

United Nations Regional Workshop on the 2020 World Programme on Population and Housing  
Censuses: International Standards and Contemporary Technologies

8 - 11 May, Lagos, Nigeria

**Conclusions and recommendations**

1. The workshop was conducted by the United Nations Statistics Division in partnership with the African Development Bank and Regional and national offices of UNFPA, and in cooperation with the National Population Commission of Nigeria. Population and housing census methodologists and managers from Angola, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe participated in the workshop.
2. In the opening session, Mr. Srdjan Mrkić, Chief of Demographic Statistics in the United Nations Statistics Division outlined the importance of promoting international standards and guidelines and emphasized the major points of the 2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, as adopted by the ECOSOC in 2015.
3. The opening statement of Mr. Eze Duruiheoma, Chairman of the National Population Commission of Nigeria, as delivered by Dr. Abu Issah Noah, Director of Census in the National Population Commission of Nigeria, commended the United Nations Statistics Division for organizing the workshop at no better time and challenged the distinguished participants to be frank in all discussions while coming up with an appropriate framework and recommendations that will improve census taking in Africa.
4. Chairing the workshop rotated on daily basis. Mr. Srdjan Mrkic, UNSD, chaired on the first day; Mr. Nyakassi M.B. Sanyang, of the Gambia, on the second; Ms. Noemi Rute Lima Ramos, of Cape Verde, on the third, and Mr. Inuwa Jalingo, of Nigeria, on the fourth day.
5. The participants expressed their appreciation for the organization of the workshop. They emphasized that the workshop was quite timely taking into consideration the momentum that is being built in regard to the implementation of the ECOSOC Resolution on the 2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, stipulating that each Member State conducts at least one population and housing census in the period 2015-2024.
6. In that context, the participants outlined that the workshop is timely also from the point of view of the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the role it assigns to statistics in general and population and housing censuses in particular. The participants also noted the fact that the African Union inaugurated the 2063 Development Agenda, placing additional emphasis on the need for accurate quantifying instruments for monitoring its implementation.
7. The workshop welcomed the revised version of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing* as well as the revised *Handbook on the Management of Population and Housing Censuses*. The participants re-iterated that the *Principles and Recommendations* represent a cornerstone for national census planning and implementation of the 2020 round of population and housing censuses. It was noted that some of the participating countries had started their preparations for their 2020 round censuses before the release of the latest set of

recommendations; it was stressed that such countries should make all efforts to comply with the recommendations although that may not be possible to do in full.

8. The workshop took note of and expressed appreciation for the global and regional activities aimed at executing the 2020 World Programme of Population and Housing Censuses as presented by the workshop's organizers and partners, namely the United Nations Statistics Division – UNSD and the United Nations Population Fund – UNFPA. The participants welcomed this coordinated initiatives and the efforts invested by the contributing partners, both in the context of providing internationally adopted methodological framework for conducting population and housing censuses and in the context of directly supporting efforts to enhance national capacities in the field of census-taking and implementation of international standards.
9. Some participants outlined the fact that population and housing censuses in their countries tend to be politicized, to the extent that even local community leaders interfere with census operations and attempt to inflate the population numbers of their respective jurisdictions in an attempt to increase government funding. Oftentimes censuses are hampered by forthcoming elections and accompanying political tensions. The workshop concluded that all efforts should be made by governments and development partners in terms of ensuring the integrity and independence of census taking.
10. Discussing the timing of the census in participating countries, the workshop noted that census dates are scattered all over the current census decade (2015-2024) which has adverse effects on regional and international comparison of national census statistics. The workshop recognized that setting a census date is the sole prerogative of each individual country; however, it stressed the need for countries in the continent to conduct censuses in years ending in "0" or at a time as near to it as possible to allow for a more meaningful assessment of the movements of population across national borders.
11. The workshop outlined the haphazard manner in which census funding is managed in participating countries; funding is often subject to the vagaries of economic and other phenomena, such as recessions, epidemics, civil unrests and humanitarian crises that recently adversely affected census funding in several countries. In addition, the workshop recommended that a comprehensive census project document always be produced and submitted to the government and donors to ensure their support and for funds mobilization.
12. In that context, the workshop noted with concern, the continuity on census taking in participating countries is jeopardized, as documented by a growing number of countries that are not able to conduct censuses in regular intervals. Thus, the workshop concluded that a much stronger legislative framework needs to be put in place ensuring that conducting a census is binding to both the government and the national statistical authorities in well-defined and respected intervals.
13. The workshop expressed specific interest in the establishment of Centers of Excellence for Population and Housing Censuses throughout Africa and encouraged their prompt installation and functioning. While doing so, the workshop also expressed concerns regarding the late start of these centers, as the 2020 round of censuses already started and none of the two centers is yet operational. In the context of the initiatives for securing portable enumeration devices that can

be used in more than one country, these centers would be instrumental in terms of coordination and implementation of this exchange – hence, the workshop urged the partners to accelerate their establishment.

14. The workshop discussed at length the methodology for the forthcoming population and housing census of the host country, Nigeria. Faced with increasing skepticism regarding the accuracy of the census counts, the National Population Commission of Nigeria, the agency in charge of conducting population and housing censuses is planning to use biometrics for each enumerated person (three fingerprints and iris scan) in order to ensure there is no duplicate enumeration and that each person is enumerated only once. The workshop expressed concerns that such an approach does not exactly comply with international recommendations for the 2020 round; that the costs of conducting prolonged interviews with sophisticated equipment would be very steep; and that such an approach raises a number of ethical issues related to ensuring the confidentiality of individual information as per the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* and to the commitment of using individual information solely for statistical purposes.
15. In addition, the workshop noted with concern that the census date for the next census in Nigeria has not been set yet nor has the government issued the census proclamation, despite the fact that the census is already one year overdue (the previous was taken in 2006).
16. Discussing the role of UNFPA, the workshop noted the results of the independent assessment of UNFPA's contribution to the use of census statistics for policy and decision making that took place in 2015. The assessment focused on lessons learnt in terms of sustainable use of census data, census ownership, south-south cooperation, among other topics. The workshop concluded that this assessment should be circulated to all regional and national UNFPA partners.
17. The workshop also noted UNFPA's current support for census taking in the 2020 round of censuses, more specifically, the production of draft manual for digital censuses and organizing CSPRO training. The participants urged an even more active role of UNFPA at both regional and national levels; the workshop noted that UNFPA does not provide substantive technical support to all the participating countries at the same level. While several countries outlined extremely strong support received by UNFPA, others reported that such support was largely missing. The workshop concluded that both the national statistical offices and UNFPA country and regional office need to establish a much closer relationship to take advantage of the existing mechanisms and tools in support of census taking.
18. In the context of these conclusions and recommendations regarding a number of issues that are pertinent to all the countries in the context of contemporary approaches to population and housing censuses and the need to specify the technological and methodological requirements in a strategic manner, the workshop is proposing convening of a strategic regional meeting on the digital census taking in Africa with the goal of identifying best joint approaches in providing harmonized and shared tools for census taking. It could be organized under the joint leadership of UNSD and UNFPA with the collaboration of UNECA, AfDB and any other stakeholders.
19. In discussing operational aspects of population and housing censuses in the 2020 round, the participants outlined concerns regarding the availability of competent work force for enumerators. This is a particularly relevant point taking into consideration that tablet computers

are expected to be widely used and working with them can be an obstacle to particular classes of potential enumerators not familiar with touch screens. The workshop also noted that the selection of enumerators was oftentimes subject to biased approach by census officials and that efforts need to be put in place to ensure fair selection of the most competent enumerators.

20. Quality assurance of all the segments of the population and housing censuses is elaborated in both the *Principles and Recommendations* and the *Handbook on Management*, the workshop noted. In that context, it recommended that measures to ensure high quality of both the processes and the outputs needs to be embedded in all population and housing censuses in the participating countries in a permanent, sequential (that is, that each subsequent phase of the census can be initiated only when the previous one met the quality standards) and concurrent manner. In that context, comprehensive census quality assessment reports need to be produced by each country that undertakes a census in the 2020 round, following the quality assessment dimensions presented in the UNSD guidelines.
21. The workshop took copious note of the list of internationally recommended topics, definitions and classifications for population and housing censuses as presented in the revised set of the *Principles and Recommendations*. The workshop concluded that certain concepts – such as, for example, usually resident population – might not be applicable in some of the participating countries in the 2020 round of censuses due to a combination of increased migration and cultural and traditional approaches to family ties.
22. In the same context, the workshop concluded that the new concept of work, as adopted by the Conference of Labor Statisticians in 2013 requires additional methodological guidance for its implementation in the 2020 census round.
23. The workshop also raised the issue of disability characteristics as a core topic in the latest revision of the international recommendations, outlining that this set of questions placed considerable burden in the 2010 round censuses. The workshop also concluded that for the 2020 round of censuses, additional guidance is needed for the purpose of harmonizing questions on disability along the lines of functional limitations rather than physical disability.
24. The workshop clearly underscored the fact that mapping is one of the critical phases of the census, both in terms of planning and execution. While considerable experience in the application of Geographical Information System (GIS) has been acquired in the 2010 census round, there is still a need to specifically focus on this census component due to the extensive workload and complexity. The workshop noted that all participating countries will use GIS technology for the purpose of mapping operations for the 2020 round of censuses. In that context, the workshop recommended that during the mapping exercise, efforts are made in identifying areas of the country that are lacking either consistent supply of electricity or internet access, in order to ensure that appropriate backup measures are taken during census fieldwork, especially when mobile devices are used.
25. In terms of using tablet computers for field data collection, the majority of participating countries intend to apply this approach. In that context, the workshop recommended and urged that the current initiatives by the regional development partners in enabling sharing of these devices between countries – and some exchanges are taking place at this very moment – are instituted as

a matter of priority as they make considerable sense in terms of experiences in 2010 round of censuses.

26. In the same context, the workshop emphasized the need to exchange existing knowledge on the use of tablet computers in surveys and censuses, especially from the point of view of testing the functioning and features of the Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) and advantages and disadvantages of different software solutions used to implement this application.
27. The workshop recognized that the use of tablet computers is already quite widespread in the countries in the region, as is the use of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology. The essential motive for the use of CAPI and portable devices lies in the fact that it results in cost savings, faster processing of data and improved quality of resulting statistics.
28. At the same time, the use of this approach has to take into consideration several issues that countries outlined while using portable devices and that need to be properly addressed well ahead of time, such as the battery life, loss of devices, extensive additional training of enumerators and, of course, the initial cost of acquiring them. In addition, enumerators carrying contemporary devices are often targeted by criminals, requiring mobilization of security mechanisms and increased costs.
29. The workshop noted with satisfaction that a careful strategy has been developed in participating countries that introduced CAPI and portable devices in their data collection practices: use them in surveys first, adjust and correct procedures and practices, and only then consider using them in full-fledged population and housing censuses.
30. The workshop paid particular attention to the relationship between the population and housing censuses and the generation of the Sustainable Development Goals indicators. It concluded that census statistics are critical for producing SDG indicators; a number of indicators cannot be produced without census data in the numerator. A much larger number of indicators cannot be generated without census statistics as denominator. The workshop also concluded that countries need to undertake a thorough and detailed mapping of SDG indicators in terms of their sources, availability, timeliness and frequency.
31. Finally, the participants welcomed the organization of this workshop, emphasizing its value at this stage of the 2020 round of censuses and urged the organizing partners to organize follow-up workshops throughout the census decade.