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STATISTICS FOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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AND HOUSING CENSUSES IN THE PACIFIC
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Experience from the Pacific – Lessons learned for 2020

Session 10 : CENSUS DATA UTILIZATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Population and housing censuses are conducted because they provide the information and indicators used for public and private sector policymaking, planning, and administrative and research purposes. One of the most basic of the administrative uses of census data is in the demarcation of electoral constituencies and the allocation of representation on governing bodies. Certain aspects of the legal or administrative status of territorial divisions may also depend on the size of their populations. Housing censuses are used to develop benchmark housing statistics and to formulate housing policy and programmes, and in the private sector to assist in site selection for industrial, retail and service facilities, as well as for the commercial development of residential housing.

Information on the size, distribution and characteristics of a country's population is essential to describing and assessing its economic, social and demographic circumstances and to developing sound policies and programmes aimed at fostering the welfare of a country and its population. The population and housing census, by providing comparable basic statistics for a country as a whole and for each administrative unit and locality therein, can make an important contribution to the overall planning process and the management of national development. The availability of information at the lowest levels of administrative units is valuable for the management and evaluation of such programmes as education and literacy, employment and human resources, reproductive health and family planning, housing and environment, maternal and child health, rural development, transportation and highway planning, urbanization and welfare. Population and housing censuses are also unique sources of data for producing relevant social indicators to monitor the impact of these government policies and programmes.

In this paper we revisit the user needs, and the related product development as reviewed in Session 9, Working Paper 8. We then discuss a few common ways of information and engagement with users and the TA delivered in support of such activities. We then conclude by noting that the NSO's have the opportunity in this and the next round of censuses to plan and strategise for increased data utilization and policy dialogue workshops in the next few years, and related behavioural change advocacies, utilizing such census products as the PopGIS and related thematic mapping functions.

2. MEETING CENSUS USER NEEDS

In Working Paper 8, we noted that census user needs are defined early in the census planning process and products and services are designed and packaged to meet the identified user needs. We then presented the suggested products for various user groups, and reviewed the products developed and disseminated in Pacific countries in the present round of censuses. We noted in Working Paper 8 also that we now have the opportunity to expand the range of census products to improve availability and accessibility and thereby increase census data utilization.

However, we also note here that the low demand of statistics in the Pacific is a result of lack of knowledge, skills and understanding of statistics and its application into policy and development. It is an issue of concern and therefore in this paper we consider possible activities targeted towards training our Pacific data users and media people to utilize census and other data products.

(a) Development indicators

One of the products discussed in Working Paper 8 under “Thematic analytical reports” was on deriving development indicators aligned to national, regional, and global policy/planning frameworks which then makes these statistics relevant for policy makers and development planners. Having said this, it is important to also note that census offices or NSO’s in general should not be expected to define policy relevant indicators alone but work in collaboration with national and sector planners. The theory is that policy/planning agencies are in a better position to know what indicators are relevant, however the reality in many Pacific countries is that census takers and statisticians are not provided with their requirements which often leads to developing data products that are too general and not directly linked to policy.

This is a weakness many census takers and statisticians around the Pacific know but little effort has been made to engage fully with data users to clearly define their needs. There is therefore, an opportunity for PIC’s to formulate strategies to engage fully with data users before and after data collections, including developing training and advocacy materials on data and indicator utilization targeting different categories of users, including the media. Empowering users with knowledge and skills on data use would obviously lead to increased use which then creates demand for user relevant census products and statistics in general.

3. PROMOTION OF, AND TRAINING IN USES OF CENSUS DATA

As we noted above and in other earlier papers, the main purpose of a census is to collect, process, and disseminate information that will be used as the basis of informed, evidence-based decision-making. The benefits of this approach to decisions are not always apparent to users, especially in situations where other approaches may have been used in the past, particularly when external consultants were involved as is usually the case in many PIC policy/planning processes. It is therefore important to promote such uses of census results among users, particularly the national policy/planning specialists as well as the media agents.

In other cases, users may be willing to use the information but require additional training to more fully understand the data. Such training may be usefully combined with training in statistical dissemination techniques and/or uses of more advanced data products. At a very basic level, some users may require training or guidance in such routine issues as how to contact the national statistical office and/or how to find the information they require within the systems of that office; in other words, how to access the information they require.

Whichever approach is taken to enhancing promotion and training in the use of statistical data, a number of strategic issues need to be addressed. These include:

- (a) Ensuring that the needs for training are identified early in the census planning process and that required funds are included in the census budget. In this regard it should be noted that in many cases the courses requested by users will be specific to those users, and in such a case it may be possible to negotiate with the users to share costs of the training course;
- (b) The proposed courses or materials should be fully integrated into the overall census advocacy or training programme for users. It is essential that messages about the use of data fully reflect the message(s) given when initially advocating taking the census and/or seeking public cooperation with and participation in the collection phase;
- (c) If the training facility is itself promoted properly, it is highly likely that the demand for training will far outstrip the ability of the statistical office to deliver it. In this case it will be necessary for the statistical office to have prepared transparent strategies that:
 - i. identify those areas in which the statistical office wishes to participate, and topics on which the statistical office has particular knowledge or expertise;
 - ii. establish partnerships with other bodies to provide training in other cases;
 - iii. use approaches other than classroom training to provide learning-at-a-distance opportunities (for example, use of self-help facilities on CD-ROM); and
 - iv. consider costing for such training delivery where this is seen as desirable or requirement.

The possible list of target audiences and topics for such training is very much a matter for decision by countries. It should be noted, however, that basic training in the use and interpretation of the results of one census is a very strong method of advocating support for future censuses. It is thus recommended that countries consider development of a basic course in:

- (a) potential uses of census data;
- (b) how to access/read census data and
- (c) interpretation of census data at the broadest level, including the interpretation of its completeness and level of accuracy. The target audience for such training should be key decision makers in the political and administrative hierarchy of the country. It should be outlined that the uses of census data at the local level (small areas) offer substantial potential for constructive use of census data: spatial distribution of population by age and sex, for example, provides an ideal framework for local government officials to address the most pressing issues of their constituents, such as location of schools, utilities and so forth.

As noted earlier, a second group of key importance are members of the mass media, such as print, radio and TV journalists. A focus on training such personalities is important because they can carry the message to many other people. This will assist in the general raising of awareness in the population at large, as well as in generating an awareness of the census and general statistics among the government, academic and business users who may not have contact with the statistical office on a regular basis. Obviously such training should be completely integrated with the overall public relations and advocacy work.

4. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING ON CENSUS DATA UTILIZATION IN THE PACIFIC

Similar to provision of technical assistance in other phases of census taking, support in the data dissemination and utilization to countries were delivered in the following manner:

Data dissemination workshops – after every census results are packaged, especially after the main census and demographic analysis and related indicators are prepared, the next step is to inform and release the information back to users. This is done in many countries through data dissemination workshops when key users are brought together and information released. Some countries then organize sector consultations to release sector specific information.

One issue that constantly defeats the purpose of these data dissemination workshops is that many users do not send decision makers but their delegates who are usually junior offices. This only shows that senior policy/planning decision makers do not place great emphasis and importance on evidence-based decision making hence not really place greater demand on NSO's to deliver on time and not clearly inform NSOs their sector specific data requirements.

Policy dialogue workshops – in the current round of census decade, UNFPA and SPC collaborated in organizing and delivering policy dialogue workshops where data users are introduced to key population measures and how to integrate them into policy development and planning processes, as well as using such measures to set development targets and monitoring the progress over time. A number of countries participated in the workshops. Data products like PopGIS were used in some of these workshops where thematic maps and charts were produced to show variations and differences geographically and related policy/planning implications.

Data analysis and report writing in census workshop settings – organized and delivered in a formal training environment, where SPC trains statisticians and managers on data analysis and report writing using their own data. Many countries in the Pacific have participated and benefited from this training in past and the current round of censuses, and SPC will continue with the training (in its current form or a reduced form) into the next round of censuses.

In addition, workshop arrangement where census data analysts from NSOs and other government agencies were trained on basic population or statistical measures, the concept of indicators, as well as data analysis using excel and other software had been delivered in a number of countries to help them with undertaking various main census report chapters. Many participants, especially those from other government agencies appreciated and were thankful for the opportunity to understand the importance of the NSOs, census taking and the relationship between their work areas and that of the NSO's and the opportunity to collaborate with each other.

Sharing/exchanging of data utilization training materials with census managers in the Pacific – templates and materials used for data utilization and training workshops as well as similar products developed by other countries were shared with other countries to serve as guide and additional reference in planning and designing their own products and training workshop contents. These proved useful and helpful to recipients so will continue into the future.

5. INCREASING CENSUS DATA UTILIZATION IN THE PACIFIC

The only way for NSO to create demand for their products and services is to ensure increased utilization of census products and services, not only census based products but also other statistical products in other areas of statistics. For this to happen, NSO are well placed to develop products that are relevant to user needs and are easy and friendly to most users.

However, there are many users in the Pacific who need NSO support to become statistical literate which in turn creates the demand for using census and other statistical products. Activities to increase

statistical literacy should begin early in the census process as well as during and after the release of census products. With such products as the PopGIS, we have the opportunity to consider strategies to increase statistical literacy among Pacific policy makers and planners to create the demand for census and statistical data utilization.

As noted earlier in this paper, there is an imbalance between resources allocated for data collection and product development, dissemination and utilization. It is crucial to ensure that there is balance between resource allocations so that resources allocated for relevant product development, dissemination and utilization matches the former. This then contributes to creating an increased demand for census data use.
