

An Evaluation of the 2010 Round of Censuses-The Liberian Experience

Liberia has had a total of four population censuses in its 160 years history. These are the 1962, 1974, 1984 and 2008 National population censuses. The 1984 Census which was held 24 years prior to the 2008 Census was never published and the onset of the 14 year civil crisis saw the loss of the national data including the 1984 data set. Besides, other demographic and socio-economic data needed by the newly democratic government of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf for socioeconomic development planning were limited or non existence. Hence, the need to conduct a fresh census could not have been over-emphasized. As such the Government of President Sirleaf decided in November 2006 to participate in the 2010 Round of Censuses by conducting the 2008 National Population and Housing Census. This paper outlines some of the achievements, constraints and challenges faced in the implementation of the 2008 National Population and Housing Census.

Background

Population and Housing censuses are essential tools for policy, development planning and monitoring purposes. Data on socio-economic indicators derived from censuses are extensively used as inputs for result-based management and tracking of progress towards national goals (such as those set in PRS) and international goals such as MDGs. In Liberia, the objectives of the 2008 Census amongst others included the following:

- a) To update the population database, i.e., improve knowledge on the social, demographic and economic characteristics of the population of Liberia;
- b) Arrive at better understanding of population and development inter-relationship in order to elaborate coherent social and economic development programme; and
- c) To establish a national database for monitoring and evaluation of socio-economic development programmes such as the poverty reduction strategy (PRS), the County Development Agendas and the MDGs.

Censuses by their very nature provide sufficient data detail and disaggregation (e.g. location, gender, age and household size) which are invaluable for planning and monitoring national and local level programme implementation. It is also well recognized that combining census data and survey-based information will allow detailed analysis of geographic patterns as well as socio-economic characteristics of the population which help in development planning. The preliminary results of the 2008 census

complemented by other national surveys (LDHS & CWIQ) were used extensively in the preparation and finalization of the PRS and CDAs.

The 2008 Census preliminary results put the total population at **3,489,072** and were released on June 20, 2008 by H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia.

Implementation Updates

LISGIS is the National Statistics Office with the mandate to implement national population and housing censuses in Liberia. In 2006, the Government of Liberia requested the UNFPA to provide technical assistance for the preparation of a Road Map for a National Population and Housing Census to be held in 2008. In this regard, the government passed the census act in May 2007 which gave LISGIS the go ahead to start preparations for the successful conduct of the census. In line with the Road Map LISGIS created the following key units/committees to undertake the planning and implementation:

- Formation of the National Census Commission;
- Organization of the Census Development Partners;
- Formation of Census Technical committee;
- Cartographic/Mapping Planning Unit;
- Publicity and advocacy Unit; and
- Census Field Operation Unit etc.

The census implementation has so far gone through four phases. These are census preparation/planning, geographic mapping/delineation of EAs, field data collection/enumeration and data processing (including entry and editing). The actual census enumeration was conducted nationwide from 21st to 30th March 2008. Other phases such as data analysis, publication and dissemination are still outstanding but are on course.

In all, the sum of US\$5,642,8009.00 was budgeted for the conduct of the 2008 Census. So far the amount of US\$6,380,959.00 has been mobilized and the amount of US\$1,903,720 is required to complete the analysis, publication and dissemination. The 2008 Census received financial assistance from the Government of Liberia, UNFPA, USAID, UNDP, UNICEF, UNMIL, AfDB, PARIS21 and UNHCR.

Lessons Learnt & Challenges

Implementation of the 2008 Census provided LISGIS with a lot of experiences in managing such a huge and complex undertaking. Some key lessons learnt:

- Great interest by the government for the conduct of the census which meant political support from the leadership. Timely release of the preliminary report has translated into high morale for the nascent LISGIS;
- Inadequate capacity to conduct/manage data compilation at LISGIS before the 2008 census; but the census exercise has resulted in strengthening the capacity of both staff competencies through training and the acquisition of modern data management equipment and tools;
- Resource mobilization:- Funds were not readily available when needed and as such implementation schedules were impacted;
- Logistics support and access to enumeration areas:- The 2008 census is the largest and most complex undertaking that LISGIS in its short history (less than 2 years) has undertaken. Inadequate logistical support coupled with bad roads in the interior are some of the challenges encountered; and
- Implementation complexities:- High population mobility, large numbers of internally displaced populations (as a result of the 14 year conflict), complex local administrative systems, infrastructural facilities needed for the census was absent or not functioning and the maneuverings of interest groups and political players, added more dimensions to an already complex exercise.

Conclusion

As earlier mentioned, the 2008 Census has provided LISGIS with a host of achievements as well as lessons learnt. Key ones worth mentioning are the following:

- Baseline data with sufficient disaggregation and detail to support programme implementation monitoring and evaluation;
- An up-to-date household sampling frame managed by LISGIS and accessible to stakeholders critical for national and local level sample surveys implementation;

- Enhanced capacities in LISGIS for undertaking and managing data compilation exercises. These gains will be consolidated with the implementation of the five-year National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS);
- Through the various 2008 census working groups and other coordination mechanisms, LISGIS has been able to build strong links with its development partners including those in the international community. This would serve it well in its desire to collaborate on key statistical fronts; and
- Successful implementation of the 2008 census will enhance LISGIS' ability to start preparations for the next national census slated for in 2018.