BACKGROUND

The Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD), a specialized institution of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) have organized four Ministerial Consultations and High Level Workshops on Capacity Building in Public Administration and Governance. The Consultations, financially supported by the Government of Italy, brought together Ministers of Caribbean governments, senior public sector managers, representatives of regional and international organizations, leading regional and international experts, and representatives of citizen organizations.

The Third and Fourth Ministerial Consultations considered the themes of ICT and e-government, respectively. The Third Ministerial Consultation recognized the importance of ICT and e-government to the national and regional development and stressed the possibilities of regional cooperation in facilitating the introduction of e-government at the national level. As such, a key outcome of the Third consultation was the creation of a Caribbean e-Government Working Group tasked with drafting such a regional strategy. The Working Group held two meetings during 2002, which served to define its mandate and Terms of Reference, as well as to develop a project proposal for the formulation of a Regional e-Government Strategy and Action Plan.

The Fourth Ministerial consultation provided an opportunity to consider the outcomes of the Working Group’s activities, identify the strategic objectives of a Caribbean regional initiative on e-government for improved public sector management; solicit agreement on the next steps for measuring e-government readiness in the region; and enhance awareness and commitment to the main processes, costs and benefits of e-government as a tool for improved management of the Caribbean public sector.

The participants of the Fourth Consultation confirmed the need for developing a regional e-government strategy for the Caribbean in order to benefit from economies of scale, harmonize individual country efforts, foster regional integration and cooperation and build upon progress already made in a number of countries. They also
concurred that, in spite of the progress made, additional analytical work was necessary in order to develop a meaningful, comprehensive and, most of all, effective regional strategy. Such work should capitalize on a number of past and current reviews, assessments and exercises in this field carried out at the international, regional and country level.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2003

The participants in the Fourth Consultation stated: “...The year 2003 must be a year of achievement and implementation…” (Recommendation for Action 2.11) and indicated a number of operational steps to be taken leading to the formulation of a Regional E-Government Strategy and Action Plan. Following the recommendations, analytical preparatory work was carried out in order to develop a meaningful, comprehensive and effective regional strategy, as described below:

1. A comprehensive inventory, review and analysis of ICT and e-government developments in the region were carried out by CARICAD with the support of UNDESA, building upon the work already done in the region. The “E-government in the Caribbean” web site was created within UNPAN, which was populated with these key regional resources on e-government.

2. UNDESA, who had undertaken initial work on the elaboration of an e-government readiness methodology, teamed up with CARICAD and representatives and experts of selected countries in the region and with leading world experts on ICT and e-government to further develop this methodology. The methodology was elaborated to assist governments in the development of more relevant and informed e-government strategies and action plans that are better aligned with good governance and public sector reform goals. The methodology contains multiple parts targeted to central government, public agencies and civil society in order to provide a choice in the depth of assessment undertaken. In these ways the methodology is very unique and creates a new framework for approaching the problem of e-government readiness.

3. The e-government readiness assessment methodology was tested in nine countries of the region being at different stages of e-government development, namely Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago. Forty-five surveys were completed by central government, public agencies and civil society in the nine countries. Combined with analysis of background material, including consideration of the e-readiness work of CARICOM that focuses on broader ICT issues, the e-government readiness assessment has provided an overview of the challenges and opportunities facing the region. The diffusion of the methodology also helped to raise awareness at the national level.

4. UNDESA developed an E-government Readiness Index and provided a ranking of Caribbean countries in terms of e-government readiness: Saint Lucia scored the highest in the region, followed by the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. Seven Caribbean countries had a higher than world average. Four countries though had a lower than world mean: Cuba, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. UNDESA E-Government Readiness Index is a composite index comprising the Web Measure Index, the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index and the Human Capital Index. The methodology followed to calculate the e-readiness index was different from, but complementary to, the
one utilized for the in-country e-government readiness assessments (UNDESA World Public Sector Report 2003: “E-government at the Crossroads”)

5. Building upon the results of the previous steps, a draft Caribbean Regional E-Government Strategy and Action Plan is being prepared.

NEXT STEPS

Participants in the Fourth Caribbean Ministerial Consultation decided that the Caribbean Regional E-Government Strategy and Action Plan should be submitted for approval and adopted at the Fifth Caribbean Ministerial Consultation.

In view of the above, the CARICAD and UNDESA are organizing the Fifth Caribbean Ministerial Consultation on “Regional Cooperation for e-Government Capacity Building” to be held on 17-18 June 2004.

The Fifth Caribbean Ministerial Consultation will provide a platform for further dialogue, commitment and closer cooperation at the regional level on government policies and strategies for the application of ICT in the public sector. The consultation also aims at increasing awareness, among Caribbean public officials and the population at large, on the main processes, cost and benefits of e-government, not only as a tool to achieve greater administrative efficiency and effectiveness, but also to transform the public bureaucratic hierarchies into networks, manage information, create knowledge, expand participatory democracy and protect the right to privacy.

In preparation for the Fifth Consultation, the Third e-Government Working Group Meeting will be held on 21 April 2004 in Bridgetown, Barbados. The Working Group meeting seeks to share information on progress made in the implementation of the Caribbean e-Government Initiative, advance in building consensus on a Draft Strategy and Action Plan, solicit discussion on the next steps for implementing the Action Plan, and identify key prospective partners.

Information on the Caribbean E-Government Initiative is to be found at the following address:
http://www.unpan.org/dpepa-kmb-eg-egovtc.asp