

The 2014 Population and Housing Census of Myanmar

Findings of the Census Observation Mission:

An Overview



Myanmar 2014

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Introduction

After three decades without a Population and Housing Census, a census enumeration was conducted in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar from 30 March to 10 April 2014. To support transparency of the census and to better understand the way data was collected, the Ministry of Immigration and Population invited an independent Census Observation Mission to observe the census. The Mission was made up of 47 experienced observers; 23 international and 24 Myanmar nationals. These experts were statisticians, census experts, demographers or social scientists.

This document is a summary of the findings of the Observation Mission. Additional information, not from the Observation Mission, has been included to provide readers with a clearer understanding of information that may need further explanation.

The specific objectives of the Observation Mission were to: objectively observe the census process in a select number of townships and Enumeration Areas against international standards and national legislation; to increase the credibility and transparency of the census process; to provide regular feedback to the Government during census enumeration; and to document lessons learned and good practices for building capacity for future censuses in Myanmar.

In total, the Observers visited all the 15 States/Regions of Myanmar, 41 districts (55% of the total), 121 Townships (37% of the total) and 901 Enumeration Areas (1.1% of the total). They observed 2,193 interviews across the country (2,177 in full and 16 partially). The Mission acknowledged that this was a relatively "large sample for a census observation/monitoring," which may make the findings useful for subsequent stages of the census process, particularly data analysis, which requires an understanding of the different factors that may have affected (positively or negatively) the quality of the data collected.

Ultimately, the findings of the Mission played an important part in providing regular feedback to the Government during the census enumeration so that remedial action could be taken where needed; and in documenting lessons learned and good practices for building capacity for future censuses and large-scale data collection exercises in Myanmar.

The Mission adapted and used a methodology that was already tested and successfully utilised in several countries with similar contexts to Myanmar, including Timor-Leste, Sudan, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nigeria and Ghana. The observers used standardised tools which enabled objectivity of the observation across all teams, harmonisation of the minimum aspects to be observed, comparability of findings from different areas, and ease of reporting by the different teams.



Findings of the Observation Mission

The Mission described the Myanmar Census as successful on the whole and in line with international standards, except in Rakhine, where almost all communities that wanted to self-identify as “Rohingya” (who the Government call Bengali) were not counted. At the time of the observation, it was noted that some parts of Kachin State, controlled by the Kachin Independence Organisation were not enumerated.

The International Technical Advisory Board (ITAB), a group of 15 experts from different countries and institutions involved in censuses and statistics internationally, will work with the Department of Population (DoP) to find ways of credibly estimating the population of the areas that were left out of the enumeration.



The Mission comprised 47 experienced observers, 23 international and 24 Myanmar nationals. These teams of experts were composed of statisticians, census experts, demographers and social scientists. ©UNFPA/ITAB March 2014

An independent evaluation of the census process itself has been planned. An assessment on the quality of the data on variables that may be difficult to collect, for example, age, disability and migration, will be conducted in order to correct any errors that may be observed during data analysis. This process will use internationally accepted demographic techniques.

Some of the key findings of the Mission are detailed below:

1. Census advocacy, communications and publicity



- The Mission found the communication and publicity campaign for the census impressive in terms of outreach, with around 92% of the areas visited registering availability of publicity materials and/or activities. Materials such as posters, billboards and pamphlets were widely available, visible and accessible (posters on trees and public places; banners and billboards along busy roads).
- To cater for populations that could not easily be targeted through printed material (due to terrain or low literacy levels), publicity was also widely organised through radio, television, and public announcements. A “Celebrity’s Bus Tour” was also organised that visited towns and villages across the country to sensitise the population about the census. The tour gathered large interest beyond the visited areas, due to daily broadcasts on TV. Celebrity comedians and singers were on the bus tour to entertain the audience with songs, quizzes and gifts.
- Whether the publicity and awareness campaign actually translated into an understanding by the general public of the census, could not be directly evaluated by the observers. However, it was observed that most people willingly and enthusiastically responded to the questions during enumeration, a fact which may be attributed to the publicity campaign. In places such as Ayeyarwady, for example, some households had prepared notes in advance to be able to respond more accurately to the interview. Observers for Ayeyarwady considered this as a sign of engagement and participation by the public.
- While publicity was reported to be less widespread in rural villages of Rakhine State, particularly in the areas where Muslim populations live, the Mission observed that remote areas in other States/Regions, such as Bago Region, Mandalay Region and Shan State, had the census publicity materials visibly displayed and distributed.



2. Census understanding, awareness and attitude of the population



- Overall the population was positive about the census and wanted to be counted.
- In Chin State and in Ayeyarwady Region, for example, the Mission reported that most of the households had prepared notes ahead of the visit by the enumerator, so that they could respond better to the enumeration.
- It was reported that some households in Chin State were not comfortable with the question on household members living abroad. This discomfort may not be due to a lack of understanding about the census, but rather a history of non-disclosure of information about migration by family members.
- While some members of the Chin National Front refused to be counted (more for political reasons than through a lack of understanding), the Mission observed that the situation in other States such as Kayah was different, where despite political tensions in some townships, the census was allowed to proceed unhindered. This may imply that people in most areas understood the value of the census for themselves and their communities.

3. The Census Offices (handling, storage and return of materials)



- The Mission observed that State/Region Immigration Offices were well organised and prepared for the support/facilitation they were expected to provide to the Townships and to the fieldwork (monitoring, supervising and mobilising supplementary materials from one area to another, where necessary). Good monitoring and supervision by the Immigration Offices was an important component in quality assurance of field work.
- At the Township level, the Mission noted that the offices efficiently handled the distribution of materials and management of field workers. This was important to ensure that all the necessary supplies were available for field workers, and that the quality of the field work was monitored.
- The Mission observed that the infrastructure and preparations for storage of questionnaires at the township level, after returning them from the field, were not adequate. Exceptions to this were Tanintharyi, northern Rakhine, Sagaing, Nay Pyi Taw, Shan, Kachin and Mandalay, where most of the storage facilities were ready with sufficient shelving and good security. Limitations in storage and facility capacity are a challenge that characterise censuses in other developing countries.
- The Mission noted that in cases where Township Offices lacked secure storage facilities, arrangements were made to use other available institutions such as police stations, religious institutions or wards/village tracts that had such facilities (for example Kayin and Kayah). This indicates that Township Officers made efforts to treat the materials responsibly, with respect and pride, although no extra resources were made available for organising storage.
- It is important to note that all census reports and questionnaires were returned from the Townships to the DoP Census Offices by 6 May 2014. Given the long holiday period at this time, getting all the materials back in such a relatively short time was considered critical to reduce the risk of damage or tampering in the field. The census reports and questionnaires were delivered by the Township Officers, in the company of security and through a hired professional transport company. Most questionnaires were not damaged while in storage at the Township Offices, and there is no sign to date that they may have been tampered with (a situation that can easily be detected and addressed during data analysis). This addresses the concern that the Mission had regarding security of the questionnaires at the Township level and the importance of having a detailed plan to return questionnaires to the Census Office. A few questionnaires were torn and some were damaged in transit to the Census Office when the vehicle carrying them from Shan South caught fire. However as the fire was put out quickly, the questionnaires could be transcribed and can still be processed.

4. Profile of enumerators



- The Mission found that a large majority of the enumerators and supervisors were primary and secondary school teachers and that 94% were female. Teachers were selected by the Government because of their capacity to explain concepts clearly, their presence in each township, their knowledge of the language and local culture, their attention to detail, and clarity of handwriting. As most primary and secondary school teachers are females, most enumerators were also females.
- The Mission observed that 99% of the enumerators were polite when entering households and asking questions. It was further noted that most of the enumerators were patient, diligent, and hardworking, dedicated to the enumeration and wore the census uniform that was provided to them (identity card, cap, vest, t-shirt, and bag). These behavioural qualities may have been due to the fact that most of them were teachers, welcomed by respondents and able to facilitate cooperation. The use of the census uniform made the enumerators easily identifiable, hence reducing the possibility of respondents being suspicious of potential bogus data collectors.
- In most cases, enumerators were deployed to cover the Ward/Village Tract where they lived. They

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