

Engendering Population Censuses

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1. Background

Malawi is a landlocked country south of the equator in sub-Saharan Africa. It is bordered to the north and northeast by the United Republic of Tanzania; to the east, south, and southwest by the People's Republic of Mozambique; and to the west and northwest by the Republic of Zambia.

The country is 901 kilometres long and ranges in width from 80 to 161 kilometres. The total area is 118,484 square kilometres of which 94,276 square kilometres is land area. The remaining area is mostly composed of Lake Malawi, which is about 475 kilometres long and runs down Malawi's eastern boundary with Mozambique.

The country is divided into three regions: the Northern, Central, and Southern Regions. There are 28 districts in the country. Six districts are in the Northern Region, nine are in the Central Region, and 13 are in the Southern Region. The country has a population of 13.1 Million (2008 Census). Out of these 49 percent are males and 51 percent are females.

Since independence Malawi has conducted five Population Censuses namely: 1966, 1977, 1987, 1998 and 2008.

2. Incorporating gender issues in Census process

Malawi undertook its recent census in June 2008 and several steps were checked to ensure that gender issues are incorporated at all levels. The paper will mainly look at steps taken by National Statistical Office to ensure this. Several stages were observed and plans are underway to make sure that gender issues are mainstreamed at all levels.

2.1 Cartographic work

In preparation for the 2008 Population and Housing census, Malawi engaged in cartographic mapping. The cartographic work for Malawi started in 2003 and was completed by 2007. Five mobile teams were assigned to do the mapping work and constantly being supervised by senior officers from the NSO's headquarters. This was a challenge to the office because no female staff was involved in the mapping exercise and the section has no female staff.

2.2 Questionnaire design

Questionnaire design was a long process in the sense that several stakeholders were involved ranging from Government institutions to Gender experts (Non- Governmental organisations). Issues of census contents were checked. Information on sex of each person was collected. During data collection the office made sure that the information on sex was complete. This will help the office to come up with data disaggregated by gender during the analysis stage.

During questionnaire design, the office made sure that number of gender specific questions have been included. These are questions such as education, occupation, fertility etc.

The ministry of women and Gender also organised a workshop on mainstreaming gender in census process for NSO senior staff. This workshop helped the NSO census management team to have a clear understanding on issues relating to gender concerns and importance of incorporating these at all level.

2.3 Recruitment

A total of 13,000 enumerators were recruited for the census. Before the recruitment exercise the district supervisors were called to a workshop for briefing on recruitment procedures. The main objective of the workshop was to ensure that all recruitment teams are following the recruitment procedures. During this workshop emphasis was made to ensure that recruitment teams are not gender biased. By the end of recruitment exercise, at least 30% of recruited staff were recruited. Even at management level interns of census operations, women were involved.

2.4 Training and Enumeration Phase

After recruitment, all the field staffs were recruited. The training of field staffs were done in phases starting with district supervisors to field enumerators. During the training emphasis were made to the field staff to pay special attention in identifying the sex of the head of household. This was done mainly to avoid the cultural stereotype which assumes that the head of household is always a man. This problem affects mainly even the wording of the questionnaires and how questions are asked.

We also emphasised on who should respond to census questionnaires. This was done also to avoid cultural stereotype again that respondent is always a man. In this regard the census questionnaire was answered by anyone knowledgeable enough to give information whether a man or woman.

2.5 Data processing

After field work, the office engaged temporary staff to do data processing. These were recruited to do data coding, entry and scanning. Women were involved in all the data processing stage. In fact the person responsible for data processing is a woman.

2.6 Census Advocacy Campaign

The objectives of the advocacy campaigns were as follows:

- Create and increase awareness on the purpose and importance of the Census
- Build credibility and ownership of the Census process with stakeholders and the media
- Solicit further support and commitment from political leaders and policy makers for the conduct of the 2008 Population and Housing Census
- Support enumerators to manage the process
- Increase dissemination and utilization of Census data among potential users

Information about the Census needs to be effectively and efficiently communicated to all people on a regular basis. The approaches used in this strategy were through workshops, meetings and mass communication

Workshops and meetings were conducted with the following groups; Ministers, parliamentarians, principal secretaries, chief executives (city and district assemblies) political parties, religious leaders, traditional /community leaders, media practitioners, NGOs, local communities.

Mass communication was done through; newsletter, radio, printed materials (newspaper, posters, stickers, banners, postal franks) drama, billboards, film shows, SMS (Celtel and TNM), and television. This happened to be the most effective tool of sensitization as it was targeting the general public. Pictures were drawn showing all kinds of people: women, men, youths and children. This entailed that census is for everyone.

3.0 Recommendation

Having gone through the whole process of Census operation my recommendation towards gender issues would be to raise awareness on gender concepts and definitions through workshops and trainings.