

COSTING GUIDE FOR POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increased demand for timely and more elaborate data combined with the rising population numbers has tremendously increased census costs. The adoption of new technologies in mapping, data processing and dissemination, while improving the efficiency and quality of the products, has further led to increases in census costs.

Donor fatigue in supporting census activities and associated rising costs resulted in many countries not participating in the 2000 round of population and housing census programme. The global financial crisis has further aggravated the situation, and there is a possibility that many more countries may not be able to conduct a census during the 2010 round. Realizing the urgency and severity of the situation, UNFPA has established a programme to facilitate the continuity of census taking in developing and transitional countries. These efforts are in line with the leadership role UNFPA has played in advocating and supporting censuses over nearly four decades.

In order to mobilize adequate resources for a census programme, proper identification of costs for the various activities involved is essential. Experience has shown that in the past many countries under-estimated census costs. As a result, UNFPA has initiated the development of a detailed “Census Costing Guide” covering all census activities to assist census organizations and Governments in preparing census budgets and mobilizing resources. The Guide will also assist the UNFPA country offices and other donor agencies to understand the census requirements.

2. ORGANIZATION OF THE GUIDE

The most crucial step in planning and conducting a census is the development of a census programme with clear identification of census activities and tasks. This serves two purposes: (i) to help determine the sequencing and timing of various census activities; and (ii) to provide a structured process for preparing a budget. In addition, such detailed breakdowns of activities and tasks, including the expected completion time for each activity, provide administrators with a clear picture of the census process and the various steps involved for its successful completion.

The “Census Costing Guide” identifies a comprehensive list of census components, activities and tasks, grouped into five broad stages. These are: 1. Planning and Management; 2. Preparatory

¹ This paper is an extract from a draft report commissioned by UNFPA prepared by the two coauthors, entitled “Census Costing Guide”. This paper is submitted for presentation at the 57th Session of the International Statistical Institute (ISI) with permission of UNFPA; the two coauthors, however, are fully responsible for its contents.

Work; 3. Field Operations; 4. Data Processing; and 5. Census Products and Dissemination. Each stage consists of a series of major components. To achieve the completion of a component, several activities must be successfully completed. For each activity to be completed, a set of tasks are identified, each of which must also be completed successfully. A task is the lowest level of work in the operational ladder; each task may need multi-prong actions. For each task, therefore, a list of quantifiable budget items should be identified with unit cost, number of units required, and frequency of occurrences in order to determine the total resource requirement. To arrive at the total cost of each item, the unit cost is multiplied by the number required and the frequency of occurrence.

The Guide is presented in a tabular Excel format (a sample page is attached), along with selected explanations and comprehensive lists of quantifiable budget items. The Guide contains in total 31 components, 92 activities, and 348 tasks. When each task is broken down into quantifiable budget items, depending on the complexity and the situation of the census project in each country, the number will easily reach several thousand items.

3. ESSENTIALS OF CENSUS COSTING

An indispensable element in planning a census is the development of detailed project plans. Use of project management techniques, such as Gantt Charts, containing a detailed time line, or network diagrams also sometimes referred as Programme (or Project) Review and Evaluation Technique (PERT), are very useful to assist the census management, Ministry of Finance, and international donor agencies in understanding the timing for each activity and when the funds for that activity will be required. The Guide has been prepared to assist national statistical offices in developing census costs and does not replace the need for well-constructed detailed project plans including a calendar of activities.

With a view to using such techniques, each task in the “Census Costing Guide” has been uniquely coded, and it is therefore possible for the census office to assign to each task its start and end time, duration, and any predecessor tasks which need to be completed before this task can be started. Although breakdowns in the “Census Costing Guide” may look too cumbersome and unnecessarily detailed, it is the only way a census budget can be estimated and justified. The quantifiable budget items for each task should be clearly identified by the office preparing the budget, and adequate resources should be earmarked in the budget. Each activity under a component should be discussed in detail by the team preparing the budget and tasks should be modified to meet local conditions.

The population and housing census is a very complex and challenging undertaking, and the census programme in each country is unique, mainly due to the differences in the national statistical systems, the census content and the methodology. The Guide will cover all the main elements of a census undertaking. It is designed to serve as a tool for planning and estimating census costs, and should be adapted to meet the specific national census structure and design.

REFERENCES

United Nations (2008). *“Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2”*. Statistical Papers, Series M No.67/Rev.2. Sales No. E.07.XVII.8