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Using CensusInfo Technology for Census Dissemination in Africa

Background

> ***"A census is not complete until the information collected is made available to potential users in a form suited to their needs"***
>
> -- UN Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2, para. 1.206

One of the major lessons learned from the 2000 round of the World Population and Housing Census Programme, during which 57% of Africa's population was enumerated[2], points to the necessity of taking full advantage of the data collected through censuses via appropriate dissemination and analysis mechanisms. Census results are typically published in a tabular format - whether in print or on the web –thereby limiting their use by potential data consumers. Furthermore, many interested data consumers encounter language and/or other data access barriers, such as the data being restricted or only available domestically in print format.

For census data to be truly useful for public dialogue, it needs to be easily accessible to the national and international community via the Internet in multiple languages. Potential users need easy, quick access to data in all of their customized disaggregation: by sex, age, geographical sub-levels and time period, for purposes of analysis, comparison and dissemination.

CensusInfo[3] is a royalty-free database system that provides a method to organize, store and display data in a uniform format, to facilitate census data sharing across government planning

United Nations Statistics Division
2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme

The 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme was approved by the Statistical Commission at its 36th session and adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in resolution A/2005/13. ECOSOC recognized that population and housing census data are essential for effective development planning and objective decision-making. In addition, census data are useful for monitoring population trends and programmes, as well as for evaluating policies. The essential goals of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme[1] are:

- To agree on international principles and recommendations to conduct a census
- To facilitate countries in conducting censuses during the period 2005-2014
- To assist countries in disseminating census results in a timely manner

Major activities of the 2010 World Programme include the development of census methodological guidelines, facilitating exchange of experience, and assisting countries in improving their statistical capacity in census taking.

For more information, please visit:
http://unstats.un.org/unsd/census2010.htm

sectors, UN agencies, aid agencies, demographers and academicians. CensusInfo was developed by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and has been adapted from DevInfo database technology. There are currently several countries with nationalised adaptations of CensusInfo across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.[4]

CensusInfo is an integrated desktop and web-enabled tool to assist countries in their census data dissemination. It contains simple and user-friendly features that can be used to produce tables, graphs and maps for inclusion in reports, presentations and advocacy materials. Database administrators can add their own sets of national, regional and local indicators to their databases. The system also has a data exchange module for importing census tables from industry-standard statistics software packages.

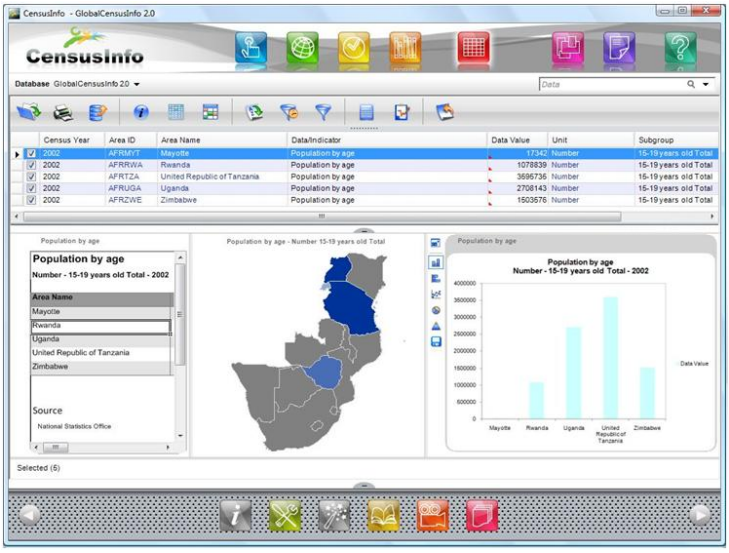

Fig. 1: CensusInfo application interface

National Statistics Offices or any other responsible governmental department are the prime candidates to create a country-specific CensusInfo application. Once this application is online or distributed via CD-ROMs, anyone can use CensusInfo to query and retrieve census information.

CensusInfo initiatives in Africa

As previously shared, dissemination of census results has been one of the weak points of previous rounds of population and housing censuses. The CensusInfo initiative aims to address this weakness by helping countries disseminate their major census results at all relevant geographical levels. The remainder of this article explores the progress of CensusInfo implementation in four African countries: Malawi, Egypt, The Gambia and Liberia.

CensusInfo activities in Malawi

Malawi has held a census every decade since 1966 and concluded its most recent population and housing census in 2008. The Strategic Plan of the National Statistics Office of Malawi for 2007-2011 highlights the importance of high quality data and the need for this data “to be disseminated widely using innovative techniques, so that both those that deliver and receive services can monitor their effectiveness.”[5]

In line with this vision, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in collaboration with the National Statistics Office (NSO) of Malawi organized a national CensusInfo technical workshop in Zomba, Malawi from 27 November to 4 December 2010.[6] The overall aim of the technical workshop was to equip the Malawi NSO with capacity to use CensusInfo as a platform to disseminate national census data.

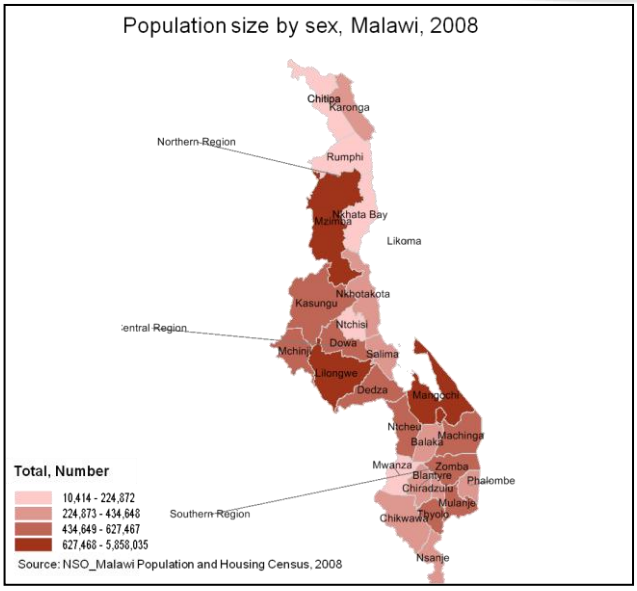

Fig. 2: Sample output, CensusInfo Malawi database

Specific outcomes included teaching important database administration skills needed to create and maintain a national CensusInfo database with data on global and country-specific indicators disaggregated to the district level, as well as teaching how to use key CensusInfo features to assure data quality. On the final day of the workshop, participants were guided through a strategic planning session to discuss specific dissemination strategies for a national CensusInfo database. The key output of this workshop was a draft Malawi CensusInfo database, with the final database and web-enabled version scheduled for release in June 2011.

CensusInfo activities in Egypt

Egypt was one of the first countries to carry out a census, with evidence of censuses being carried out in 3340BC. Its first modern census was undertaken in 1882, and its most recent one took place in 2006.[7]

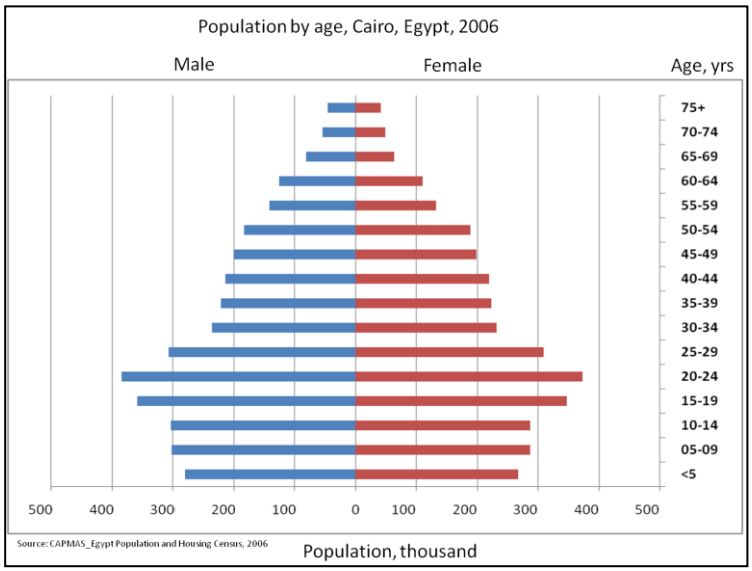

Fig. 3: Sample output, CensusInfo Egypt database

In response to a request for technical assistance from Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), UNSD organized three workshops to train CAPMAS staff in the use of CensusInfo software from May to October 2010. In cooperation with UNSD experts, CAPMAS developed the Egypt CensusInfo database, which is a country adaptation of CensusInfo. It

contains over 90,000 data values from the 2006 census and the 1996 census rounds and is available in Arabic and English languages online at www.censusinfo.capmas.gov.eg/. The data have been organized by CAPMAS to better serve analysts and data consumers.

CensusInfo activities in The Gambia

The Gambia's first complete population and housing census was performed in 1963, and the most recent one was carried out in 2003. The target audiences for census data dissemination include government agencies (especially the policy and planning offices), international donor organizations such as UN agencies, NGOs and civil society.

In November 2009 the Gambian Bureau of Statistics (GBOS) nominated a staff member to attend a UNSD CensusInfo workshop in Maputo, Mozambique. Soon afterward, work began on the creation of a national CensusInfo database for The Gambia. In December 2009 CensusInfo was highlighted during national activities related to the dissemination of the 2003 Population and Housing Census results.

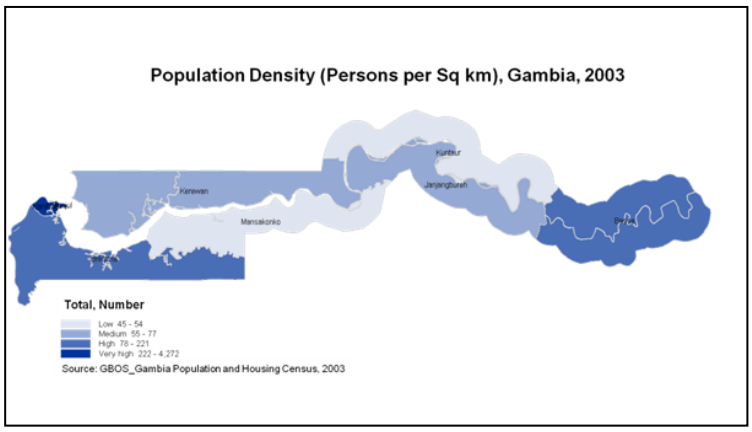

Fig. 4: Sample output, CensusInfo The Gambia database

Data continues to be entered into the database, with the objective of creating a CensusInfo database that provides standard, accessible and timely benchmark data to partners, planners, policy makers, researchers and the general public, for better planning and advocacy.

CensusInfo activities in Liberia

Prior to Liberia's population and housing census of 2008, it had been 24 years since the country had last undertaken a census. Even then, the results of the 1984 census were lost in the civil crisis before they could be analyzed and published. Most of Liberia's data banks were completely destroyed in the domestic conflict.[8]

To capitalize on the availability of new population data and to strengthen its dissemination and use, the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS), in partnership with UNSD and UNFPA, organized a CensusInfo training workshop in 2009. More than 30 staff from LISGIS and other line ministries and agencies were taught how to use the CensusInfo software. Since then, data for 169 indicators have been entered into the CensusInfo Liberia database, and further efforts are underway to link this database to the national Integrated Management Information System (IMIS).

Conclusion

This article has highlighted the progress of CensusInfo implementation in four African countries: Malawi, Egypt, The Gambia and Liberia. Each of these countries has recognized the need for a better method of disseminating their census results and has initiated steps to use CensusInfo to make this data more widely available to a broad spectrum of data consumers. Several other countries have indicated interest in the software and have contacted UNSD for support. An update on additional countries adopting or using CensusInfo will be provided in subsequent issues of the Newsletter.

For more information on these various CensusInfo initiatives, please contact Keiko Osaki-Tomita, Chief, Demographic and Social Statistics Branch, United Nations Statistics Division, at osaki@un.org. To learn more about using CensusInfo to organize, store and disseminate population and housing census data, please visit the CensusInfo website at http://www.censusinfo.net.

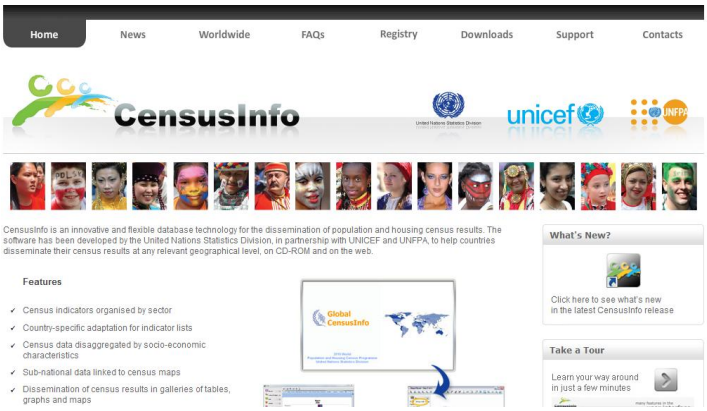

Fig. 5: CensusInfo homepage website

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