

Remarks of His Excellency Sydney Osborne  
OECS Commissioner and CARICOM Ambassador for St. Kitts and Nevis  
at the Official Launch of the OECS Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (RSDS)  
under the theme  
Revolutionising our Statistics | Developing our Societies

Fort Young Hotel, Roseau, Dominica

11 April, 2017

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon.

June 15, 2017, will mark the 36th Anniversary of the establishment of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.

To appreciate the significance of the event for which we are assembled today, that is - the launch of the OECS RSDS, in relation to this upcoming Anniversary, it is fitting to deliver an overview of the OECS – its proponents; its purpose; its functions, its achievements and its new directions and plans.

Doing so will contextually situate the OECS RSDS and help us understand why it is imperative that we pursue a regional approach to statistical development, not only to collectively respond to and buffer the external triggers and forces;

or to participate in the global imperatives such as the 2030 Agenda as Minister Joseph has just convincingly elucidated;

but more importantly and practically, to acknowledge that an RSDS “meets the requirements of regional integration policies and ensures that the statistical information produced by the attendant national statistical systems is comparable”.

**First There Were Seven, Now There are Ten... and Counting!**

15 June 1981 was the day on which the Treaty of Basseterre was signed by seven countries in the capital city of the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis.

These countries were Antigua and Barbuda, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Four prominent institutions are results of this Agreement:

- Eastern Caribbean Central Bank
- Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court
- Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority

- Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority

Many of you may not be intimate with their role and functions. Rest assured that the financial, justice and courts, air transportation and telecommunication services and regulations that they respectively deliver, are attributed to the regional imperatives that demand and define them.

The Director General of the OECS Commission, in his remarks to observe the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the OECS, pointed out that among the signatories to that momentous event,

though there were “extreme ideologically and temperamentally views, such as was the case for Eugenia Charles of Dominica and Maurice Bishop of Grenada,

the event was “an eloquent enough testament to the fact that what unites us is far greater than that which divides us”.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is why **One Community – Working Together** a profound and proud pursuit that should remain at the forefront of our daily lives, debates and undertakings.

This resolve to become **One**, envisioned a single space with open borders, and ushered the revision of the Treaty.

In January 2011, the Revised Treaty of Basseterre established the OECS Economic Union. The objective of the Union, as recorded on the Treaty, “shall be closer economic relations among Protocol Members States”.

This objective is being guided by the principles of common systems and standards; harmonised policies and legislation; joint negotiation stances and arrangements; and coordination and cooperation among the actors and institutions charged with implementing the Treaty.

This Union can be sliced to represent different “layers” of the same ecosystem:

- **A single economic space:** where people can move freely to work and live; where businesses have the rights to establish; where goods can circulate within the region without incurring taxes at each border;

*For this space, we have for instance, common tariffs and commercial policies; a Common Tourism Policy; a joint Agricultural Action Plan; and a growth and development strategy;*

*In practical terms, a business, whether a self-employed person or a branch of large company, birthed in Roseau, Dominica has the right to establish in Grenada or St. Lucia just as it would to establish a branch in Portsmouth or Rosalie, Dominica.*

- **A single financial space:** where capital can flow unobstructed by a deluge of competing or contradicting regulations from country to country; where financial transactions can be confidently undertaken using the Eastern Caribbean dollar;

*The Banking Act and the ECCB Agreement ensures the soundness and stability of this space.*

*This is perhaps one of the spaces that is most “visible” and one we all experience every day.*

- A **single social space**: where people move freely and there is seamless and non-discriminatory access to education; to social and health services; to justice; so as to achieve accelerated improvement in the standard of living and the reduction of poverty.

*An OECS Education Strategy; a common Health Policy and a Juvenile Justice Reform programme are just some of the initiatives that create and sustain this space.*

*In practical terms, if the treatment and benefits are uniform across Member States, then it quells the temptation for citizens to move to Member States where conditions are more favourable, and which could cause a strain on their social system and services.*

- A **single environmental space**: where a global agenda for climate change and a common regional policy to manage and sustain the environment; unite policy-makers, stakeholders and activists to protect land, oceans, and to demand clean air.

*for this space, OECS Member States adopted St. George's Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability in the OECS (SGD), and its implementation instruments, the OECS Regional Environmental Management Strategy (OECS REMS) and the National Environmental Management Strategies (NEMS).*

On the occasion of the signing of the Revised Treaty of Basseterre, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerit of Dominica submitted "The signing of the Treaty ... is a demonstration of our seriousness and our desire to take the process forward ... The signing is not a means to an end at all. We have to certainly continue the process of working towards fuller integration"

Ladies and gentlemen, consider for a moment, what **fuller integration** would require of a regional statistical system for this eclectic fraternity of 10 countries:

- Six Member States are independent;
- Three Member States are Overseas Territories of the United Kingdom;
- Eight Member States make up the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU) and use the EC dollar;
- Country-specific productive sectors with offshore services in BVI and tourism in Anguilla;
- Election cycles that are not synchronise and political ideologies that are organic;

On the 34<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the OECS, Martinique joined as the 10<sup>th</sup> member of the OECS - breaking down linguistic and cultural barriers to expose opportunities for business and trade; ease of travel; and health services.

- So we now have one French and 9 Anglo-Saxon Member States.

### **The Imperative for Statistics to Measure, Monitor and Evaluate the Economic Union**

A regional agenda for statistical development will no doubt have to be as respectful of the principle of subsidiarity while at the same time attending to those statistical concerns that must receive a regional treatment.

As Minister Joseph would have explained, all OECS Member States share similar challenges as vulnerable island developing economies. They are small in size, occupying a total land mass of nearly 3,100 sq. km, service-based economies with limited natural resources.

Their openness makes them very susceptible to economic volatility, and their geo-coordinates make them vulnerable to natural disasters.

Ladies and gentlemen, here is a snapshot view of our single space in numbers (excluding Martinique for the moment)

- combined population is just over 620,000, ranging from 5,000 to 178,000 people;
- approximately 310,000 households;
- a school-aged population of just over 180,000 (up to fifth form);
- a labour force of roughly 290,000 persons;
- 38 commercial bank branches under the supervision of the ECCB;

These numbers can also describe a single country. It means therefore that we should not let the waters that separate us geographically, also separate use economically, socially and environmentally.

### **The OECS Architecture to Support the OECS RSDS**

You have been apprised that the Economic Affairs Council endorsed the OECS RSDS. The EAC has responsibility to lead the creation of and the operationalisation of the Economic Union.

This endorsement therefore translates to imperatives for the Member States and directives for the OECS Commission.

Imperatives for the Member States have been enunciated by Minister Joseph.

Permit me to cite the Treaty “The Economic Affairs Council, may, with the approval of the OECS Authority, take decisions which are binding on all Protocol Member States and may make recommendations to the Protocol Member States”

The EAC, at its Third Meeting in November 2016, endorsed and approved the OECS RSDS.

The EAC’s directives for the Commission are provided for in the Treaty.

The OECS Commission is the principal administrative organ of the Economic Union. Among its functions is “collection, collation, analysis and distribution of all information pertinent to the workings of the Economic Union”

The Councils of Ministers are the other significant organs in the OECS architecture and who are consumers of statistics.

These Councils include Ministers of Health; Ministers of Social and Human Development; Ministers of Education; Ministers of Trade; Ministers of Foreign Affairs; Ministers of Tourism; Ministers of Agriculture.

Any proposal, policy or report to these Councils must, without exception, be evidence-based. This is non-negotiable and even more imperative given the new paradigms before us:

- Globally: to design **the future we want**;

- Regionally: to pursue **full integration** and prosper in one space;
- Nationally: to deliver public services and create conditions for the **well-being and prosperity** of its people;

We have not been successful at delivering robust knowledge products that have the quantitative information that satisfactorily describes and analyses the economic, financial, social and environment spaces of our region.

### Institutionalising the OECS RSDS

With respect to the OESC RSDS, the directives and recommendations to the OECS Commission can be translated and captured under five practical areas:

- **Strategic guidance:** supporting the Member States so that they are able to adapt and react quickly to change, adjust or design new actions as the needs arise, to meet the statistical needs prescribed nationally, regionally and globally;
- **Facilitative:** being available to Member States using appropriate modalities to implement actions; to build and strengthen statistical infrastructures; to enhance technical capacity; and to reinforce shared-responsibility for producing statistics;
- **Advocacy:** using the power of voice, negotiation, partnerships to communicate and trumpet achievements; celebrate the work of the statisticians; promote responsible use of statistics; and more emphatically, to promulgate government investment in statistics;
- **Resource mobilisation:** developing and nurturing durable partnerships for statistical cooperation so that resources (money, technical assistance, goods) are timely, targeted and used efficiently and effectively;
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** designing tools and systems to measure, report on outputs, and to assess the outcomes and impact of the OECS RSDS; and ensuring updates are provided to the appropriate OECS organs: EAC, Commissioners and the Councils of Ministers;

The OECS RSDS is a game changer and must now be used as the tool to fill this void and sustain a data-smart region.

It promises to **revolutionise our statistics and develop our societies**. It lays out a transformative agenda that uses data from us, about us, for us.

- **From us:** households, businesses, government departments, schools, police, non-government agencies - using surveys, censuses and administrative records;
- **About us:** our living conditions; poverty levels; state of the economy; social ills and phenomena; demographic characteristics; incidences of crime; health; quality of education; state of roads, buildings; quality of utilities;
- **For us:** policies and programmes to improve public services - education, health; housing, public safety; better infrastructure; more employment opportunities and so on.

Ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate the Commission, and in particular, the Statistical Services Unit, for bringing us to this juncture.

The national statistical office in each Member States, without your input, contributions, support and commitment to this process, this event and what it signifies, would not be possible. Your role in this effort cannot be understated.

Without any doubt, the success of the OECS RSDS rests on you as much, or even more so, than it does on the Commission. When you succeed, we all succeed. And the converse is true as well – when we succeed, you succeed, and the region flourishes!

To our development partners, who supported the design of the OECS RSDS – DFID, World Bank, UNDP and ECCB; and others who offered feedback and guidance along the way, in particular, the Partnership for Statistics for Development in the 21 Century – the PARIS21.

Thank you for your investment in our region, which demonstrates the confidence you have placed in us.

To all development partners, I express unreserved gratitude.

In my capacity as an OECS Commissioner, I commit to supporting the Commission through the appropriate mechanisms and with the appropriate instruments as it assumes and owns this expanded, visible and very important role as the leader of the OECS regional statistical system.

Congratulations again for arriving at this juncture and we anxiously await what it portends.

I thank you.