UNFPA Strategy for the 2020 Round of Population & Housing Censuses (2015-2024)

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EVERYONE
COUNTS

…because everyone counts

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1. Introduction

The population and housing census is among the most complex and massive peacetime exercises a nation can undertake. It requires mapping the entire country, mobilizing and training a large number of enumerators, conducting a public advocacy campaign, canvassing all households, compiling vast amounts of data in paper or electronic form, and analyzing and disseminating data. By definition, *a population and housing census is an enumeration of the total population of a country, which provides data on numbers of people, their spatial distribution, age and sex structure, their living conditions and other key socioeconomic characteristics.* Such data are critical to national and sub-national development planning, tracking progress for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the distribution of infrastructure and social welfare programmes, election planning and market analysis. While national registry systems are evolving world-wide, and in some countries replacing reliance of population and housing census, for the majority of countries the population and housing census remains the primary source of data on the size and spatial distribution of the population and its related characteristics, and the central role of census within national data ecosystems is likely to remain for the foreseeable future.

The 2010 round of population and housing censuses (censuses conducted between 2005 and 2014), had the largest global coverage to date. Approximately ninety-three percent of the world population was covered, across 214 of 235 countries territories and areas. Only twenty-one countries territories and areas, mainly in Africa (eight) and the Arab States (six), did not participate [1].[1] This coverage represented a major improvement over the 2000 census round, when twenty-six countries, territories, or areas did not conduct a census.

Conditions of war, civil unrest, or inaccessibility can compromise the coverage of a population and housing census. Innovative modeling approaches to generate population estimates are gaining increasing attention for use in such conditions. Modelling techniques that integrate satellite imagery, remote sensing, micro-census and survey data offer promise for closing coverage gaps, by enabling governments to estimate basic population parameters from partial data. These developments are important for estimating population numbers, but do not replace the comprehensive data on population characteristics that are generated by a traditional census.

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[1] United Nations. Statistics Division. 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme. Available from: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/wphc/default.htm

Since its inception, one of UNFPA's core mandates has been to strengthen national capacities to ensure that population and housing censuses are of high quality and uphold international principles and standards. With programme presence in 155 countries, UNFPA provides robust and widespread support to governments for national census planning, implementation, and use of the resulting data. Institutional support includes capacity strengthening for the use of census data to track national and sub-national population dynamics, as well as spatial and social inequalities in development, including indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Population data are needed for 98 SDG indicators.

During the 2010 census round, UNFPA provided support to 135 countries, including 122 countries through, *inter alia*, technical assistance; capacity strengthening; procurement of equipment or services; financial and operational support; coordination and management of financial resources for the census on behalf of partner governments; and facilitation of South-South cooperation.

UNFPA's Strategy for the 2020 Census Round has been developed from a critical analysis of lessons learned during the 2010 round and in response to new global development frameworks. The strategy focuses on strengthening national capacities to generate, analyze, disseminate and utilize high quality, timely, relevant, and disaggregated geo-referenced census data to inform, implement, monitor, and evaluate sustainable development policies, plans and programmes for the public good.

2. Context of the 2020 Round

New Development Frameworks

The 2020 census round (2015 to 2024) is being undertaken in the context of new commitments to identify and redress inequalities between and within countries, across a wide range of development indicators. The twenty year review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 2014 [2], including its regional reviews, identified that progress towards the Millennium Development Goals occurred against a backdrop of highly unequal achievements, with persistent (or worsening) inequalities at sub-national level in a range of countries.

The ICPD beyond 2014 key areas for future action called for greater attention to redressing inequalities in development and more systematic attention to under-served populations; good governance and systems of accountability to ensure that quality data and knowledge are accessible to the public and all decision makers; and use of data on population dynamics to guide and target development investments. Echoing this attention

to inclusive development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by United Nations (UN) Member States in 2015, placed the highest priority on ensuring that "no one is left behind", and "serving first those furthest behind". In the 46th session of the UN Statistical Commission in 2015, the UN Secretary General requested a joint effort of the UN Statistics Division (UNSD), UN sister agencies, and international and regional development organizations to enhance technical assistance to National Statistical Offices (NSOs) to strengthen capacities to implement the 2020 round of Population and Housing Censuses as a fundamental priority for achieving sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda.

To meet this mandate and to address the ICPD beyond 2014's key areas for future action, national data ecosystems need to be supported and further strengthened. The population and housing census underpins national data ecosystems, providing population denominators for SDG indicators, and the master sampling frames for all national and subnational surveys. In addition, the demand for disaggregating all SDG development indicators by strata such as migration status and disability, call for the inclusion of related census questions.

Funding Challenges

A review of the 2010 census round by the UNSD and the US Census Bureau (USCB)[2], determined that census cost was the most commonly reported challenge for governments (sixty-seven percent). As countries strive to meet the requirements of timely production of high quality census data, they need to invest in new capacities and technologies. For instance, there has been a gradual transition towards increased use of administrative data systems to complement the traditional census, and potentially reduce census cost. The 2000 and 2010 rounds saw a decline in the number of traditional censuses from thirty to twenty-four in the Europe and Central Asia region, and a corresponding increase from nine to nineteen in the number of censuses using either registry data alone or in combined methodologies. While this transition provides a more sustainable modality of census