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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean

Expert group meeting to explore and promote
wider use of the results of the 2010 Population
and Housing Census
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Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

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**REPORT OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING TO EXPLORE AND
PROMOTE WIDER USE OF THE RESULTS OF THE 2010 POPULATION
AND HOUSING CENSUS**

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. Place and date

1. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) convened a one-day Expert group meeting to explore and promote wider use of the results of the 2010 Population and Housing Census in Port of Spain on 29 July 2013.

2. Attendance

2. Statisticians and demographers from national statistical agencies and statistical institutes attended the meeting: Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Aruba, Central Statistical Office of Grenada, Central Statistical Office of Saint Lucia, Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago and the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN).

3. A representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) attended the meeting.

4. Representatives of the following institutions also attended the meeting: HIV Secretariat of the Office of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) and the University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona Campus.

3. Agenda

5. The meeting adopted following agenda:

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Objectives and organization of the meeting
3. Importance of census data for national development planning and advocacy
4. Presentation of the document entitled “The use of census data for national development planning: Focus on the 2010 Population and Housing Census”
5. Use of data (2000 and 2010 Rounds): National censuses
6. Best practices and recommendations for use of census data
7. Conclusions and recommendations
8. Closing remarks

B. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening of meeting

6. Welcome and opening remarks were delivered by Dillon Alleyne, Deputy Director a.i. of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean.

7. The Deputy Director underscored the importance of population and housing censuses as a key source of benchmark statistics on demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics.

Moreover, he noted that census data formed a critical foundation for evidence-based policy formulation, good governance, planning and development. He commended the commitment of countries in the region to regularly conduct the decennial population and housing censuses, irrespective of their physical size and resource constraints. He however flagged dissemination of data from such large statistical undertakings as essential for ensuring the use of data for decision making and development. Highlighting the issues of data confidentiality as a main deterrent to data sharing and dissemination, he encouraged all present to start considering and formulating more innovative approaches to data dissemination that would embrace and support the wider use of the data. He concluded by reiterating the importance of the meeting as a medium for advancing those discussions and making policy recommendations that would enable greater use of census data.

2. Objectives and organization of the meeting

8. In her presentation, Sheila Stuart, Social Affairs Officer of ECLAC, outlined the general objectives of the meeting and provided a synopsis of the main goals of each session. She noted the importance of the meeting as a means of engaging experts on the main messages of the paper and for obtaining further inputs for the finalization of the document. She concluded with a summary of the expected outcomes of the meeting and encouraged meeting delegates to participate actively in the sessions.

3. Importance of census data for national development and planning

9. A presentation on the importance of census data was delivered by the representative of the Statistical Institute of Jamaica. In her introduction, she provided an in-depth account of the key elements of population and housing census, highlighting in particular, the value and purpose of the census for policymaking, planning and administration. She highlighted the census as an instrument for measuring social issues that change slowly over time and identified some of the core topics included in the census. She noted the continued lobbying by advocacy groups for the inclusion of special questions and elaborated on the related challenges because often the level of detail required cannot be obtained or can threaten data confidentiality. In that regard, she spoke particularly to the limitations of the census in capturing information on persons with disabilities, noting the definitional issues as well as the low or partial coverage of persons with disabilities because of the exclusion of persons residing in collective or non-institutional homes from the census count. Notwithstanding the value of the census, she reiterated that the census cannot be all things to all people and concluded by examining some of the issues that would impact on the future conduct of the census. Among those issues flagged were the exorbitant cost of conducting the census, the resistance of the public to participate, the lack of understanding of census concepts, the scepticism of the results and the inability to interpret census data.

10. The representative of ECLAC singled out the persistent challenge experienced by a number of countries with obtaining full coverage for the census as an area of concern. She noted the high level of public resistance that seemed to threaten the conduct of data collection activities like the census and questioned how that concern could be addressed. In response, the representative of STATIN provided clarification stating that while all censuses aim to enumerate all members of the population, that goal is hardly ever achieved. As a consequence, there is invariably some degree of under coverage which has to be measured and reported. The identification of demographic and statistical methods for the treatment of non-response is therefore one component of census design which should be made known to the public when presenting the census information.

11. With respect to a question regarding the use of the census to capture information on gender-related issues such as time use and gender-based violence, the representative of STATIN spoke to the challenges experienced by her office with determining the issues that gender specialists needed, and with

identifying how to measure those concepts in the census. She noted that over time STATIN was able to incorporate questions to get some basic information on certain themes, such as gender based violence in national surveys. However, that information was not an end in itself and instead merely served as a basis for conducting further research. She highlighted the challenges experienced by statisticians with trying to operationalize survey concepts and noted the importance of having detailed discussions with advocates and researchers to avert any misunderstanding and to ensure that the data collection instrument captures the information needed to meet the specific research objectives.

12. With respect to under-coverage, the representative of the Central Statistical Office of Saint Lucia indicated a notable challenge faced by his office was the constant comparison between the census results and the information published in the electoral register. As a consequence, the Statistics Department had on occasion intervened and provided explanations about the differences in two data sources as well as the definitional difference between a voter and a resident. He underscored the importance of such actions not only for clarifying such misconceptions but also for preserving the veracity of the census and improving public perception of it. He pointed to the techniques for adjusting census results to account for any non-response and emphasized the need for statistical offices to inform the public on the extent of the undercount as well as the process of adjustment. The representative of UNFPA supported the comments on census undercounts and stressed that census data cannot be everything to everyone.

13. The representative of UNFPA concurred with the statement made by the representative of ECLAC on the expansion and evolution of the census and its objectives over time, but noted that those changes are not necessarily negative and were instead reflective of the changing needs of the society. As a result, the data needed to address those constantly evolving needs. Notwithstanding that, she noted the need to weigh the value added by expanding the questionnaire against the impact of those changes on the quality of the product. On that note, she raised the need for experts to rethink the objectives of the census and examine ways in which its quality could be improved.

14. A significant component of the discussion focussed on inclusion of non-traditional questions in the census questionnaire, particularly at the request of interest/advocacy groups. Participants noted the tendency of some countries to use the census as the main vehicle for obtaining information from the populace, particularly if there were no regular data collection programmes. However, they warned that the use of proxy reporting made the census unsuitable for collecting information on topics such as literacy. In those cases, more specialized surveys would be better suited. On that basis, participants noted the need to reassess the census content in the context of other surveys. It was also necessary to recognize the constraints of the census in terms of the limited number and type of questions that could reasonably be asked.

15. The representative of the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago noted that residents are not usually open to participating in the census because they assumed that the census was being done for the Government. This perception impacted negatively on the response rate. She cited the need to sensitize the populace on the benefits of participating in the census as a key step towards increasing the response rate. As an example, she alluded to the high response rates in more developed countries such as the United States of America and linked the willingness to participate to the general awareness of the actual use of the data for allocating funding to communities.

16. The representative of PIOJ noted that under-coverage in Jamaica was linked to the increase in the number of gated communities. He challenged the statistical offices to be creative and identify ways of overcoming this challenge. He cited working with the community and housing development representatives or using information technology (IT) as two potential solutions. He asserted that PIOJ was a key user of census data for research purposes and therefore had a vested interest in ensuring that the

census exercise was conducted well and that the data generated through the process was reliable and accurate.

17. The discussants recognized the key role played by the media, particularly with the dissemination of census results. The representative of Grenada highlighted misreporting as an issue because of misconceptions with the data or the reporter's disregard for the facts. On that issue, discussants agreed to the value of a public relations department that interfaces with media and ensures that correct information is disseminated.

18. With regard to the use of online data collection to improve the response rate, the representative of the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago spoke about her office's experience with using this medium for collecting data. She indicated that this option was explored for the 2010 census exercise because of the challenges with getting access to the crime areas "hot spots" and gated communities. The office's experience was negative as use of that medium proved very complicated and yielded only 60 responses. Factors such as the length of the questionnaire and lack of understanding of the concepts were cited as reasons for the limited use of the online questionnaire.

19. The representative of the CBS of Aruba restated that the original purpose of census data was for government policy planning. He however noted that this objective as well as the content of the questionnaire would inevitably evolve because of the changing needs of the community. He further noted that the length of the questionnaire impacted on the cost and as such, it was necessary to determine whether information for specialized topics could be obtained through other means such as a sample survey or administrative data. In addition, the cost of including any supplementary questions to measure specific issues of interest should also be weighed before making decisions on the expansion of the questionnaire.

4. Presentation of the document entitled "The use of census data for national development planning: Focus on the 2010 Population and Housing Census"

20. In her presentation, the consultant reviewed the main activities of the 2010 and 2011 population and housing censuses and elaborated on three of the main components: the common questionnaire, the methodologies for implementation of the census and the tools for data access and dissemination. She highlighted the need for more accurate and timely data which was more accessible and of broader scope as an issue that had to be addressed by the region. With regard to the use of data, she identified a number of ways in which the results of previous censuses had been used, some of which included: (i) developing indicators (gender) and (ii) research purposes such as water quality pattern and equity in Jamaica, disaster risk reduction Atlas and Caribbean seismic Atlas.

21. The representative of PIOJ spoke to the use of the census data along with survey data for developing multidimensional wellbeing maps at the community level. He noted the usefulness of the resulting information for targeting communities for intervention and satisfying requests from development agencies. He referred to other applications such as the use of census and survey data for a project on National Transfer Accounts. This project examined the difference between consumption and labour incomes across the various stages in the life cycle. The representative of the Statistical Office of Saint Lucia supported the comments on the use of data for poverty maps and highlighted in particular the use methodologies such as the Alkire-Foster Method for measuring multidimensional poverty indicators.

22. There were varying views about the use of the census data for generating poverty maps. The representative of UNFPA noted for instance that the long list of amenities included in the census do not necessarily help distinguish across communities. In addition, the information captured does not necessarily reflect the situation on the ground, as there are persons who acquire amenities from relatives

overseas but who would not ordinarily be able to afford them. Possession of those amenities therefore may not reflect their status.

23. The representative of CBS Aruba stated that the limited use of census data for analytical purposes may be attributable to the lack of sufficient statisticians to do pertinent analysis. He therefore highlighted the urgent need to provide training for statisticians in order to ensure that they have the capacity to perform the analysis. He further proposed extending this training to the private sector to ensure that the data are correctly and more widely used. Other participants concurred with this proposal, noting the low capacity of some national statistical offices (NSOs) to conduct their own analyses because of deficiencies in the skill levels of statisticians. They flagged this as an issue of concern to be addressed. It was therefore suggested that NSOs consider making the data available to external users who may be better equipped to conduct the analyses. In addition, participants noted the need for statisticians to collaborate with experts or specialists who may be in a better position to use the data, but who may not know how to interpret the data.

24. On the matter of the provision of greater access to microdata, the representative of UWI lamented the limited use of the databank as a resource for housing data from across the region and encouraged the further development and use of databanks.

25. With regard to points raised about the limited use of certain questions or variables from the census because of the low response rate, the representative of CBS Aruba proposed that statistical offices consider undertaking an evaluation of the response rates for each question, as a mean of identifying the questions that should be excluded from future rounds of the census.

26. The representative of CBS Aruba highlighted the need for NSOs to consider using data from alternative sources such as administrative data if their offices still have difficulty producing data that is sufficiently reliable to be used for policymaking.

27. Participants highlighted the importance of metadata and lamented that the practice of documenting metadata was not common in some statistical offices and in some instances the documentation standard was poor. The representative of the Statistical Office of Saint Lucia supported this remark and pointed to the International Household Survey Network metadata catalogue available through the website of the Central Statistical Office and which allows users to browse and download information about surveys and data.

28. The representative of the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago endorsed the comments on making metadata available to users. He noted, however, that this access would only have limited effectiveness unless the end users are knowledgeable of metadata and understand the actual microdata. It was observed that end users generally are not interested in the metadata. There was therefore a need to develop a culture promoting greater use of metadata, which should start by increasing awareness of the uses of metadata to improve the quality of one's analysis.

5. Use of data (2000 and 2010 Rounds): National censuses

29. The Chair invited representatives of the national statistical offices to report on their national experiences with both the 2000 and 2010 rounds of the population and housing census. The presentations highlighted the extent to which the data from the 2000 census was used and identified challenges and lessons learned in the process.

30. In his presentation, the Director of Statistics of Aruba emphasized that statistics derived from censuses and surveys are not merely numbers, but instead are fundamental tools that convey information about the citizens of a country and help guide decision-making. He identified the challenges that were encountered in the conduct of previous rounds of the census that ranged from administrative issues, such as the lack of cooperation from the Government and delays with getting approval of the budget, to external issues that presented operational challenges, including flooding, aggressive dogs, power failures and gated communities. He noted the efforts of CBS to mitigate against those drawbacks in the 2010 Round and highlighted some of the lessons learned in the process that would help inform the preparation for and conduct of future censuses. He underscored the following characteristics of data as being essential for ensuring the use of data: accuracy, accessibility, relevance and timeliness. In that regard, he identified the ways in which the CBS had undertaken to promote accessibility of data to varying types of clients such as policymakers, organizations and students using different carriers/mediums such as CD-ROM, online access through the retrieval of data for small areas by microcomputer (REDATAM), CensusInfo, Facebook and You Tube and other types of information such as basic tables, special reports, press releases, monographs, posters for schools, documentaries and presentations. He cited several examples that supported the use of the 2010 census data for evidence-based policy formulation, such as the development of educational programmes for multifunctional buildings based on the social economic and demographic characteristics of the population; building labour force satellites; and projecting the cost of health care for all citizens. He concluded by highlighting the need for statistical offices to develop a framework of action as a mean for promoting the use of data for evidence-based policy making. He proposed that this framework of action should embrace the following six core pillars: fostering ownership, improving dialogue, matching supply and demand, making statistics understandable, effective dissemination and access and investing in institutional development.

31. The representative of the Statistical Office in Grenada noted that the experience of his office in the conduct of the 2001 and 2010 Population and Housing Censuses was somewhat similar to that experienced by the CBS. He identified some of the main challenges as a limited budget, flooding, lack of competency of field staff, difficulties with data cleaning. In terms of lessons learned, he noted the importance of ensuring the involvement of stakeholders in census activities, the use of a strong public relations team for effective public education, greater emphasis on the recruitment of field staff particularly the screening of enumerators and the provision of more in-depth training to staff as critical areas for development and improvement in the next round of the census. He outlined the ways in which the census data for 2010 would be used which included the presentation of results to key stakeholders using Geographic Information Systems, publication of detailed demographic reports, monthly press releases and thematic analyses and sensitization of the public on the uses of census data.

32. The representative of STATIN noted that the results of the 2001 census had been used both in-house and by various external users including the ministries of education, health and transport; the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES), PIOJ, telecommunications companies and other private consulting companies. As with the previous presenters, she noted that the challenges of the 2001 and 2011 censuses were fairly similar and the completion of the 2011 census was threatened by a number of factors including lack of funding, natural hazards such as hurricanes and flooding and other issues including general apathy and hostility of the populace, inefficient and unproductive workers and difficulties with accessing the gated communities. She further highlighted some of the publications that had been released using the 2001 census results. In addition to the usual demographic and administrative reports, STATIN and other agencies had produced map volumes for each parish. She identified challenges with IT which originated from the focus of the IT personnel on the technology rather than the data processing as a major issue of concern. She flagged challenges with the use of scanning technology because of illegible writing as an issue that needs to be revisited for future censuses. Going forward, she identified the need for a dissemination policy as essential.

33. The representative of Statistical Office of Saint Lucia noted that there was 93 per cent coverage for the 2010 census; thus weights had to be used to make up the 7 per cent under coverage. He highlighted the various outputs developed by both the Statistical Office and other external users from data of the 2001 and 2010 censuses. Some of the publications or applications included the development of an “unmet basic needs” index using assets and a poverty map for the Poverty Reduction Fund and the preparation of migrant and community profiles. He drew attention to the work undertaken by his office to make data more accessible and flagged, in particular, the office’s new website and the sustained interest in using dissemination tools such as DevInfo and REDATAM for dissemination of data via the Internet. He elaborated on the thrust of the office to embrace the open data approach; elements of which are evident in the recently launched website for the statistics office. He concluded with a demonstration of the website in which he highlighted in particular the range of resources related to the census that can be accessed online. He flagged access to microdata as a recurrent issue that would need to be grappled with, and cited ways in which his office has tried to supply information and provide access to data without breaching the secrecy and confidentiality provisions of the Statistics Act.

34. The representative of the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago provided a status update on the closure of the office by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in May due to existing health and safety hazards, and its consequent temporary relocation to the designated census office. He noted that this recent development had impacted the delivery of some of the census outputs. He discussed challenges that delayed the conduct of the census and reiterated some of the issues that were encountered in the process that bore strong semblance to those presented by other participants. He underscored the value of the census and spoke to some of the projected/intended uses of the census data that included developing and monitoring policies and programmes, such as the formulation of pension plans, health care and housing programmes, and business completion of the processing and dissemination of the census. With respect to the use of the results of the census for preparation of sampling frames, he identified a number of requests that had been received from the Ministry of Health – Burden of Obstructive Lung Disease, UWI Dementia Survey and the Ministry of National Security – crime and victimization survey. He stated the intention of the Central Statistical Office to use the data to generate thematic maps for various geographic levels (national, municipal corporation and enumeration district).

35. One of the challenges highlighted by discussants was the lack of dedicated census staff. In addition, participants noted the importance of having a trained and dedicated staff member with responsibility for interfacing with the media. It was further noted that the best suited person to function in that role would be a trained statistician who has an understanding and appreciation of data, and who can help with ensuring that the transmission of information to the public is correctly conveyed. Reference was made to institutional arrangement employed by Statistics Canada as a best practice that could be emulated by the region.

36. The representative of Grenada reported that, a Ministry of Information and Communication Technology had recently been formed and charged with the responsibility for providing IT support to the various government departments. This arrangement posed a challenge since in many cases, as the IT staff were not sufficiently knowledgeable of the substantive work being done within the department and therefore do not necessarily provide the most efficient support. He therefore sought inputs from the floor on how to treat with that issue. In response, participants spoke to similar arrangements in their respective countries and cited examples of specific challenges and misconceptions that emanated as a result.

37. With respect to earlier points raised on the challenges encountered with the use of information technology, the representative of the Statistics Department of Saint Lucia disputed the statement that “information technology was an end in itself.” He noted that often, IT experts are not aware of the core specialized software such as CSPro, which was specifically developed for cleaning and processing census

data. As a result, they recommend more generalized software that was not as efficient. On that point, the representative of PIOJ indicated that in light of the importance of the software tool in ensuring the efficient processing of data, the choice of software should be determined by the statistician in conjunction with the IT expert. The principal role of the IT person should be to determine if the selected software can be supported by the platform used by the office and to assess any required configurations or changes that would need to be made to ensure that the chosen software can be used in-house. He further emphasized that IT specialists are support staff and should be treated as such. In support of this point, the representative of ECLAC pointed to the importance of providing some basic training and guidance to the IT experts on the core aspects of the statistical work being done so they are in a good position to make better judgements related to software selection and other technical matters.

6. Best practices and recommendations for use of census data

38. Under this agenda item, the consultant identified best practices from the Caribbean subregion as well as other regions with respect to the use of census data.

39. The presentation by the consultant focussed on options for dissemination and the associated issues. She stressed the importance of dissemination and marketing strategies as effective means for facilitating and developing information sharing opportunities and hence enabling the more widespread use of the data. She further drew reference to the quotation that “only used statistical information is useful statistical information” and reiterated the need for national statistical offices to pursue means for optimising the usefulness of the data they produce. She provided an outline of the main elements of the marketing and dissemination strategies. She highlighted that as a prerequisite to determining how the data would be made available, the NSOs should identify the current and potential users of their data as well as the nature of their outputs. She noted that the dissemination strategy should be developed at the planning stage since it informed the contents of the questionnaire. On that basis she reiterated the need for a dissemination policy. She examined the various mechanisms for disseminating data, some of which have the capacity to preserve data confidentiality. She concluded by emphasizing the need for countries to develop a marketing strategy and suggested consultations and collaboration with users, regional and international partners as a necessary prerequisite for the development of those strategies and policies. She expressed the hope that the region will be able to overcome the obstacles (psychological and legal) so that by 2020 the countries of the Caribbean would be better able to allow more comprehensive dissemination.

40. In response to the presentation, the representative of the HIV Secretariat noted that dissemination is a process, consideration of which should be incorporated from the inception of the census exercise. She further underscored the importance of stakeholder engagement as a key element of the census process. She highlighted the need for statistical offices to pay attention to the content and manner in which the data is presented for dissemination and advised that materials should be in user-friendly format in order to foster greater use.

41. On the issue of improving capacity, participants further underscored the key role played by the media at all stages of the census process and therefore reiterated the value of involving the media from inception.

42. The representative of STATIN acknowledged that much of the data produced by statistical offices has been used for academic purposes and therefore expressed her intention to trace the process through which data from surveys and censuses were translated to policy. This comment was endorsed by the representative of ECLAC who pointed to the validity of undertaking such a mapping exercise to see how data is used for policy formulation.

43. On the point of the use of social media, the representative of Saint Lucia spoke to the use of Twitter by many statistical offices for disseminating new and significant findings. He relayed the use of that medium by his office and noted that there is scope for further development. It was also suggested that this medium as well as text messaging could also be used for both dissemination of the census and sensitization. Participants agreed that there was a need to put greater emphasis on the use of these mediums, and identified collaboration with the private sector as an important element of that approach.

44. Participants expressed mixed views regarding the contribution made by the representative of Grenada as regards the need to submit the demographic report of the census to the Government prior to the release of the census results. The representative from UNFPA noted however that the report is typically submitted out of courtesy and not to encourage political interference. Further, it was agreed that the NSO should be clear on the reason for submission so as to ensure that the data is not manipulated. The representative of Aruba stated that the process of submission may or may not be a requirement of the Statistical Act. In his case, the CBS was mandated by the Statistics Act to obtain approval from Cabinet before releasing any data.

7. Conclusions and closing remarks

45. The meeting concluded with a summary of the main discussion points and closing remarks by Michael Hendrickson, Economic Affairs Officer of ECLAC.

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