On the future of census

Alessio Cangiano & Eduard Jongstra

For

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Key question:
Is the census still “fit for purpose”?

• Decreasing cost-effectiveness:
  – Constraints of public finances;
  – Infrequent periodicity;
  – Limited utilization of census data;

• Concerns about the accuracy, relevance and coverage of census data

• Challenges in capturing new types of living arrangements and patterns of mobility

• Systematic under-enumeration of some population groups
A stock-take of census methodologies

• PAPI: Interview- and paper-based
  – Still widely used in combination with CAPI

• CATI: Interview- and telephone-based
  – Typically only in combination with other methods

• CAPI: Interview- and computer (tablet)-based
  – Rapidly gaining in popularity

• MBE: Mail-based self-Enumeration
  – Usually combined with other methods for complementarity or follow-up

• CAWI: Web-based self-Enumeration
  – Only where high internet penetration exists, even then, with varied success

• RBC: Register-based census
  – Increasingly seen as the “silver bullet”, but limited so far to countries with good administrative data systems

• Hybrid or combined census
  – Various combinations of methodologies
Countries by type of census.

Source: UNFPA Global Census Tracker (as of July 2022).
Countries conducting traditional or combined censuses by method of enumeration (2020 census round)

- No Information: 25.7%
- Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI): 44.6%
- Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI): 4.1%
- Mixed Methods: 17.1%
- Paper and Pencil Interviewing (PAPI): 8.6%

Source: UNFPA Global Census Tracker (as of July 2022).
Key considerations for census innovation

• Reduction of per capita cost of a census
• Faster census data processing
• Improved timeliness of census data dissemination
• Improved quality of census data
• Real time monitoring of census operations
• Automated enumeration area delineation
• Potentials of geo-spatial data analysis
• (Doing away with ten-year census intervals)
Key issues regarding “classic” census funding

• Lack of financial resources is one of the top three challenges experienced by statistical agencies in the conduct of the 2020 census round (UNSD, 2020)
• Field work represents around 40% of the total census costs
• Uncertainty and delays of funding affect quality of census operations
• Dependence on foreign donors
• International support for censuses and surveys has been stagnant
• Rapid population growth pushing up the cost of census enumeration (Africa)
Census in the Post-COVID era

- Postponed censuses may suffer from budget cuts
- Issues may arise regarding representativeness and comparability of census results
- Periodicity of census operations is affected
- Donor fatigue and multiple competing priorities
- Acceleration towards non-interview-based census methodologies
Prerequisites for a register-based census

• well established and comprehensive set of administrative registers
• accompanying institutional and legal frameworks to support access to and use of administrative data for census purposes
• Ways and means to link different administrative registers at record level
Percentage of children under age 5 registered by the civil registration system by type of 2020 round census, selected countries*.

Note (*): UNFPA Program Countries which completed the 2020 round census as of July 2022.
Source: UNICEF birth registration data and UNFPA Global Census Tracker (as of July 2022).
Concluding observations

- The vast majority of countries will continue to do field-based census operations
- But increasingly using technologies that facilitate field-based census data collection
- And exploring hybrid methodologies – when and where feasible
- Transitioning to register-based census is likely to take many years for most countries
- The coverage and quality of CRVS systems is a good indicator – though not the only one - for readiness to transition to register-based census.
- The costs of refurbishing and maintaining administrative data systems to suit census purposes must be taken into consideration