

The 2014 Population and Housing Census of Myanmar:

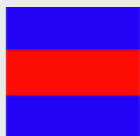
Questions and Answers about Myanmar's Census



Ministry of Immigration and Population

with technical support from UNFPA

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Introduction

This booklet is a compilation of questions and answers that were frequently raised during a series of consultations and interactions on data release and dissemination of the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. These consultations took place over several months from May 2014 and involved meetings and discussions with representatives of different sectors of society across States and Regions in Myanmar. They involved meetings with religious and ethnic groups, political parties and groups, civil society and community-based organizations, women and youth organizations, private sector, media and government officials. In addition, visits to the Census Centre in Nay Pyi Taw by different stakeholder groups, such as Ambassadors, the UN, media, donors and development partners, NGOs, and ethnic groups, took place to see the data processing that was underway. These “Frequently Asked Questions” about the census also benefitted from the advice and questions of the members of the Census National Advisory Committee.

Having listened to the main concerns about the census generally and associated data release specifically among different communities in Myanmar, this booklet is part of a larger effort to shape a people-centered approach to census data release and dissemination by helping to build public trust, understanding, acceptance and use of census data at all levels.

General questions on the census

1. Why is a census conducted?

Periodic population censuses are conducted in nearly all countries in the world to provide governments and society in general with accurate information on the number of people in the country, their characteristics and living conditions. Very few countries do not need to conduct censuses because they have up-to-date registration systems that provide this information in a continuous manner.

2. What is UNFPA and what is its role in census?

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that provides support to countries on population, gender, and reproductive health. This includes technical and sometimes financial support for conducting censuses.

3. What is the cost of the Myanmar census?

The total cost of the census is around \$60 million (USD). The exact figure will be known as soon as the whole operation is finished. This has come from Government, Donors and UNFPA. Communities and civil society organisations have also voluntarily through local communication and mobilisation activities.

4. What is the value of conducting a census?

Having accurate knowledge about the population is critical to guide decisions relating to people's wellbeing, economic investments, policy making, development planning, and the improvement of services. A census constitutes the base of any sound statistical systems.



5. Given that risks had been identified for census taking, why was the census conducted in March/April 2014 and not delayed to a future date?

There are always risks of different nature associated with large scale operations like the census. It is impossible to guarantee that no risk would affect the operations, particularly in countries with complex political and social issues like Myanmar. In Myanmar, a comprehensive risk analysis was conducted at the end of 2012. The risks outlined in this report were tested out during the pilot census by a team of national and international observers. Then, the census planning incorporated the recommendations of the risk assessment, conducting several activities and adjusting the planning to address and mitigate those risks.

The approach was to analyze the opportunities and risks associated with taking the census as planned in 2014, as well as the opportunities and risks inherent to not having a census. Myanmar is undergoing a complex reform process that incorporates peace negotiations, political, social and economic reforms. Important decisions need to be made, which require an adequate information base. Available information is based on the data from the 1983 census, which are both outdated and no longer reliable not only because it is more than 30 years old, but also because during these last three decades the country has experienced major events that transformed the country's political, social and demographic basis. The

available knowledge base from that census, therefore, is inadequate to guide policy decision making and planning. In addition, in 2015 an election is planned to take place and a new government would be appointed. If the census is not conducted before these relevant events, the new government would have to take office, start planning and decision making without the benefit of accurate information.



It would have to initiate census planning, but the census and data would not be available for at least three -most probably four years- after the new government has taken office. That would mean that new policies and programmes would have to be adopted with inadequate knowledge of the population situation and their social needs.

The time-line described above is in conformity with the fact that international experience and practices indicate that a census and elections should be separated at least by one year.

In addition, also for pragmatic reasons the census should precede the elections, because it can provide valuable information to improve the planning and logistic preparation for the elections, as it indicates the number of people residing in every electoral district and therefore also an estimate of potential eligible voters. While the data of the census is not used for establishing a Myanmar voter list update, it provides a reliable independent source to assess whether the numbers included in electoral lists are reasonably accurate or not. This is a valuable measure to expose anomalies and the potential exclusion or disenfranchisement of voters.

Similarly, the census provides the Union Electoral Commission and the political parties with an estimate of the number of potential voters per electoral district. On the basis of this, an estimate number of polling stations per constituency, including required polling staff to be recruited and trained, may be identified with the ultimate objective that the Myanmar voters will be informed on where to cast their votes on Election Day. Taking into account all these factors the decision was to conduct the census in 2014, and incorporate all feasible activities aimed to risk prevention and mitigation.

An example of risk mitigation, among others measures undertaken, was the consultations conducted in the second half of 2013 with all parties, non-state and armed groups. In all, 126 political/peace ethnic leaders participated in a meeting on 2nd March 2014, after the census launch in Nay Pyi Taw, to discuss final preparations for the enumeration with the Minister of Immigration and Population. Most of these groups, even in cases where no peace agreement had been reached, agreed

to cooperate and support the census. In many cases these groups selected the enumerators to work in their areas or even conducted the enumeration themselves, and returned the completed census questionnaires for processing. In most cases the census not only did not generate conflict, but instead it became an opportunity for confidence building and effective cooperation.

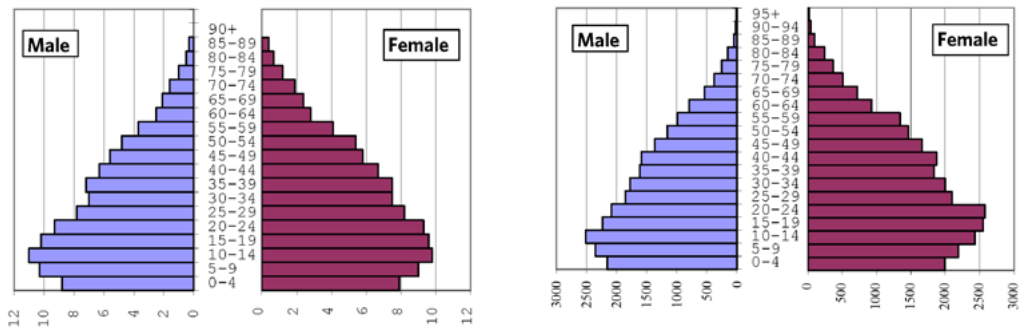
6. In what sense has the census improved or may improve decision making and planning?

The 2014 population and housing census constitutes the foundation for developing a national institutional statistical system. An updated population census provides the basis for planning all development activities and provision of health, education, sanitation, infrastructure and all other social services.

For example, the Pilot Census has already revealed that important demographic transformations are taking place in Myanmar. This is seen in that the base of the population pyramid is no longer expanding, but is narrowing. It means that population age groups below the age of 15-19 are becoming smaller than the groups before them. (*Figure 1*) This is because families are having fewer children and the population growth rate has reduced over the last 30 years. This situation results in a levelling in the number of births each year, as can be seen in tables 1 and 2 from the pilot census. This transition process has created a “bulge” in the now 15 – 29 age group. This represents a potentially powerful factor to accelerate economic growth and development, demanding adjustments and investments in different sectors. When the “bulge” of 15-29 year-olds reaches or is in the working age, the dependency ratio (the proportion of dependent population to the working age population) declines. That means that each person in the labor force has to sustain a declining number of people who are dependent. Hence, this demographic transformation creates a situation that would favour economic production and savings with respect to consumption needs.

This phenomenon is known as the “demographic bonus”. There is abundant empirical evidence demonstrating the impact of the

Figure 1: Population Pyramid- 2007 Fertility and Reproductive Health Survey Population Pyramid- Pilot Census 2013



demographic bonus in accelerating economic growth. However, the potential benefits of the demographic bonus are fully materialized only if conducive public policies are adopted in order to enhance the human capital of the new entrants to the labor force, equipping them with the knowledge and skills that contribute to increase productivity, at the same time as employment opportunities are expanded so as to accommodate the increases in the working age population.

Data on these processes is essential in order to design adequate policies in a timely manner so as to maximize the advantages emanating from these opportunities. In the case of Myanmar, policies to enhance the benefits from the demographic bonus must start immediately. Ideally they should have started about 10 years ago, when the fertility decline resulted in decreasing number of births as compared to previous years, but inadequate information basis did not allow for proper monitoring of trends in order to guide policy making.

Questions about the census results



7. How certain is it that the data will be released?

Government has committed itself to releasing data in three stages. The provisional data was released on time in August 2014 and it is expected that the main results will be made available in May 2015, and at the end of 2015 or early 2016 for the data that need more time for analysis. International advisers are assisting in this whole process. As of November 2014, the census process was on schedule.

8. Can census information be used to protect groups at risk?

The information that a census provides about people's lives can help to defend socially marginalized groups, as well as those most in need. It can

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