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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF UNFPA TSS/CST WORKSHOP



UNITED NATIONS - UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

**TSS/CST Workshop on Data Collection, Processing,
Dissemination and Utilization**

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Conclusions and Recommendations of the Workshop

A. Statistical Systems/Institutional Frameworks

At the broadest level, national governments will need to determine their priorities in terms of data required within a framework for an integrated national information system. The sources of data for this system will include the traditional/conventional statistical collections such as censuses and surveys, but will also incorporate various record-keeping systems that potentially provide the source for many flow data.

Implementation and monitoring of ICPD will create new demands for data systems and will require new initiatives in planning and in funding to enable them to respond to new demands.

Post-ICPD needs identified by UNFPA provide a focus for the UNFPA/TSS/CST technical development and assistance in statistics and also in qualitative research methodologies such as rapid assessment procedures. Advisers will play an important role in ensuring that the information/data required by planners and programme managers for integrating population factors into development planning are readily available.

Lack of national and international co-ordination and the absence of clear mandates for data production have led to conflicting and inconsistent statistics. These problems have been exacerbated by:

- i. tendencies by different data producers to claim organizational authority or the exclusive capability to produce certain kinds of statistics;
- ii. the disproportionate influence of some funding agencies to dictate statistical priorities.

Information needs are becoming more complex and countries are finding it difficult to produce and disseminate appropriate and relevant information to planners and users. Integrated information systems could make an immediate contribution for improvement. It is clear that there is not one particular preferred approach to set up an information system. The Workshop recognized that statistical data systems which already exist in many countries could be better utilized with the removal of bottlenecks and improvement in proper documentation and timeliness. More research is needed to take into account users' perspectives.

Recommendations:

Strengthening of national information systems should be supported through:

1. development of integrated and comprehensive information systems that should be widely available and utilized. Data collection/analysis/research must be considered as key components, applicable to all thematic areas defined in UNFPA priorities;
2. promotion of a programme approach;
3. more training and capacity-building;
4. joint interdisciplinary missions including CST together with TSS;
5. and coordination of work of funding agencies.
6. Support to countries by the TSS/CST needs to be operationalised, particularly in view of the fact that the levels of project support to countries for traditional statistical activities will likely be reduced.
7. More and better information on process indicators should be produced (eg., quality of care);
8. The need for wide and timely access to information and to development of an effective dissemination method should be promoted.

B. Computerized Mapping and Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

A dual approach is needed to promote development and application of computerized mapping and GIS. The first approach is that a centralized agency (such as UN Headquarters or Regional Commissions) could be responsible for developing standards and providing guidelines on GIS and computerized mapping. The second is that specific UNFPA programme-oriented GIS applications should be developed at the country level depending on needs.

Recommendation:

A principal goal of UNFPA/CST support development of computerized mapping and GIS applications in countries should be oriented to the provision of technical support and building/strengthening of national capacities.

C. Population Censuses and Surveys

Population censuses remains the single most important source for demographic data.

Delay in the release of census results and analysis is still widespread. Analysis remains the weakest link in the chain of operations. There is a dearth of experienced analysts due to factors such as poor training and staff turnover. Other related issues are:

- i. inadequate attention given to analysis and research, data processing, dissemination and utilization at the planning stages;
- ii. analysis rarely takes account of planning needs and is not linked to national, sub-national and sectoral plans;
- iii. present over-emphasis on published reports with the related need to further strengthen the use of electronic media;
- iv. funding of population censuses is a serious problem;
- v. the process of decentralized planning occurring in many countries will require more geographically detailed demographic and socio-economic data.

Recommendations:

1. More emphasis should be made to integrate collection, analysis, research, data processing and dissemination at all relevant stages of the operation.
2. Attention needs to be given to analysis and to more extensive exploitation of existing census/survey data.
3. The workshop endorses the idea of organizing a workshop which would address issues related to analysis in more detail so as to reorient the focus of current analytical reports from over-concentration on estimation of demographic parameters to making the results of analysis more usable and responsive to national and sub-national planning needs.
4. UNFPA should provide support to the 2000 world programme of population and housing censuses, particularly for training at regional, subregional and national levels and should provide TSS/CST advisory services to strengthen analysis, reports and data access for use in health and population planning.

5. With regards to the need for decentralized planning information, development of new techniques for small area estimation was requested.
6. Effective use of sampling techniques in collection of census data as well as in preparation of advance tabulations should be encouraged to improve timeliness and relevance for policy makers and reduce costs.
7. Countries should be encouraged to establish effective user services for the dissemination of census/survey data and to provide more access to census records in appropriate media, subject to confidentiality provisions, for the more important users. Special consideration should be given to supplementing published reports with use of electronic media to reduce costs of dissemination.

D. Sampling and Rapid Assessment Procedures

Since UNFPA may provide some support for use of RAP methods, an issue is identifying the appropriate applications in countries. RAP is seen as highly useful for qualitative investigations to help in interpretative research and to find out what works in the field. For hard statistics, however, especially monitoring change over time nationally, more rigorous statistical methods are needed, particularly probability samples. For the latter, the modified cluster survey design is a feasible methodology because it combines the rapid feature of RAP with a simplified, statistically sound technique that can be easily applied and sustained in most countries.

Recommendations:

1. TSS/CST data collection advisers should give careful attention to the appropriate use of RAP methods in certain field settings, including particularly the modified cluster survey design for rapid "statistical" surveys to address emerging data collection needs in reproductive health.
2. Training in the modified cluster survey design and RAP methods in general should be given in interregional and regional workshops.

E. Civil Registration and Other Administrative Records

In some countries civil registration is yet to be established, and in most developing countries it needs to be enhanced. Sample registration and multi-round sample surveys have been planned and implemented with various degrees of success to provide estimates of vital rates. However, sample surveys fail to provide estimates down to the community level.

Delay in the release of information and analysis is also widespread and analysis of information remains weak.

Although on the global level civil registration activities are coordinated under the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, on the national level it is almost lacking.

Recommendations:

1. There is need to establish increased awareness within government of the utility of the civil registration systems, with particular reference to those ministries, departments or agencies concerned with health, family planning, women's welfare, infant and child mortality, education, etc..
2. Methods and procedures should be developed for extending the issuance of certificates of specified vital events;
3. There is a need to identify specific and priority activities in civil registration that could be supported within a comprehensive master plan.
4. Vital data should be tabulated and analysed even if they are fragmentary for feedback and improvement of coverage and quality of the data.

F. National Capacity Building

Rapidly changing priorities in developing countries, combined with the availability of many new technologies to help provide relevant information, require appropriate training at many levels to build needed national capacities.

Recommendations:

1. Assistance should continue to be provided by UNFPA to strengthen national training capabilities.
2. CST/TSS advisers should provide support in this area primarily through the organization of regional workshops and training programs. Whenever possible, full use should be made of regional, sub-regional and national expertise.

G. Technology

A wide range of data collection, processing and dissemination technology is now available and a number of these were demonstrated in the workshop. However, the applicability of the technology in specific contexts and situations is always not clear. Over-enthusiasm to promote the use of the latest state of art technology for data collection and data processing by NSOs without the necessary supporting infrastructure has led, in many cases, to failure to make the most effective use of the technology.

As countries have turned away from traditional (bilateral) donors towards multilateral ones (UNFPA) for support in development of computing facilities, a new regime of dependence has been created. Given the rapid development of "processing" technologies, the need for continued upgrading to maintain contact with professional needs in the field of statistics, the complications of this dependence cannot easily be ignored.

Recommendations:

1. Countries should be provided with comparative analyses of various hardware options and application software packages to assist in selecting the most suitable. TSS specialists could assist in this process. It is essential to ensure that appropriate technologies be used at the country level.
2. TSS/CST coordination could be improved if state-of-art research is combined with more practical help to the CSTs through joint missions, workshops, etc.

H. Future TSS/CST Workshops in Population Information Systems

Recommendations:

1. The workshop proposed that regular meetings on the TSS/CST data collection advisers should be convened, preferably with specific technical themes. One possibility is strengthening of non-traditional sources of data collection and their integration into the national statistical system;
2. CST advisers should also have the opportunity to attend major events such as international conferences and major exhibits. In this respect, advisers should exchange timely information in the TSS/CST network on the existence of forthcoming professional meetings and events.