teachers Associations and Civil Society groups. On some occasions issues leading to policy decisions are discussed at national fora.
(3) - To some extent. Except for the Strategic Plan, which does incorporate policy suggestions, civil society participation is limited.
(4) - The Senior Policy Making Group meetings provide the forum for policy decisions to be made. The development of policies involves extensive participation of stakeholders, including civil society. This guidelines provided by the Cabinet Office also seek to ensure that there is participation of stakeholders in the process.
(5) - Since 2001 the Ministry of Education and Community Development has embarked a national consultation process in which the Civil Society does participate. Stakeholders (representatives of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations active in the education sector) have participated in many seminars and workshops in order to identify and analyze the problems in education and at the same time, to list the goals and priorities which are to be realized within the estimated time units. Further to determine the strategies and policy instrument to be applied and the selection and organization of such activities and the creation of such preconditions as should lead to a successful realization of the goals.
Based on numerous studies on Surinamese education and on the results of many consultancies funded by the Japanese Government through the Inter-American Development Bank, and regional and international conferences, a Surinamese Education Plan was formulated and approved by Stakeholders in November 2002.
This document can be seen as a Strategic Plan for the education sector for the coming 15-20 years. Through the same participatory model, the stakeholders have been involved in the process to formulate a first Five Year Education Sector Plan 2004-2008, which now is in execution.
(2) – Yes.
Consultations with stakeholders are conducted on a regular basis.

10) Who are the officers in the Ministry involved in a decision-making process? Are there tensions within the institution caused by the difference between educators and administrators, between politics and technical concerns?

(1) - There are always tensions among those groups however we try to ameliorate them. All officers are involved in the decision-making process but at different levels.
(6) - Decisions are made at the levels of the Chief Education Officer (CEO), Permanent Secretary (PS) and Honorable Minister. However the Ministry has instituted a Policy and Strategy Team comprising Heads of Divisions (HODs) and a consultant. This team discusses and makes recommendations on matters of policy.
(3) - It depends on the decision. In the final analysis however, the decision on what becomes policy is a political decision, the degree to which technical recommendations are accepted could well depend on the Minister's willingness to accept them, regardless of how strongly theses recommendations are supported.
(4) - The decision-making process involves the political directorate as well as the senior officers within the ministry.
(5) - The tradition for policy formulation is that when a new Government enters into power the President of the Republic will present his Policy Statement in Parliament in which the policy for every sector, as usual, is formulated at macro-level. This Policy Statement is primarily based on the election programs of the political parties forming the coalition, and consultations of all stakeholders.
After approval of this Policy Statement by Parliament, the newly appointed minister of Education will inform his staff (management officers) about the policy and he or she will install a working group in order to formulate a policy document for the education sector. The minister will also sent letters to Stakeholders and requests them to contribute to the formulation of the policy. In the case of education, the Permanent Secretary will to guide the discussions with all the assistant permanent secretaries and the entire personnel.
Sometimes there are tensions because everybody is free to come with his or her opinion. In the discussions we try to reach consensus. Technical tensions between educators and administrators may arise on the issues of availability of means, materials and manpower. Because there can be a gap between the goals and priorities and the preconditions.
(2) – 1. Minister of Education
      2. Chief Executive Officer
      3. Chief Education Officer
      4. Deputy Chief Education Officer
Sometimes but no enough to be unproductive.

Please answer the following Yes-No questions with an X in the space provided. If you want to make any comments, please feel free to do so. They will be useful to us.

Questions	Yes	No	Comments
11) Does the Ministry have a yearly statistical publication?	5/6	1/6	(1) - Usually a year behind. (6) - It is done by the EPD generally using information obtained from the ASR and data obtained by the Division of Educational Research and Evaluation pertaining to the National Tests. (4) - The data are not current. (5) - In the past we had yearly publications, but the last folder with statistical data is of 2003.

Questions	Yes	No	Comments
12) Are the results of tests and exams used to compare academic achievements at different times?	6/6	0/6	(6) - This approach has recently started. (5) - But due to lack of expertise, no actions can be taken.
13) Are results of tests and exams, and other system-wide indicators published?	4/6	2/6	(6) - This has presently been done. The results of the SEA and the National Tests at the primary level are made available. Efforts are now being vigorously made for a comprehensive implementation such publications. (3) - More analytical work could be done. The trends analyzed are national and regional but there can be significant variation within sub-regions. National indicators can hide some problems. (4) - Schools receive their own results. (5) - In the months July and Augustus almost every day there are articles in the newspapers about the results of tests and exams. But it is more an initiative of the media to publish the results.
14) Is the Planning Unit or its equivalent in the Ministry, providing the necessary analysis for policy development and decision-making?	5/6	1/6	(1) - But this is limited due to staffing inadequacies. (6) - To a great extent this has been happening. However the analysis needs to be done on a timelier basis. This is as a result of inadequate capacity in the EPD and lack of technology. (4) - The Planning Division provides analyses but these are sometimes limited because of lack of data and small staff. (5) - In some cases the Research and Planning Unit does provide the requested data and information, but at present this unit is too weak to make the necessary analysis for policy development and decision-making. Measures are under way to strengthen the capacity of this unit. (2) - More can be done by way of analysis.
15) Does the Ministry have an effective financial information system?	6/6	0/6	T - To a great extent. Monthly and quarterly reports on both capital and recurrent expenditure are made available. J - This system is to be computerized. S - There is a financial information system and the requested information

Questions	Yes	No	Comments
			can be presented quickly but also for this unit, measures are under way to strengthen the capacity of this unit to make it more effective.
16) Are teachers evaluated at least every three years?	1/5	4/5	(1) – This is to be implemented within a year. (6) - Teachers are evaluated annually. On the basis of these annual assessments, teachers are accordingly granted merit increases or not. There is a project on stream to deal with incentives / or excellence in work/performance. (4) - This process is now being implemented. Approval of increments or non-approval based on performance.

PART B – You can, if you wish, answer the following questions in writing. As before, please, feel free to give as much information as you can and wish. In the following days a date and time will be fixed, at your convenience, to contact you by phone. You can choose to answer the following question at that time orally.

1) Take an example of an important policy decision made in the recent past in the Ministry. Please describe the process that led to that decision. Are you satisfied with this process? With the amount of information at your disposal? What would you like to be different?

(6) - <u>Policy Decision</u>: - The Universalisation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)
<u>Process</u> – Conducting of research on the benefits and costs of Universal ECCE as well as a needs analysis. With regard to the provision of ECCE, conducting of primary feasibility studies. Developing a White Paper (Policy Paper) on Universal ECCE. Developing a Green Paper and the convening of consultations at regional and national levels involving civil society and other educational stakeholders. Submission of the White Paper to the Cabinet of the Government for its approval. The MOE is very satisfied with the process.

(4) - The decision of the Government to pay half of the fees for students at the secondary level.
Previously the Government had announced that they would gradually eliminate school fees by this academic year.
The cost to the Government was calculated and different scenarios were presented and discussed. After taking everything into consideration, including making provision for those who are unable to pay, the decision was taken to underwrite half of the fees. This was sent to Cabinet for approval, and then the public was informed.
There was enough information to prepare the necessary costs.

(5) - Policy decision: Introduction of English in Primary Education.
For many years there is strong suggestion from many persons in and outside the ministry to introduce English in Primary schools. Also in many debates in Parliament it was suggested to introduce English in Primary Education.
The discussion led to the formation of a task group within the ministry, which came with some recommendations, but still there were no solid recommendations to start. It was not clear in which grade to start.
The acting Minister and his staff wished to start in the first grade as an experiment with a textbook based on just 10-15 words and increase that number gradually in the other grades.
Information was also gathered from some experts from Holland who suggested starting in the fifth grade. The confusion was complete since Holland announced to start with an experiment with

English in Kindergarten in the coming school year.

After discussions it is now decided to start with English as an experiment in the third grade. For this decision the minister did consult even the President of the Republic of Suriname. After his consent, the Cabinet confirmed the decision.

The curriculum development unit has planned the introduction of English in Primary Education and has already developed a textbook for the third grade and a teacher's manual.

I am satisfied that we have come to a decision but are not confident with the fact that till today, there are many comments with regard to this decision. Also among scholars there is a discussion about when to start. Almost everybody does agree that we have to start with the introduction of English in Primary Education but there is no general consensus about the grade to start with.

There is also still no consensus about how many years this experiment will last and when this subject will be incorporated in the compulsory timetable of the school.

(2) - Eight action areas the Ministry would address over the next ten years. Extensive consultation with both external and internal stakeholders. The process was satisfactory as much useful information was gathered. Implementation will be challenging in the fact of budgetary constraints.

2) Would you say that the decision-making process in the education sector of your country is based on a reliable and sufficient information gathering system, that this information is well analyzed, systematized and shared as to support a solid policy development and decision-making process?

(1) - To a very large extent decision-making is done on sufficient ad reliable information, well analyzed and shared. The exercise however is generally very time consuming and late in submission given:
- The data has to be collated and organized since, the data emanates from different sources outside of the MOE and Divisions of the MOE;
- The obtaining of data takes much longer than is desirable.
- The analysis of the data has to be done by personnel who has several other tasks than analyses of data; and
- The absence of computer networking systems.

(4) - No, not fully. The system in place does provide some basis for policy development but because the data are often not current and sometimes limited, the analysis maybe flawed therefore impacting on the recommendations. In addition, this may sometimes prejudice the type of decisions made.

(5) - Not sufficient yet.

However, because of the fact that we have received technical assistance from the Japan Government and the Inter-American Development Bank, and Treaty Funds from the Netherlands, many consultants have made in-depth studies of the education sector. On the basis of the analysis, conclusions and recommendations we have formulated our education policy.

The EFA goals and the MDG's have certainly influenced our policy.

(see also answer of question 10 of part A)

(2) – Much more needs to be one to improve the process.

3) After decisions are made and policies are implemented, how does the system assess the results? How are the results of these policies and/or decisions evaluated?

(6) - The results of policy decisions are assessed through:
- Oral and written reports from field officers e.g. School Supervisors, Curriculum Officers, Research and Evaluation Personnel and Educational Planners.
- Monitoring and evaluation by Divisions of the projects which are directly under their responsibility;
- Formal assessments and evaluations by external bodies e.g. consultants

The Ministry of Education is now in the process of establishing a School Inspectorate and a

Quality Assurance Division. These bodies along with the Educational Planning Division and the Division of Educational Research and Evaluation will formally evaluate the results of policy decisions.

(4) - In many cases, during the process of decision-making, evaluation is considered and incorporated. In other cases, evaluation is done as the decision is being implemented. The evaluations are undertaken using different processes depending on the type of decisions. For example, there may be formal evaluation or analyses based on data collected.

(5) - The system of monitoring and evaluation is weak. Therefore we do carry out many activities in order to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry.

At the moment, we have several Project (Program) Management Units for the monitoring and evaluation of the activities. New structures have been discussed and a new mechanism will soon be in place to have an overall Program Management Unit, which will be responsible for the total management, monitoring and evaluation of all the activities.

The procedures and processes of this mechanism are structured in such a way that there is a daily communication with the Permanent Secretary for Education, the Strategic Management Team of the Ministry, the Research and Planning Unit, the Financial Unit, the Internal Audit Inspection, the Stakeholders and so on.

(4) – Evaluation is often not done.

4) After decisions are made and policies are implemented, how does the system assess the results? How are the results of these policies and/or decisions evaluated?

(6) - The results of policy decisions are assessed through:
- Oral and written reports from field officers e.g. School Supervisors, Curriculum Officers, Research and Evaluation Personnel and Educational Planners.
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Attachment 4

List of Persons Participating

Country	Person	Position
Barbados	Wendy Griffith - Watson	Chief Education Officer
Belize	Ms. Maud Hyde	Chief Education Officer
Guyana	Ms. Evelyn Hamilton	Chief Planning Officer
Jamaica	Barbara Allen	Director of Planning & Development Division
Suriname	Adiel K. Kallan	Permanent Secretary
Trinidad and Tobago	Maurice Chin Aleong	Technical Adviser Educational Planning

Attachment 5

Important Note: This Bibliography does not follow the APA guidelines. It is not a list of references of the material used in the elaboration of the paper. It is more a list of possible references to the users in order to facilitate their search for more information.

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