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LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2010 ROUND OF PHC AND PLANNING FOR THE 2020 ROUND TO MEET THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA[1]

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Lessons learned from the 2010 round of PHC and planning for the 2020 round to meet the post-2015 development agenda

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A. Demographic and Social Statistics Branch—United Nations Statistics Division

Conducting a population and housing census is a fundamental statistical activity of a country. Population and housing censuses generate national data on population size, demographic, social and economic characteristics as well as their distribution, which are at the base of almost all major planning decisions. The UN Statistics Division (UNSD), as the secretariat of the decennial *World Population and Housing Census Programme*, has supported national efforts to conduct censuses through the provision of international census guidelines and technical assistance. It has also closely monitored the implementation of censuses worldwide under the authority of the UN Statistical Commission, which is the apex entity of the global statistical system.

Based on the review of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme which spanned the period 2005 to 2014, this brief note 1) summarizes the experiences of demographic data collection through population and housing censuses in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); 2) discusses challenges of existing data sources to fulfill the needs of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, and 3) recommends how to strengthen demographic evidence base through concrete actions.

B. Experiences of demographic data collection through population and housing censuses in the context of the MDGs

Among the key essential features of population and housing censuses are "individual enumeration" and "universality within a defined territory" (United Nations, 2015a)[2]. Thus, by their nature, population and housing censuses produce the figure of the total population in a country, which can serve as a denominator for many development indicators that are often expressed in the form of the proportion in the total population or per capita. Population and housing censuses can also provide the sample framework without which the design of necessary and accurate sample household surveys would be adversely affected.

A review of the 2010 World Census Programme showed that during the last census round, 214 countries or areas conducted a population and housing census, enumerating about 93 per cent of the world population (United Nations, 2015a)[3]. The peak years in the 2010 round of censuses were 2010 and 2011, when 43 and 63 population and housing censuses took place, respectively. This suggests that population and housing censuses of the 2010 round could collect the data of total population from most of the countries in the world with reasonably close reference dates.

In order to enhance the international comparability of information collected by population and housing censuses, the United Nations, through development of international census guidelines, recommends a set of topics on which countries should collect data in their national censuses. These topics

[2] The essential features of population and housing censuses, which have been internationally acknowledged, are 1) individual enumeration, 2) universality within a defined territory, 3) simultaneity, 4) defined periodicity and 5) capacity to produce small area statistics.

[3] Twenty-one countries and areas, mostly in African and Asia and many of them are politically unstable, did not participate in the round, which resulted in an estimated 7 per cent of the world population not being enumerated during the census round.

are included in *the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*. There are a few core topics that would allow the production of MDG indicators from censuses. Table 1 shows that in most countries where the information is available, censuses served as an important source of information to generate several demographic or socio-economic MDG indicators, except for those related to mortality and literacy on which relatively fewer countries collected the information.

TABLE 1. NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF COUNTRIES OR AREAS THAT INCLUDED MDG RELATED CENSUS TOPICS

Topic	Countries	Percentage
Demographic topics		
Sex	124	100
Age	124	100
Marital status	122	98
Household deaths	48	39
Maternal and paternal orphanhood*	27	22
Socioeconomic topics		
Literacy	75	60
School attendance	117	94
Educational attainment	105	85
Activity status	124	100
Occupation	120	97
Industry	114	92
Status in employment	113	91

Source: United Nations (2013a)
* Non-core

TABLE 2: NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF COUNTRIES THAT INCLUDED MDG AND OTHER RELATED TOPICS

Topic	Countries	Percentage
Living quarters-type of	92	74
Water supply system	75	60
Drinking water-main source of	47	38
Toilet-type of	99	80
Sewage disposal	61	49
Bathing facilities	64	52
Kitchen-availability of	46	37
Fuel used for cooking	75	60
Solid waste disposal-main type of	46	37
Tenure	107	86

Source: United Nations (2013b)

C. KEY CHALLENGES OF EXISTING DATA SOURCES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by world leaders in September 2015 demonstrate how central statistics are to development. However, the new development agenda poses enormous challenges for the statistical community to make it as an effective framework under which

progress towards the achievement sustainable development can be closely monitored with appropriate statistical evidence.

First and foremost, the SDGs comprise 17 Goals and 169 targets, covering much broader policy issues, compared with the MDGs. Also, large data gaps exist in many development areas covered by the SDGs. For instance, there are a number of newly added or expanded areas to the development framework, such as disaster management or governance where statistical sources vary and statistical concepts for measurement require much refinement. Given the diversity of what is covered under the SDGs, it is obvious that the data required for SDG monitoring cannot be generated by a single source such as population and housing censuses. It is of paramount importance, therefore, that countries have a well-integrated statistical system under which different statistical activities can be coordinated.

With the principle of "leaving no one behind", inclusiveness, equality, dignity and prosperity are major objectives of the SDGs. This has important implication for data requirements. The SDGs demand the monitoring of the targets not only at the national level, but also at sub-regions or within/by sub-groups of populations (such as persons with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants, etc). While population and housing censuses are a well-established source of information that allows the production of small area statistics or disaggregation of data by diverse population characteristics, the data collection by this means usually takes place only once in ten years. Therefore, it is likely that the frequency and disaggregation required for SDG monitoring would demand large investments in data collection through surveys. When data of sub-populations are collected from multiple data sources, caution should be exercised in terms of the consistency in concepts and measurements applied, so as to ensure the comparability of data.

The SDGs were adopted amid growing expectations for "real-time data" and "data revolution" to aid fast decision making. The advancement of modern technologies has fueled the demands for data to be available more swiftly and accurately. While it is anticipated that progress towards the achievement of SDGs be monitored and reported frequently, if not annually, existing sources of demographic data are hardly equipped to respond to such demands. It is worth noting that the last decade saw renewed interest and investment in strengthening civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems in developing regions. However, to date, few developing countries have been able to produce reliable vital statistics annually. Lack of well-functioning civil registration systems results in serious gaps in demographic data, especially of vital statistics. At the same time, household sample surveys have been conducted with different focus and at varying frequencies among countries in developing countries.

D. How can the demographic evidence base be strengthened?

The monitoring and reporting on the progress of SDGs will require large volumes of reliable and comparable data for the compilation of the SDG indicators at both national and global levels. In order to meet such unprecedented challenges, significant and sustainable investments are needed in statistical capacity at all levels. In particular, national statisticians should be empowered with advanced knowledge on demographic techniques and analysis in order to produce quality demographic indicators which are essential for a number of SDG indicators. The strengthening of national statistical capacity is particularly important, given the strong emphasis on country ownership in SDG monitoring processes.

As the number of policy areas addressed by SDGs is significantly large, the importance of population and housing censuses as a key source of demographic statistics should be reiterated. Censuses can be used as a source to produce statistics for not only fertility or mortality indicators, but also migration variables, in addition to the information on the total population and its distribution. Countries should have regular population and housing censuses using international methodological guidelines the

principles outlined therein by the United Nations. The increased use of modern technologies (such as GIS, PDA, computer tablets and the Internet) in all stages of the census operation during the 2010 census round is a welcome trend, that contributes to improvements in the quality and timeliness of statistics, and that should be further encouraged during the 2020 census round.

Strengthening of the civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system should be also a priority in advancing the demographic evidence base in a country. The civil registration system is often perceived to be an instrument for providing a birth or death certificate and nothing beyond that. More advocacy efforts are needed to garner the support of citizens and decision makers who are not fully aware of the full value of the system. The infrastructure of CRVS administration can be improved in many countries by creating coordinating mechanisms among various stakeholders, but typically between civil registrars' offices and statistical offices which receive statistical outputs out of administrative information.

Among demographic statistics, international migration statistics are considered the poorest in terms of quality and availability, while the demands for the data continue to grow in the globalized world. It is highly critical to invest more in methodological developments in this area. At the same time, fuller use of all relevant administrative records (such as data on work permits or visas, and border control statistics) should be explored and facilitated. International migration is also an area where the application of big data could be explored. Some attempts have been already made to capture the mobility of people within and across national borders, using data from mobile phone operations or social media networking.

Lastly, many countries still do not have a sustainable coherent programme of household sample surveys. At the national level, sample surveys are often administered by different authorities or ministries with varying focuses and frequencies. Consequently, the produced outcomes may not be necessarily comparable. In the era of SDG monitoring, the demands for survey data is likely to grow significantly. It is highly recommended that every country has a coherent coordination mechanism, for the routine production of basic demographic statistics.

E. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Although it is rather limited in terms of frequency, population and housing censuses served as an important statistical base for monitoring progress towards the achievement of MDGs. Censuses produced the data on total population size that was used as a denominator for a number of development indicators, and provided a sample framework essential for planning household sample surveys. Population and housing censuses also generated information to produce some MDG indicators.

The adoption of the SDGs generates enormous demands for quality and timely statistics for monitoring progress towards achievement of the goals. Consequently, a single data source will not suffice for the computation of the wide range of SDG indicators. Hence computation of all the indicators would require a coherent and integrate statistical system under which all sources of data, including censuses, CRVS, and surveys, are effectively coordinated. Furthermore, the new development agenda calls for a greater level of collaboration across countries and international organizations.

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