



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

International Workshop on Economic Census
Beijing, 26-29 July 2005

Report of the Workshop

United Nations • New York

2005

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A. Purpose and organization

1. The purpose of the workshop was to share views and experiences on:
(a) economic census and other modes of data collection in basic economic statistics; and
(b) how to build an integrated economic statistics programme. The workshop was conducted in the context of the United Nations Statistical Commission's efforts to establish a uniform pattern for the measurement of economic activities on a comparable basis.
2. The International Workshop on Economic Census was organized jointly by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS). The workshop was intended to take advantage of the success of the first national economic census in China and to use it as a starting-point in the exchange of country experiences. It is expected that this workshop will contribute towards further improvements in the methodology and compilation approaches to basic economic statistics with the focus on economic census.
3. Participants from 26 countries, with diverse regional backgrounds, were invited to attend the workshop, and NBS sent 30 observers from its provincial bureaus.
4. The opening session was chaired by Mr. Xianyn Lin, the Deputy Commissioner of NBS and was opened by Mr. Paul Cheung, Director, UNSD. He briefed the participants on the general objectives of the workshop and the expected outcome from the exchange of experience and views on different approaches to data collection. He also expressed his appreciation to China for what it had achieved in its first national economic census and cited the importance of economic census in understanding China's rapid structural economic change. Mr. Thomas L. Mesenbourg, Assistant Director for Economic Programs of the US Census Bureau delivered a keynote speech on economic census. He elaborated on the goals of the economic census; its evolution and development; its underpinnings, the challenges of the economic census programmes and the key to its success. The NBS Commissioner, Mr. Li, made a general introduction to China's first economic census and summarized the future steps and lessons to be drawn from it. Two senior statisticians, from the Shanghai and the Anhui provincial bureaus, also briefed the participants on their experience in conducting economic census.
5. The workshop consisted of four main sessions. The subject issues focused on the business register, coverage and content of economic census or economic survey, data collection and processing, and the move towards an integrated economic statistics programme. The NBS also organized a field trip to Beijing Municipal Statistical Bureau, which provided the participants with first-hand information on the organization of economic census at the grass-roots level.
6. At the end of the workshop, Mr. Cheung and Commissioner Li made a joint summary of their conclusions and closed the workshop.
7. Judging by the participants' feedback, the workshop was a great success and will be a stepping-stone for the general review of methodology and approaches to basic economic statistics.

B. Summary of the opening statements

Opening statement by the Director of UNSD

8. Mr. Cheung, Director, UNSD expressed his gratitude to NBS for hosting the event and its willingness to share the experience and the lessons learned in the course of China's first national economic census. He emphasized the significant developments in the world economy, the changes in the compilation methods of national statistical offices and in the ongoing revision process of the System of National Accounts, ISIC and CPC, which make it imperative to revise a number of the 20- or even the 30-year old international recommendations on economic statistics.

9. The Director hoped that the workshop would be a forum for discussion on the methodology and related technical issues of economic census and on the exchange of relevant experiences in alternative approaches. He also emphasized that the overarching goal of this workshop was to evaluate the potential of economic census in the context of efforts to compile high-quality and policy-relevant economic statistics. The Director expected that the useful recommendations of the workshop would be integrated into the UNSD strategy paper on compilation of basic economic statistics, planned for submission to the thirty-seventh session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, in 2006.

10. As the main themes covered by the workshop were rather ambitious, the Director noted the time constraint. However, not all relevant issues may warrant the same attention to detail and he commented on the importance of reviewing most of them, in order to see clearly the overall picture and to charter a future course of action. Finally, he explained that the justification for inviting countries from different regions with different experiences, circumstances and needs, was to ensure the achievement of the workshop's objectives and that the agenda items would be taken up effectively.

Keynote speech by the US Census Bureau

11. As the largest country conducting economic census, for approximately one century, the keynote speech by Mr. Mesenbourg, US Census Bureau, provided a description of how the economic census in the United States serves as the cornerstone of the country's economic statistics infrastructure. In his speech, Mr. Mesenbourg also discussed the goals of the economic census, its evolution in the United States, some of the census underpinnings, and the important challenges and keys to improving economic statistics programmes in the years ahead. As stated in his address, the economic census in the United States has four important goals: (1) *Provide the nation with comprehensive and detailed information about the changing structure of the U.S. economy;* (2) *To establish and maintain the statistical foundation for continuing economic analysis by policymakers and business;* (3) *To provide information needed to maintain the Census Bureau's Business Register;* and (4) *To extend Economic Census detail and coverage in areas of special national interest.* The overview of the history of economic census in the United States revealed how the economic census programme has evolved to meet changing data needs, technological advances, and changing business practices.

12. In his elaboration about the underpinnings of the economic census, Mr. Mesenbourg mentioned four aspects which were of great importance for the success of

the economic census programme. *The first* underpinning is the statutory authority of the economic census, which requires businesses to participate, makes data provided to the Census Bureau immune from legal processes, establishes the confidentiality of individually identifiable records, establishes penalties for the wrongful disclosure of confidential information by Census Bureau employees, and pledges that reported information will only be used for statistical purposes. *The second* important underpinning of the economic census is the availability and extensive use of administrative data acquired from the Internal Revenue Service, the Social Security Administration, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Those administrative data not only provide critical source data for the Census Bureau's Business Register, the sampling frame for economic census, they were also used in lieu of direct reporting for some 2 million small employers and 17 million businesses without paid employees. *The third* underpinning of the economic census programme is securing the cooperation of American businesses, and *the fourth* and final underpinning is organizing the management of the Census Bureau's economic statistics programmes to facilitate the implementation of an integrated economic statistics programme.

13. In his speech, Mr. Mesenbourg briefly summarized some challenges of the economic census programme, mainly, the increasing difficulty of securing adequate resources for statistical programmes, how to improve the programme in the face of constrained resources and how to improve cooperation with data providers and suppliers, and maintain high response rates. In his concluding remarks, he summarized some of the keys to success as follows:

- Clearly establish programme objectives, ensuring organizational roles and responsibilities are well understood;
- Establish programme priorities in close collaboration with key data users;
- Ensure programme priorities satisfy important government and public policy needs;
- Target a limited number of new initiatives and priorities, guard against being too ambitious;
- Use information when determining content, developing data collection strategies, or improving methods;
- Data requests align with business recordkeeping practices and accounting conventions;
- Think outcomes, not outputs;
- Develop a roadmap, measure progress, identify alternative ways to reach our destination, and execute the plan.

Speech by China's NBS Commissioner

14. China's NBS Commissioner provided an historical retrospect of China's census system and the problems underlying the previous census system. In his presentation, the Commissioner elaborated on the purposes and the methods of China's first national

economic census, and the organizing and conducting of the economic census. He emphasized the importance of the first national economic census in understanding the economic structural changes which evolved over the past two decades.

15. As China's NBS has finished the data collection, the next stage would be data processing and validation. Most importantly, the Commissioner described the future steps of the economic census as follows: to establish and perfect the business register; to revise the historical data with the economic census acting as the benchmark; to establish and perfect the statistical survey system of the tertiary industry and explore ways to develop and fully utilize the economic census data.

16. The experience of China from its first national economic census is very valuable for developing countries, especially in the area of data collection or the sampling of the informal sector.

C. Evaluation

17. Participants expressed their satisfaction with the agenda of the workshop and the fruitful discussion about the subject issues.

18. Some developing countries requested terminology standardization, i.e. definition of economic census and the integrated economic statistics programme. There were requests to further elaborate on the content of the economic census, i.e. what economic or financial variables should be included, and how to explore the results of the economic census.

19. Other requests to UNSD included: (1) recommendations for conducting economic census and enterprise surveys with or without the business register in place; (2) recommendations for institutional approaches to economic statistics; (3) further clarification of the structure of economic statistics; (4) recommendations for the structure of the business register; and (5) how to gain access to tax records and how to use those tax records.

20. In response, UNSD promised to set up programmes to help countries to develop their core economic statistics and to put forward recommendations on how to build an integrated economic statistics programme in the next five years.

D. Conclusions

The Workshop:

General

1. Expressed its gratitude to the United Nations Statistics Division and to the National Statistical Bureau of China for the excellent organization of the workshop and expressed the view that the periodic conduct of such workshops provides a means for the effective exchange of views, the sharing of country experiences and the identification of good practices.

2. Concluded that there is an apparent need to review the existing international recommendations on economic censuses and economic surveys, in order to reflect changing data needs, institutional arrangements, availability of new data sources

and methods. Further elaboration is required, for example, on such topics as content of the economic census (list and definitions of economic and financial variables), classifications used, terminology standardization, effective ways to use results of economic censuses and surveys.

3. Agreed that economic censuses, establishment/maintenance of business registers and economic surveys should be seen as the key elements towards building an integrated economic statistics programme.

4. Confirmed that cooperation with other forums is needed to ensure a well-coordinated process, which would result in better evaluation of the specific needs of particular subject-areas of economic statistics, and in the formulation of more concrete proposals, relevant to the organization and the conduct of economic censuses and surveys.

5. Endorsed UNSD's initiative to put forward recommendations on an integrated economic statistics programme in the next five years, including revision of international recommendations on economic censuses and surveys in various areas of statistics, and to help developing countries to build up core economic statistics.

6. Concluded, in view of the above, that there should be one set of recommendations on economic censuses and surveys for all countries. Such recommendations would provide a uniform conceptual framework, which would allow some flexibility in its implementation, and identify preferred compilation practices and alternative options, depending on the specific country circumstances and needs.

7. Agreed that there should be a mechanism for monitoring developments in economic census/survey methodology and country practices and asked UNSD to take the necessary steps to develop such a mechanism, including creation of an appropriate website, to enable continued discussion of relevant issues, and central storage and dissemination of related documents.

Economic census

8. Concluded that economic census is an important statistical activity in: (a) providing countries with comprehensive and detailed information about the structure of their economy; (b) establishing the statistical foundation for national accounts, continuing economic analysis by policymakers and the business community; (c) providing the information needed to establish/maintain a country's survey frame and business register; and (d) obtaining the necessary details and coverage in areas of special interest.

9. Recognized that in order to ensure the successful conduct of the census, its purposes should be well articulated and explicitly related to user needs, especially those of policymakers and the business community, well in advance of the starting date. The results of the census should be made publicly available in the most timely manner and at the most detailed level permitted under country law. Efforts should be made to promote public awareness of the results and how to use them.

10. Emphasized that careful preparation is a key to the success of the census. Such preparation includes many elements, such as securing legal, financial and

administrative support from other governmental agencies, as well as making the necessary internal arrangements within the statistical system.

11. Stressed that the success of the economic census depends, in particular, on the availability of skilled enumerators and proposed that while developing international guidelines on the conduct of economic census, proper attention should be paid to the good practices of organizing pre-census training.

12. Agreed that conducting a pilot run of the census in a particular representative region is advisable in order to identify potential problems with the census design and to find appropriate solutions.

13. Concluded that post-census validation procedures are carried out in order to ensure high credibility of the census results.

14. Agreed that economic census not only has advantages but also presents some challenges, such as high-cost and fast-aging results, in a rapidly changing economy. In this context, the economic census might be more suitable for developing economies in the process of making efforts to update their survey frame and/or to start up a business register. Some developed economies, with a large number of big enterprises and a good system for using administrative records, might find it useful to conduct censuses to ensure availability of detailed information on the business sector of their economy.

Business register

15. Concluded that building and updating a business register is essential for the success of economic statistics, by providing a foundation for designing the sample frames of various economic surveys.

16. Recognized that there could be different modes of business register maintenance (e.g., it could be centralized, provincial or at city level). However, consistency of information and its integrity must be ensured, including the use of appropriate coding of statistical units. The key to the vitality of the business register is dynamic updating, with cooperation from other governmental agencies.

17. Concluded that in the construction and maintenance of the business register, various sources of information should be utilized, including results of economic censuses and surveys, together with administrative records, especially tax records. Proper attention should be given to the validation and reconciliation of incoming information to ensure the internal consistency of the register.

18. Encouraged countries to develop long-standing legal and working arrangements with tax authorities, to ensure timely access to and use of tax data while preserving the confidentiality of such information as prescribed by country legislation.

19. Agreed that there is a need to further elaborate on such issues as proper identification of statistical units and classification of those units to the appropriate activity category; the boundary between the different activities is not always clear and additional recommendations in this area would be helpful.

20. Concluded that special attention should be given to profiling big companies consisting of various branches, located in different regions (including abroad) and engaged in different kinds of economic activities.

Economic surveys

21. Concluded that well organized, comprehensive annual economic surveys, followed by quarterly and/or monthly surveys, to capture a more limited number of indicators, could be a cost-effective means of data compilation and would ensure efficiency gains.

22. Recognized that concerns about the compliance rate and respondents' burden need to be taken into consideration when designing and revising questionnaires - some non-essential questions should be removed from the questionnaire and such methods as sampling rotation should be employed, to the extent possible; assessment of the response burden should be part of the survey design programme.

23. Agreed that imputations and estimations are good practices to supplement reported data, to broaden coverage and to minimize the response burden. However, such imputations and estimations should be done with care and not result in a diminished quality of data.

24. Underlined the importance of good communication between statisticians and data providers, in order to find out what type of data are available and how data requests could be brought into line with business accounting conventions. Such cooperation could reduce the reporting burden and solicit a better response from the data providers. The statistical office needs to convince the reporting units that economic surveys are in their interests also.

25. Agreed that the overall organization of surveys, as well as survey techniques, should reflect country circumstances in general and also the specificity of industries (e.g. different criteria for stratification (employment, turnover), may lead to different results); a clear explanation of such matters to the user community is imperative in order to maintain the credibility of economic statistics.

26. Stressed that more attention should be given to innovative ways to collect and process data using new technology (e.g., use of on-line reporting, modern database software and hardware).

27. Expressed the view that each country should find the right balance between economic censuses and surveys. In transition economies, sample surveys may not capture the full scope of changes in the economy, therefore, a combination of full enumeration and sampling should be considered.

28. Agreed that for developing countries with a large informal sector, periodic full enumerations are advisable to achieve a better reflection of that sector in sample frames and in maturing business registers. When measuring the informal sector, the survey design should reflect specificity of each surveyed activity.

Towards an integrated economic statistics programme

29. Agreed that the revision of basic economic statistics has to help countries build an integrated economic statistics programme. Moving towards such a programme is a complex and long-term process, aimed at the more efficient use of resources and provision of more relevant statistics, with respect to the needs of economic policymaking and market research.

30. Stressed that building an integrated economic statistics programme includes such activities as: (a) a clear identification of user needs, their structuring and prioritization; (b) development and use of common standards by all involved governmental agencies (concepts, definitions, classifications and survey designs, etc.), to ensure maximum data comparability and to increase their analytical potential; (c) active use (with appropriate editing etc.) of available administrative records; and (d) preserving enough flexibility to take care of the specificity of each subject area and the development of tools to ensure the timely capture of new economic activities.

31. Acknowledged that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to economic statistics. There are many alternative ways to build up an integrated economic statistics programme, however, coherence among various programme elements must be ensured.

32. Concluded that while acknowledging the importance of administrative sources, their potential drawbacks should also be recognized (e.g., use of non-statistical definitions and a limited number of data items collected), and appropriate measures should be implemented to minimize their impact on data quality.

33. Agreed that while designing the integrated programme, one should not be over ambitious and should avoid unnecessary complexity – focus should be on the high-priority components and ways to ensure their successful implementation. In this context, the search for the most efficient ways of data integration is one of constant challenge.

Cooperation with other governmental agencies and the public

34. Agreed that publicity is necessary for securing the cooperation of data providers, other governmental agencies and the general public; encouraged, in this connection, national statistical offices should review their practices in this area. More emphasis can now be placed on how the economic census and/or economic survey outputs could be used in national development plans, and in marketing and productivity analysis of particular enterprises.

35. Stressed that statistical offices cannot achieve their goals by relying solely on their own resources, that support from other governmental agencies is necessary to take advantage of administrative data, especially tax data and data available from social security administrations. To ensure better cooperation, statistical offices should be proactive and convince policymakers, in other governmental agencies, of the usefulness of the compiled data for their own programmes.

36. Acknowledged that closer cooperation with various business associations is required to raise their awareness of the purposes and organization of economic

censuses and surveys, and this might help to increase the response rate and the quality of the reported information.

37. Agreed that national statistical offices should reaffirm, when necessary, their role as centres of complex national statistical systems, by providing leadership in managing the production of timely and high-quality economic statistics, to serve the needs of Governments, businesses and the general public; to effectively carry out this role, national statistical offices should take responsibility for initiating and monitoring the implementation of integrated economic statistics programmes, based on economic censuses, and/or surveys in parallel with the development and effective use of business registers.

Annex I

Agenda

International Workshop on Economic Census

United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)
National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS)

26-29 July 2005, Beijing

Tuesday, July 26

8:45-9:00	Registration
9:00-9:30	<p>Opening ceremony</p> <p><i>Chair, Mr. LIN Xianyu, deputy commissioner of NBS</i></p> <p>9:00-9:10 NBS</p> <p>9:10-9:20 UNSD</p> <p>9:20-9:30 photo session</p>
9:40-10:10	<p>Keynote Speech on Economic Census</p> <p><i>Chair, Paul Cheung, Director, UNSD</i></p> <p>Thomas L. Mesenbourg, Assistant Director for Economic Programmes, U.S. Census Bureau</p>
10:30-12:30	<p>Introduction of Chinese Experience (NBS)</p> <p><i>Chair, Paul Cheung, Director, UNSD</i></p> <p>3 PowerPoint Presentations by NBS [each 20 min + 20 min for discussion]</p> <p>Mr. LI Deshui, Commissioner of NBS Mr. QIAN Yongguo, Director of Census Center, Anhui Provincial Bureau Mr. CAI Xuchu, Chief Economist of Shanghai Municipal Bureau</p>

<p>14:00-15:30</p>	<p>Constructing and Maintaining A Business Register (session I)</p> <p><i>Chair, Marie Brodeur, Director, Enterprise Statistics Division, Statistics Canada</i></p> <p>Country presentations [each 20 min + 10 min for discussion]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • countries constructing the economic census frame in the absence of a unified or comprehensive business register and approaches to the maintenance of the list between censuses; • countries developing the economic census frame with a comprehensive business register and the mechanism for maintenance. <p><u>USA</u> [Mr. Ronald Lee]</p> <p><u>Czech</u> [Mr. Jan Matejcek]</p> <p><u>Singapore</u> [Mr. Ong Lai Heng, Ms. Swee Li Rowena NG]</p> <p><u>Russia</u> [Mr. Igor Uliyanov]</p> <p><u>Macao, China</u> [Ms. Iun Lei MOK]</p>
<p>16:00-17:30</p>	<p>Constructing and Maintaining A Business Register (session II)</p> <p><i>Chair, Marie Brodeur, Director, Enterprise Statistics Division, Statistics Canada</i></p> <p>Open discussions</p>

Wednesday – July 27

<p>9:00-10:30</p>	<p>Coverage and Content (session I)</p> <p><i>Chair, Frederick W H HO, Commissioner for Census and Statistics, Hong Kong SAR</i></p> <p>Country presentations [each 20 min + 10 min for discussion]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries with a unified economic census - census covers all important nonagricultural economic sectors; • Countries with economic census covering selected sectors or different sectors for different years. <p><u>Australia</u> [Mr. Eden Brinkley]</p>
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	<p><u>India</u> [Mr. V.K. Arora]</p> <p><u>Mexico</u> [Mr. Gerardo Leyva-Parra]</p> <p><u>Egypt</u> [Mr. Mohamed ELDESOKY]</p> <p><u>Mongolia</u> [Ms. Eldev-Ochir ERDENESAN]</p>
10:45-12:30	<p>Coverage and Content (session II)</p> <p><i>Chair, Frederick W H HO, Commissioner for Census and Statistics, Hong Kong SAR</i></p> <p><i>Open discussions;</i></p> <p><i>Discussion points:</i></p> <p><i>Concluding Remarks.</i></p>
14:00-15:30	<p>Data Collection and Processing (session I)</p> <p><i>Chair, V.K. Arora, Deputy Director General, Industrial Statistical Division, Central Statistical Organization, India</i></p> <p>Country presentations [each 20 min + 10 min for discussion]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • countries with centralized data collection; • countries with decentralized data collection (i.e. provinces/districts/villages take key responsibilities) <p><u>Australia</u> [Mr. Eden Brinkley]</p> <p><u>Indonesia</u> [Ms. Nursinah AMAL URAI]</p> <p><u>South Africa</u> [Mr. Michael Manamela, Mr. Itani Magwaba]</p> <p><u>Chile</u> [Mr. Luis Rodrigo RIFFO PEREZ]</p> <p><u>Iran</u> [Mr. Nematollah MIRFALLAH NASSIRI]</p>
16:00-17:30	<p>Data Collection and Processing (session II)</p> <p><i>Chair, V.K. Arora, Deputy Director General, Industrial Statistical Division, Central Statistical Organization, India</i></p> <p><i>Open discussions.</i></p>

Thursday – July 28

<p>9:00-10:30</p>	<p>Towards an Integrated Economic Statistics Programme (session I)</p> <p><i>Chair, Thomas L. Mesenbourg, Assistant Director for Economic Programmes, U.S. Census Bureau</i></p> <p>Country presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • countries with an integrated or almost integrated system - approach, problems, successes; • countries planning to develop an integrated programme – priorities and approach <p><u>China</u> [Mr. LI Qiang, Chief Statistician of NBS]</p> <p><u>UK</u> [Mr. Stephen Penneck]</p> <p><u>Canada</u> [Mrs. Marie Brodeur]</p> <p><u>Brazil</u> [Ms. Magdalena CRONEMBERGER GOES]</p> <p><u>Poland</u> [Mrs. Halina DMOCHOWSKA]</p>
<p>10:45-12:30</p>	<p>Towards an Integrated Economic Statistics Programme (session II)</p> <p><i>Chair, Thomas L. Mesenbourg, Assistant Director for Economic Programmes, U.S. Census Bureau</i></p> <p>Open Discussions</p>
<p>14:00-17:30</p>	<p>Towards an Integrated Economic Statistics Programme (session III)</p> <p><i>Chair, Thomas L. Mesenbourg, Assistant Director for Economic Programmes, U.S. Census Bureau</i></p> <p><u>China</u> [Mr. XU Xianchun]</p> <p><u>New Zealand</u> [Mr. Vince Galvin]</p> <p><u>Japan</u> [Mr. Shozo INAMI]</p> <p><u>Hong Kong</u> [Mr. Frederick W H HO]</p> <p>Open Discussions and Concluding Remarks</p>

Friday – July 29

<p>09:00-10:30</p>	<p>Deliberations on the Future Directions of Economic Census (session I)</p> <p><i>Chair, Paul Cheung, Director, UNSD</i></p> <p><i>Panel: China, Hong Kong SAR, Canada, South Africa, US</i></p> <p><i>Open Discussions</i></p>
<p>10:45-12:00</p>	<p>Deliberations on the Future Directions of Economic Census (session II)</p> <p><i>Chair, Paul Cheung, Director, UNSD</i></p> <p><i>Panel: China, Hong Kong SAR, Canada, South Africa, US</i></p> <p><i>Open Discussions</i></p>
<p>12:00-12:30</p>	<p>General Conclusions of the Workshop</p> <p><i>Chair, UNSD/NBS</i></p>
<p>14:30-17:30</p>	<p>Field Visit to Beijing Municipal Statistical Bureau</p>

Annex II

List of Participants

(1) **Australia**

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