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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Meeting of Directors of Statistics of the Americas

Santiago, Chile, 24 - 26 March 1999

THE 2000 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS ROUND */

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Supplementary note relating to Subprogramme element 3.3: Implementation of population and household censuses

This note supplements the document entitled "Programme of international statistical work for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1999-2000", prepared for the meeting of Directors of Statistics of the Americas to be held at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago, Chile, from 24 to 26 March 1999.

Population censuses are known to be the principal source of demographic and socio-economic data for developing countries. They provide information on populations, households and housing and on their characteristics at a given time, not only at the national level but also for large, medium-sized and small geographical divisions. In this respect, they are the only source of this type of information for a particular universe which can be used as a reliable basis in social and economic planning at local levels. Moreover, since the administrative records in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are often deficient, censuses also include indirect questions through which flow variables such as mortality, fertility and migrations can be estimated. In addition, they provide the necessary sampling frame for household surveys which will be used in in-depth studies of social, demographic and economic interest, among others.

The 2000 round of censuses will be particularly significant since it will establish the situation of the population and demographic trends towards the end of the second millennium, primarily as a contribution to the pursuit of the goals established at major international conferences, in particular the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994. These censuses will also be very useful in evaluating the social development programmes and updating instruments for investment programming in the social sectors for example poverty maps.

Many countries have organized exchanges on preparatory work for the 2000 round of censuses. The Mercosur countries, including Bolivia and Chile, have held seminars on coordinating and exchanging experiences while Colombia held a meeting in January 1998 with other countries of the region and specialized agencies to invite suggestions regarding the various stages of the census. In October 1998, CELADE held a seminar, attended by representatives from eighteen countries of the region, on conceptual design and issues to be examined during the 2000 round of censuses in Latin America. In December 1998, the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, in conjunction with CELADE and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and with the collaboration of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), organized the workshop, "Census 2000: Putting the planning for the year 2000 round of censuses into gear".

These data-collection exercises have been conducted widely throughout Latin America and the Caribbean since the 1950s and currently cover all countries of the region. However, for each round of censuses, which are supposed to be held in the years ending in a zero, there are invariably countries that are several years behind hand either in

conducting them or in communicating the results and, in some cases, they never take place. Census evaluation over the years shows that there has not been any clear improvement in the timing or the quality of the data; indeed, many countries have experienced great difficulty in carrying out the census exercise as a result of the crisis of the 1980s and the subsequent structural adjustment programmes. These difficulties arose despite the availability of modern technologies, especially for mapping, and information collection and processing. For the 2000 round of censuses, there is again some doubt in many countries as to whether the census can be conducted on a timely basis, given the current crisis.

International aid, both financial and technical, was one of the basic pillars of the censuses held prior to the 1990s. However, in the last decade, there were cut-backs in this type of aid, on the one hand because it was felt that the data collection and processing was a matter of national responsibility and, on the other because data collection has been treated as a lower priority issue by specialized agencies.

Notwithstanding those restrictions, the Commission, through CELADE and the Statistics and Economic Projections Division, has, to the extent possible, maintained constant support for the census activities. In this regard, its collaboration with countries has been concentrated on technical advice for the conceptual design of the censuses, the creation of databases using its REDATAM software, and the evaluation, analysis, dissemination and use of data for economic and social planning.

Objectives

- a) To help to reinforce the technical capacity of statistical institutes throughout the various stages of the census operation, in terms of both conceptual and technological advances;
- b) To analyse and evaluate the experience of the 1990 round of censuses, with emphasis on critical situations that led to delays and restricted coverage and quality, and on the result of the incorporation of new technologies.
- c) To promote the interchange of experiences and horizontal cooperation between countries of the region, mainly in those aspects in which countries have developed technological and conceptual advances in the preparation, collection and dissemination of census data.
- d) To identify those census functions that require further technical assistance in order to establish priorities for the use of the limited resources available for the purpose and to detect the most appropriate ways of satisfying those needs.
- e) To identify and seek access to new sources of funding for the various phases of the population and housing censuses in order to ensure that they are conducted in a timely manner and yield accurate results.

Activities:

1. To provide technical assistance on the conceptual design of the census. It involves assistance in defining the type of census, selecting issues for research, preparing the questionnaire and establishing the tabulation system. Given the involvement of countries in conducting censuses, this is a priority activity for the biennium.

Principal activities: Technical assistance missions and participation at seminars. Publication of a volume containing the papers presented at the seminar on conceptual design for the 2000 round of censuses in Latin America.

2. Assistance with data processing and analysis of census data bases using REDATAM PLUS for Windows (winR+). CELADE will continue to develop REDATAM with a view to using the 2000 round of population censuses and creating multisectoral databases and integrating them with the Geographic Information System (SIG).

The first version for Windows was sent free of charge to national statistical offices in February 1998. In the first half of 1999, CELADE will finalize the preparation of the REDATAM database generation module. This module will facilitate the creation of databases incorporating census and other data (vital statistics, household surveys, etc.) using existing files in IMPS, ISSA, SPSS, DBF, ASCII and other formats. A faster, 32 bit version of winR+ will be available in the second half of 1999.

Along with the development of REDATAM, further work will be done on the development of ZonPlan, a winR+ tool designed to enable end users to utilize visual programming to obtain socio-demographic indicators and plot them out on the map.

Using these tools, CELADE will facilitate the use of census data, principally for identifying target populations for social action and supporting decision-making at the local and regional levels.

Principal activities: Consultancy missions, internships at CELADE and training workshops.

3. Assistance in evaluating and analysing census data. This is an on-going collaboration activity which CELADE provides to countries to the extent that results from the population censuses are available. For the 1999-2000 biennium, the only activities envisaged are joint activities with countries which are reviewing their data because of delays in the programme or because new data are now available for the purpose.

Principal activities: Technical assistance missions and internships at CELADE for technical staff from countries of the region.

4. To provide technical training for nationals of member States who are professionals in demographic analysis through the intensive regional course on demographic analysis for development and specific workshops on instruments and technologies for the creation of databases in REDATAM format and use of winR+ and ZonPlan for the analysis of data from the census and other sources.

Principal activities: Courses, workshops, seminars, publications.

5. To coordinate horizontal technical cooperation for using national technical capacities.

Principal activities: The generation of a roster of professionals, support on missions.

6. To collaborate in seeking sources of financing. Following contacts with countries and the decision taken by the Presiding Officers of the Population Commission, expressing concern for the financial constraints affecting the implementation of the 2000 round of censuses and the need to secure new sources of financing. ECLAC/CELADE will, as far as possible, provide support to the countries of the region in their negotiations for financial assistance. As indicated by the Director of CELADE in his e-mail of 29 December 1998, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) is willing to consider the possibility of extending a line of credit to Governments of the region that may be interested in availing themselves of this facility. Several countries have already indicated their interest in making use of this option.

Principal activities: To support countries in their negotiations relating to requests for resources and in the preparation of projects for this purpose, subject to the areas falling within the competence of CELADE.