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**Identification and consultations  
with census data users**

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## **1. Introduction**

The user consultation process in terms of census products is a major factor in the development of a dissemination programme. The user consultation should always be carried out at the census planning stage. The work done at this stage of the census is important in achieving the objective that the census is relevant to users. It is also a major indicator of the quality of the census.

## **2. Objective of user consultations**

The overall aim of the dissemination phase is to provide information to assist users to make more informed decisions. In working towards this objective, the dissemination phase should use the results of the evaluation of the output from one census to consolidate and improve the product range for the next census. The focus should be on data relevance, quality and timeliness of delivery.

It is likely that the user consultation process will commence with the census agency stating its view on the nature of output to be produced. This view can be developed from the evaluation of the previous census and enhanced by the knowledge of recent developments. However, there will need to be some flexibility to adapt the range of products and services to meet current and emerging needs in the market place that only become identified in the consultation process.

The dissemination programme must deliver relevant product and services to users. This is the core statistical objective of undertaking a census.. To this end user consultation will assist the census authorities in planning for a census that, within the resources available, is as responsive as possible to user needs in terms of the collection, processing, tabulation, storage and availability of meaningful data. It will also foster a wider and more informed understanding of and support for census plans and activities.

### **3. Identification of users**

The most obvious stakeholders of the census are the people and organizations who use the output of the census to assist them to understand some aspect of the society from which the census information has been collected. Users can be classified as follows:

#### *(a) Policy makers, government organizations, and provincial and local governments*

In the majority of countries, government ministries and local governments will be the major users of census data. User consultations can provide an opportunity to educate the staff from these ministries and government offices about the uses and limitations of census data. The following items are examples of information sought by this group of users:

- Information on the size, distribution and characteristics of a country's population is essential for describing and assessing its economic, social and demographic circumstances and for developing sound policies and programmes aimed at fostering the welfare of a country and its population;
- Census data are important for the demarcation of constituencies and the allocation of representation on governing bodies;
- Census information is also crucial for electoral boundary delimitation: redrawing of electoral constituency boundaries;
- Housing census produces benchmark statistics on the current housing situation and is vital for developing national housing and human settlements programmes; for formulation of housing policy and programmes; and for assessing housing conditions and quality of life.
- Population and housing census is also important in emergency planning for response to natural hazards or post-conflict situations.

#### *(b) Researchers*

This group of users deals mainly with scientific analysis and appraisal of the composition, distribution and past and prospective growth of the population. The following items are examples of analyses that could be done based on census data: the changing patterns of urban/rural concentration; the development of urbanized areas; the geographical distribution of the population according to such variables as occupation and education; the evolution of the sex and age structure of the population; the mortality and fertility differentials for various population groups; and the economic and social characteristics of the population and the labour force.

*(c) Individuals and institutions in business, industry and labour*

In addition to those uses given above, the census has many important uses for individuals and institutions in business, industry and labour. Reliable estimates of consumer demand for variety of goods and services depend on accurate information on the size of the population in subnational areas and its distribution at least by sex and age. Census generates statistics on the size and characteristics of the supply of labour needed for the production and distribution of such commodities and services. Such statistics on the local availability of labour may be important in determining the location and organization of enterprises. Furthermore, for construction industry and financing institutions and manufacturers of housing fixtures and equipment and household appliances the census can be used to assess the possible demand for housing and perceive the scope of their activities within the overall programme.

*(d) Media*

Another group of key importance is members of the mass media, such as print, radio and TV journalists. A focus on consultation with and on training such personalities is important because they can carry the message to many other people. This will assist in the general raising of awareness in the population at large, as well as in generating an awareness of the census among the government, academic and business users who may not have contact with the statistical office on a regular basis.

*(e) Stakeholders within the census agency*

It is important that stakeholders within the census agency are involved as a matter of course in all phases of the consultation process. They should be given the opportunity to reply to questionnaires and participate in the detailed product proposals at the contemplative stage.

#### **4. Managing the user consultation process**

The user consultation process should also seek views of census data users on the strategic goals and directions for the census dissemination phase. The overall aim of the census consultation can be broken down into three as follows:

- (a) to better understand overall user reactions to the current broad direction of the dissemination phase;
- (b) to understand user reactions to specific products and services;
- (c) to report on the outcome of the research and make recommendations to users and census agency management for the dissemination phase.

The consultation can be carried out in two stages.

*Stage 1: Consultation on the broad directions*

The dissemination strategy should be provided in publication form, accompanied by a questionnaire. The publication and the questionnaire will usually be in hardcopy form, although some countries may wish to supplement this with an Internet publication, supported by e-mail responses.

This first publication can provide the goals, the strategies to achieve the goals and the broad directions of the dissemination phase. The self-enumerated questionnaire can comprise two parts:

- (a) questions relating to the client's use of current census products and services;
- (b) questions relating to the strategies proposed by the census agency for the products and services of the next census.

To facilitate later work, users should also be asked whether they wish to be involved in later rounds of the consultative process.

Much of the information sought at this stage will be qualitative commentary. Information may be available on the quantity of products purchased (or accessed, if products are not sold) by each user. This information can be used to develop some weighted measures of the strength of views according to the nature of the client.

### *Stage 2: Consultation on specific products and services*

Based on the results of the stage 1 consultation, more specific proposals can be developed. A second publication and questionnaire can be mailed out (or supplied through the Internet, as appropriate) to those clients that expressed interest in further consultation. This publication presents the proposed content of products and services that will become available, indicative prices and indicative release dates. The questionnaire can seek detailed information on the content of specific products.

In addition to the mail-out of publications and questionnaires, face-to-face sessions can be conducted with key users, where possible, to obtain more detailed feedback.

Users should also be consulted on whether they prefer printed and/or electronic products. There are still many users who would prefer to receive census results in printed form. Since the cost of producing census products in various formats, for example, printed, in computer media or online, can be high, it is recommended that countries consider very carefully the forms in which the census results are disseminated. (P&R, Para. 3.4)

Some data users will need specialized products that the census organization is not planning to produce as part of the general census programme. In such cases, it is recommended that the census organization establish a service to meet such specialized requests, usually on a cost reimbursement basis. (P&R, Para. 3.4)

Reactions from clients can be sought against a number of specific criteria, such as the following:

- (a) content and functionality;
- (b) views on, and reactions to, pricing of products and services;
- (c) importance of timeliness;
- (d) client support;
- (e) usefulness and appropriateness of the census data and products.

## **5. Tools to be used for product design**

The user consultation process can use 3 tools for product design conducted in three phases, some of which will overlap. These are: (a) Qualitative studies; (b) Quantitative studies; and (c) Detailed product design.

While the research should commence well before the enumeration period, it may be possible for detailed product design (for more complex products) to be undertaken during the processing period. However, it would be desirable for the detailed design of the basic output products to be completed in sufficient time to minimize the lag between completion of validation of processing and release of the product.

### *(a) Qualitative studies*

The aim of the qualitative research is to better understand the reactions of clients to the current census dissemination programme, including products, services and their delivery. This contributes to recommendations for the next census dissemination programme.



Qualitative studies are most commonly undertaken in the form of focus groups (i.e., small group discussions moderated by a market research specialist). Focus groups can be established to obtain qualitative information about the performance of current products and services. Detailed current product plans provide the starting point. The groups are usually general in nature, covering a range of clients and products. However, there may be the need for more specialized groups to deal with key market segments, as well as with individual products, in particular flagship or premium commercial products.

Where appropriate, larger-scale conferences and/or workshops can be held to allow consultation with clients and users from the central and regional offices of the census agency. Focus groups and workshops for internal clients provide an effective forum for innovation and generating proposals for new products, as well as providing internal staff with the chance to have input into the final product design.

According to the United Nations (2001), approximately six months should be allowed for this phase of consultation.

*(b) Quantitative studies*

Quantitative studies and the detailed product design will have some overlap and will give a broader base to client contacts. Quantitative studies may make use of client mailing lists that have been built up by the census agency over the past census cycle (e.g., client databases and newsletter subscriber lists).

A variety of questionnaires may be required, including a general questionnaire and others focusing on:

- A particular product or service;
- Particular market segments or industry sectors;
- Users' technical requirements (available formats and media and industry standard software in use).

The major tasks in the quantitative research phase are:

- Determining detailed methodology;
- Developing questionnaires, covering letters, newsletter articles the response mechanisms;
- Conduct surveys;
- Analyse and prepare reports.

According to the United Nations (2001), approximately 8 – 10 months should be allowed for this phase of consultation.

*(c) Detailed product design*

Based on the results of the qualitative and quantitative studies, decisions will need to be made on the appropriate product mix.

Within the census office, approval should be sought for the detailed product design, along with submissions for appropriate funding (where this is required from government funding rather than being obtained through user-pays arrangements).

Prototypes of the various products can be prepared and follow-up user consultation undertaken through seminars and mail-outs. Consultation will also need to take place on the classification details clients require from the census, some of which (such as income ranges) have an impact on the final census form design.

The major tasks in the detailed product design phase are: Determining overall product mix; Developing product plans for corporate approval; Developing prototypes; Devising classification proposals; Consulting users; and Finalizing product design.

According to the United Nations (2001), approximately 12 months should be allowed for this phase.

## **6. The business plan**

A business plan is developed after extensive consultation with external clients and the agency's stakeholders. Even if the census results are not being sold on the open market (i.e., no revenue is required or expected), a plan should be created showing the costs, the expected number of units to be created and the expected principal users of the products and services.

A management steering group can be established to review on a regular basis the development of the plan and to monitor revenue and expenditure under the plan. The business plan should cover the costs of the full range of dissemination activities. These include the costs associated with data validation, output systems development and product development and production. Costs associated with marketing and ongoing support of all census products through the complete census cycle should also be included.

To assess the demand for data, an information paper can be prepared. The information paper should invite submissions from users on what topics should be included in the census. If feasible, the release of the information paper can be supported by seminars held with users. Seminars provide the census agency with an opportunity to meet the users of census data and to provide them with an indication of what topics can and cannot be realistically included in the census. In the majority of countries, other government ministries will be the major users of census data and these seminars provide an opportunity to educate the staff from these ministries about the uses and limitations of census data.

## **References**

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