

SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY
STATISTICS FOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

UNFPA-SPC REGIONAL WORKSHOP REVIEWING THE 2010 ROUND OF POPULATION
AND HOUSING CENSUSES IN THE PACIFIC
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 21–25 May 2012)

Experience from the Pacific – Lessons learned for 2020

Session 4 : PILOT CENSUS

(Document presented by Kaobari Matikarai, Demography and Health Survey Technical Officer,
Secretariat of the Pacific Community)

1. INTRODUCTION

The pilot census, also known as the “census dress rehearsal”, is a process in which all census operations are being tested in a detailed comprehensive manner. This takes place, ideally and as a matter of best practice, one year ahead of the actual census date, when major external circumstances, such as season (weather), holiday periods, school year schedule etc. can be expected to be similar to when the census proper will be conducted. The pilot census test all phases of the main census, from planning to the execution of the planning, logistics arrangement and management, questionnaire design and format, training procedures, fieldwork operations, publicity, payment system, data processing, data tabulations and analysis. Another test known as the pre-test is the process to test the questionnaire content, design and format only.

The importance of undertaking a pilot census is emphasized in all census reference books, census conferences and technical meetings as an important planning tool to ensure all is in place come census time. It provides the NSOs with the opportunity to test all aspects of the census operations, from transport/logistics to payment of field staff, to make accurate GPS recordings, administer the questionnaires in a proper manner, test your field supervisory arrangements, data capture systems (manual or scanning), and data processing. It also provides the opportunity for census manager to gain more confidence, as for many this will be their first time.

It is from a pilot census that experience is gained and used to refine and finalise the main census operational plan. In this regard, the pilot census provides the opportunity for any country irrespective of its size, to lay the foundation for a good census operation.

Hence, the purpose of this paper is to provide summary description of technical assistance provided to PICTs countries who conducted the pilot census in the last 2010 census round. The paper then highlights achievements made and problems encountered in the process and lastly presents suggestions and recommendations as to be considered in the next 2020 census round.

2. SDP TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

The following technical assistance were provided throughout different phases of the pilot census from the planning phase through data tabulation and analysis. The technical assistance listed were delivered in country by TA provider visiting the country or from outside the country through internet correspondences (email, skype, etc) and over phone discussions.

- i. Working closely with census manager in developing work plan, budget and proposal document required for the pilot census. In the process, other census team members and office staff were also involved by presenting the draft for their further inputs and comments.
- ii. Encouraging work coordination between NSO and other inline ministries and department such as Lands, internal affairs, etc that could provide local technical support to the census. For example, making arrangement for land officer attached to the census and working with teams to produce census maps. In other countries, NSO provide technical support to other department carrying out another survey. At the same time, the survey collected information required by the census team.
- iii. SDP also involved in reviewing pilot census questionnaire and provide comments where seemed necessary. Usually, the pilot census questionnaire was sent to SDP for comments and inputs prior finalising the questionnaire.
- iv. SDP was also involved in the household listing exercise, by providing instructions and training on how to conduct the listing and applying the GPS for capturing the position of the households.
- v. In preparation for the pilot census training of fieldworkers, SDP also provided support by assisting in the development of the training manuals and training materials required for the training. This was carried out by working together with the census manager ensuring that the materials are ready for the training.
- vi. Providing assistance and support during the training of fieldworkers for pilot census. SDP technical provider was involved in the two weeks training of the fieldwork.
- vii. Providing assistance in monitoring pilot census progress by developing monitoring tools to be used during and after census pilot fieldwork to assist the census manager to record and account all experiences encountered by fieldworkers during the fieldwork.
- viii. Training provided from SDP data specialist to data operators on data processing procedures for census data entry and data editing.
- ix. Assistance in tabulation of the pilot census data and analysis of the results for use in the main census plan.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS

The following are achievements made during the delivery of technical assistance in the process of the pilot census:

- i. Work plans, budget and proposal documents were developed as expected for funding process and considerations.
- ii. Were able to transfer some skills to NSO office staff particularly census manager who had been involved and worked with technical assistance provider especially
- iii. Meeting milestones of activities required for the pilot census, such as household listing of selected EAs, training of fieldworkers and particularly conducting the pilot census.

- iv. Census maps and cartography showing EA boundaries were made available and ready for use in the pilot census fieldwork.
- v. Improved coordination between NSO and other department which provide better opportunity of sharing skills and data between the offices.
- vi. Producing of table and the analysis of the pilot census data.
- vii. Upon completing of the pilot census, the census manager and the census team gained more confident and well prepared for the main census operation

4. CHALLENGES

Evidence shows that the combination of no proper planning with late and delay in preparatory work and limited resources always led to challenges and problems encountered when trying to achieve what is required. The challenges and common issues encountered during the pilot census include the followings:

- i. The delay in funding support has been one of the main challenges that had been experienced which always caused delay in the execution of the plan. The contributing factor to the delay in accessing fund is usually the late planning done by NSOs. In most cases, the planning exercise was done within a short period of time and as a results time to seek funding was limited and therefore funding was not always ready.
- ii. Pilot census should be conducted one year prior the main census as outlined earlier, to conform to seasonal patterns and activities and as well as to have ample time to prepare well for the main census. Due to time pressures and domestic budgetary/financial challenges many countries dispensed with doing a pilot census at all, others did it within 6 months of the main census, which is not sufficient time to evaluate the results and integrate what had been found in the pilot census in the main census operations.
- iii. Only two countries (Samoa and Tuvalu) allowed sufficient time and monitored operations regularly.
- iv. The proper conduct of the pilot census is to be carried out in different settings (urban and rural) and particularly in areas that are difficult to access them. This was not achieved in some cases.
- v. Communication problems between the NSOs and the technical provider, developments partners also posed a considerable challenge in some countries, with irregular activity and financial updates/monitoring the major bottlenecks.
- vi. Shortages of materials and problems of payment (on time) of field staff impacted on fieldwork progress – a good lesson learned, one would think, for the main census operation.
- vii. Fieldwork monitoring and supervision were not done properly as office editors picked in completed questionnaires and errors in the some of the answers. Supervisors were sent to the field for corrections.
- viii. Progress reports were not always produced and if so were not circulated regularly for comments and review.

5. WAY FORWARD TO IMPROVE 2020 CENSUS ROUND:

During the 2010 round, only few countries did the pilot census due to different reasons as:

- some did not realise the importance of pilot census, considering it a waste of time and money;
- others felt as they had conducted many censuses in the past there was no need;
- some were unable to do so, because of a lack of funds;
- in other cases, planning timelines were so tight, they did not allow room for a pilot census.

A key lesson learned for us in working across 12 countries during this 2010 round of censuses, is to remind NSOs, our main constituents, as well as their governments and our respective development partners, that since population censuses are considered the biggest national peacetime operation and challenge in terms of organization, transport and logistics, to implement such “census dress rehearsals” in the 2020 round.

After all, everyone agreed to do so in endorsing the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy and the Pacific Statistics Strategy Action Plan Phase 1 (2011 – 2014), with the very first Output 1-1 stipulating that “*Census plans and budgets are prepared within 12 and 18 months prior to scheduled census date, and all pre-enumeration activities are completed*” – the latter defined as cartography, household listing, **pilot census**, training of field staff, and setting up of data processing systems”.
