Challenges and Opportunities: Supporting the 2020 Global Round of Censuses Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

Mitali Sen, Ph.D.
International Programs Center, Population Division
U.S. Census Bureau

Draft
Outline

• International Programs Center’s portfolio of countries
• Census challenges with COVID-19
• Type of assistance provided
• Challenges encountered, lessons learned
• Opportunities
• Upcoming challenges
• Conclusion
Where International Programs Center has Worked

As of October 2020

Most recent assistance provided

- 2020 Census Round (2015 - 2024)
- 2010 Census Round (2005 - 2014)
- 2000 Census Round or earlier
- No assistance

United States Census Bureau

USAID

From the American People
Countries in our 2020 Census Portfolio

• Botswana
• Djibouti
• El Salvador
• Ethiopia
• Ghana
• Kenya
• Madagascar
• Mali
• Malawi

• Mozambique
• Namibia
• Rwanda
• Somalia
• Tanzania
• Uzbekistan
• Zambia
Census Challenges with COVID-19 Pandemic

- Disrupted census timelines
- Supply chain issues
- New fieldwork protocols
- Coverage and content errors
- Office closings and remote work
- Unstable internet connectivity
- Resource diversion for the pandemic
- Increased data demands from NSO
- Staff attrition due to illness/death
Type of Support Provided

- Remote census planning and budgeting assistance
- Remote CSPro application development assistance
- Remote field manual assistance
- Remote assessments of statistical capacity
- Virtual training of trainer workshops for tool administration
- Remote population projection workshops
- In-person, more recently -
  - Pilot Observation in Uzbekistan
  - PUMS file in Mozambique
  - Edits workshop in Namibia
Challenges Encountered, Lessons Learned

- Minimum set of requirements to be effective -
  - Redesigned learning materials and use of tools/portals/hubs for virtual interaction
  - Stable, broadband internet connectivity
  - Enough overlapping work hours (time zone differences)
  - Small number of participants (under 10)
  - Excellent communication between the team leads
  - Dedicated participants with few competing work priorities

- Some census operations are difficult to teach remotely -
  - We provided minimal support in mapping
Opportunities: Time to Develop Tools and Products

• Tool for Assessing Statistical Capacity (TASC 2.1)
• Census and Survey Processing Software (CSPro 7.7)
• Select Topics in International Censuses (STIC)
• Demographic and Population Projections System (DAPPS)
• Tool for Assessing Pilot Electronic Censuses (TAPEC)
• Open-Source Dissemination Strategy (OSDS)
Opportunities: Regional Trainings

• Savings on travel costs, time, and inconvenience allowed for –
  • More regional trainings
  • Drawing from a wider pool of expertise at the U.S. Census Bureau for instructors/presenters
  • More countries could participate in workshops/webinars/seminars
  • More women could attend workshops

• Time zone differences allowed for assistance to two countries in one day
  • Work with African countries in the morning and South and Central American countries in the afternoon
Upcoming Challenges: Census Data Edit Support

• Countries that did their enumeration during the pandemic may need to use more sophisticated methods to resolve data issues
  • If population temporarily migrated/rooted during the pandemic it may have implications for de jure counts or census coverage
    • Census provides denominators for many development indicators
    • Population projections may be inaccurate
    • Master sampling frame may be impacted
  • Other content issues based on unique pandemic conditions – employment, education, migration, and more

• Building capacity to use administrative sources of data
• Building capacity to use population estimates in some areas
Upcoming Challenges: Other Support

• Increased workload as the pandemic declines
  • Support needed for a host of countries simultaneously

• More sophisticated capacity building to resolve census issues

• International standards and guidelines on how to resolve data issues and adjustments

• International standards and guidelines on how to compare this census data with past and future censuses
Conclusion

• On the balance, a lot of challenges to address
• Future support will involve -
  • Coordination among international partners so we can address these challenges in an efficient and effective manner
  • Building the capacity of NSOs to handle discovery, prioritization and action on data issues
  • Developing communities of practice and mentorship programs
• Tools and online courses built during this time are part of the solution
• Require robust metadata in dissemination products
Questions?