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EMERGING ISSUES IN AFRICAN POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

TOTAL POPULATION

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INTRODUCTION

1. The primary objective of a population census is to determine the total number of inhabitants of a given country. The population census which is usually carried out according to the administrative divisions of a country is the primary factor for demographic comparability between two countries and a particularly convenient frame of reference for the political and administrative authorities. Population census data can be used for several purposes such as:

- (a) Dividing a country into administrative regions;
- (b) Allocating electoral seats;
- (c) Allocating subsidies;
- (d) Siting development projects;
- (e) Planning towns and rural areas;
- (f) Determining social services.

2. All these uses show the importance of the total population variable and census organizers must spare no efforts to ensure that they have total population returns that are as accurate as possible.

DE FACTO AND DE JURE POPULATION

3. The total population of a given country is usually divided into two categories:

- (a) The de facto population which comprises all the persons present in the country at the reference time for the census enumeration, all persons are enumerated at the place where they are at the census reference time;
- (b) The de jure population which is the total of all usual residents of the country.

4. The total population of a country may comprise either of the two categories.

5. Most African countries enumerated the de jure population in their censuses. They however made provision for the classification of population into different categories (residents present, residents absent, visitors) and this enables them eventually to obtain the de facto population. However, two of the countries which used the de facto population approach did not provide any classification with regard to the residence status of the population enumerated. Two other countries have attempted to cover the migrant population as a separate category in the total population.

6. It is not easy to completely enumerate the total population without making omissions or counting double. It is, however, easier to count the de facto population than the de jure population since the former involves recording only those present instead of enumerating the population according to the residence status at a specific reference time. To avoid double counting or omission a relatively short period of time should be used since the movement of the population is the main drawback of this option.

7. The de jure population is more difficult to count because the concept of usual residence is difficult to define. Many doubts crop up at the time of enumeration and some categories might be mistakenly included or excluded: absent individuals or households, polygamists and heads of several households. To define the concept of residence, all countries use the length of time during which a person has stayed in a given place. A period of six months has generally been used.

VARIOUS POPULATION GROUPS

8. Each of the population groups (de facto or de jure) is divided into several sub-groups some of which are marginal and are sometimes very difficult to count. Some groups such as armed forces and diplomatic corps may be deliberately omitted and others such as nomads, pygmies, fishermen and seamen are not easy to contact because of their way of life.

9. Any description of the total population should specify the population groups concerned. Countries do not always indicate the various groups that make up the total population when they publish the census results.

10. The document entitled "Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses" (ST/ESA/STAT/SEP.11/57) of the United Nations, recommends that the following groups should be considered:

- (a) Nomads;
- (b) Persons living in areas to which access is difficult;
- (c) Military, naval and diplomatic personnel and their families located outside the country;
- (d) Merchant seamen and fishermen resident in the country but at sea at the time of the census (including those who have no place of residence other than their quarters aboard ship);
- (e) Civilian residents temporarily in another country as seasonal workers;
- (f) Civilian residents who cross a frontier daily to work in another country;
- (g) Civilian residents other than those in groups (c), (e) and (f) who are working in another country;

- (h) Civil residents other than those in groups (c) to (g) who are temporarily absent from the country;
- (i) Foreign military, naval and diplomatic personnel and their families located in the country;
- (j) Civilian aliens temporarily in the country as seasonal workers;
- (k) Civilian aliens who cross a frontier daily to work in the country;
- (l) Civilian aliens other than those in groups (i), (j) and (k) who are working in the country;
- (m) Civilian aliens other than those in groups (i) to (l) who are temporarily in the country;
- (n) Transients on ships in harbour at the time of the census.

11. The homeless people who are usually found in the cities should also be taken into account.

HOUSEHOLDS AND THE INSTITUTIONAL POPULATION

12. The total population is usually counted on the basis of two categories:

- (a) Households;
- (b) Institutions whose population is sometimes referred to as a separately enumerated population. These are people living together in institutions such as barracks, hospitals, hotels, boarding schools, university campuses, prisons, convents, monasteries, religious missions, temporary construction quarters, asylums and orphanages.

13. Although all the countries make this distinction they do not usually indicate whether the institutional population is included in the total resident population.

CONCLUSIONS

14. African countries have often taken into consideration the de jure population when analysing census data since it is more widely used than the de facto population. However, even those countries that have chosen to focus demographic analysis on the de jure population, have published some tabulations on the de facto population.

15. Finally regardless of the type of population selected as the total population, (de facto or de jure) the various population groups included therein should be specified.