

PILOT CENSUS

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the purpose and importance of conducting the pilot census. The pilot census should be seen as a value added or an opportunity to undertake a good and success census particularly in PICTs where human and financial resources are main factors hindered the census operations and results. The paper further presents important experiences and lessons learnt from the 2010 World Round of Census and the beginning of 2020 round of census which can be better opportunities used by countries when conducting their next census.

2. BACKGROUND

The UN Principles and Recommendations, Rev. 3 states that, “The census is among the most complex and massive peacetime exercise a nation undertakes. It requires mapping the entire country, mobilizing and training an army of enumerators, conducting a massive public campaign, canvassing all households, collecting individual information, compiling vast amount of completed questionnaires, and analyzing and disseminating the data.” (UN 2015, p.1) The census undertaking is a very costly exercise the countries have to support. Census undertaking is also mandated in all NSO’s regulation that mandates the countries to conduct the census. It is by law that countries should conduct the census despite the NSO’s size and resources.

The pilot census, also known as the “census dress rehearsal”, is a process in which all census operations are being tested in a detailed comprehensive manner. This takes place, ideally and as a matter of best practice, one year ahead of the actual census date, when major external circumstances, such as season (weather), holiday periods, school year schedule etc. can be expected to be similar to when the census proper will be conducted. The pilot census tests all phases of the main census, from planning, to the execution of the planning, logistics arrangement and management, questionnaire design and format, training procedures, fieldwork operations, publicity, payment system, data processing, data tabulations and analysis. Note that a similar sounding exercise, often referred to simply as a the pre-test, is the process testing the questionnaire content, design and format and testing other new technologies to be adopted in the census such as scanning, CAPI, TAPI and other. This is not to be confused with a Pilot Census.

The pilot census is essential to undertake well in advance of the full enumeration because it plays an important role in ensuring that all census preparations are in place for the main census. It is from the pilot census that errors in the census operational plan are identified. The pilot census provides the opportunity to adjust and correct errors that could impact the success of the census and is more

cost-effective in comparison to the expense of discovering problems during the actual census. Countries may opt out of conducting a Pilot at their own risk, as there is no mandate that one be completed. However, the evidence presented in this paper based on other countries' experiences leads us to strongly recommend that every country include a comprehensive Pilot Census as a standard component of overall Census operations.

3. PILOT CENSUS CONSTRAINTS

While acknowledging the importance of conducting a comprehensive pilot census, there are still constraints that countries encountered which could have prevented them from conducting the pilot and even so preventing them to conduct the pilot census the way it should be:

1. Most PICTs did not realise the importance of a pilot census and therefore consider a pilot census as a waste of time and money.
2. Other PICTs thought having conducting many censuses in the past; they felt they did not need to conduct one.
3. Some were unable to conduct a pilot census due to lack of financial and human resources to support the pilot census undertaking.
4. Lack of well planning and as a result timelines were too tight to schedule the pilot census.
5. New and inexperienced census managers/commissioners who may not realise that the pilot is an expected component of the census and should be included in the census operations.

4. PILOT CENSUS OVERVIEW – SDD SUPPORT

Most or all PICTs are still not acknowledging the importance of conducting a comprehensive pilot census. Evidence from past censuses in PICTs proves that very few countries had tried to conduct a comprehensive pilot census. Many countries included an exercise that they titled "Pilot Census" but most only carried out limited testing on just a small element of the census operations. For instance, most countries carried out questionnaire testing only or testing new technology tools used and applied in their census.

In the 2010 round of census, Tuvalu and Kiribati included the pilot census in their operational planning. They were scheduled to conduct a comprehensive pilot census with support provided from SDD. Tuvalu was able to test all aspects of their census operations while Kiribati did not manage to test all census operations.

During the 2012 Census Review Meeting, the importance of conducting a comprehensive pilot census was emphasized and discussed in detail. The outcome of the meeting recommended that

pilot census should be considered in the 2020 round of census. All PICTs recognised the importance of the pilot and all agreed to the recommendations presented in the meeting.

Palau and Kiribati are two first countries to run a census in the 2020 census round. Palau did not manage to conduct the pilot census prior to their main census in April, 2015 due to several reasons. Kiribati on the other hand had planned to conduct the pilot census prior their upcoming census in November, 2015. The experiences during the Kiribati planned pilot census are discussed further in this paper as lesson learnt for countries to consider in their upcoming census.

5. PILOT CENSUS EXPERIENCES – WHAT DID NOT WORK WELL?

Below is the summary of major challenges encountered during the planned pilot census for the Kiribati census 2015:

1. Pilot census planning and budgeting:
 - The plan and budget for the pilot census did not capture all activities required for running the pilot.
2. Pilot census date:
 - The timing to conduct the pilot census was too short of about 5 months prior the main census. The timing of conducting the pilot did not reflect the actual situation of the main census and at the same time would not provide sufficient time to make changes and corrections if needed.
3. Census team organisation and leadership:
 - The census team was under-staffed, and most permanent staff already had other full-time responsibilities in the statistics office. In addition to their normal task, they were assigned another role in the census operation. This team organisation contributed to missing deadlines for census activities.
4. Communication:
 - Good communication and understanding between all partners that have roles in the census operations is very crucial for the success of the census. This did not work well and as a result some activities were carried out without the support from other partners.
5. Household listing and GPS waypoint data:
 - There were a lot of data inconsistencies found between the listing and the GPS waypoint database that were used which created confusion to the fieldworkers in the field.

6. Questionnaire:
 - A lot of questions were simplified without proper consultation with other resource people. Modifying the questions could have an impact on the quality of the data collected and also means changing the entry system used for data entry.
7. Training of fieldworkers;
 - There was no training schedule for the training to show the training plan for the two weeks. Training materials such as note books were not provided to participants. The training was focusing more on the questionnaire without providing training and guidance on the use of EA maps and listing forms to detect missing households. The training manuals were not detail enough and did not include instruction on how to identify potential missing households in the EA and how to record them.
8. Fieldwork:
 - Fieldwork logistics, transport arrangement and materials (questionnaires, listing forms, EA maps, etc.) were just prepared at the very last minute. Fieldwork supervision in most areas was not organised and enumerators were just instructed to complete the given number of households.
9. Data processing:
 - There was a last minute review of the entry system due to the newly modifications of the questionnaire that the data processor was not aware of. There was also a delay in the training of the data entry people as well as the data entry due to the unavailability of the office data processing manager who would be responsible for supervising the data processing in the absence of the data processing specialist.

6. PILOT CENSUS EXPERIENCES – WHAT WORKED WELL?

The main objective of the pilot census is to assess and evaluate all phases of the main census. So despite the challenges stated above that were encountered during the pilot, the outcome did work well in that it provides the followings:

1. Opportunity to review errors in preparatory work, for instance, errors in the listing forms, questionnaire design, etc.
2. Opportunity to new inexperienced census manger/commissioner to gain more experience and confidence in carrying out census plans and operations after such experience in the pilot.
3. Opportunity for the census team and other partners to make sound decision on whether the country is ready to conduct the success census or not.

7. WAY FORWARD

1. Conduct Pilot Census:
 - PICTs should realise the importance of the pilot census as an opportunity to improve the quality of their census and therefore must consider the pilot census in census operations.
 - PICTs should follow best practice recommendation to schedule the pilot one year prior the main census
 - PICTs should aspire to test all census procedures, not just one or two small elements of the enumeration.
2. Detail plan and budget for pilot census:
 - PICTs should prepare a detailed plan and budget for the pilot census that corresponds exactly to the main census.
3. Good communication and collaboration between census team and partners:
 - PICTs should be proactive and take ownership and leadership of their census activities; do not wait for reminders from partners or donors.
 - Good communication, understanding and collaboration between the country and other parties are crucial and must be maintained throughout the project so that support and assistance can be allocated efficiently.

8. CONCLUSION:

The census undertaking is one massive and expensive exercise that requires sound, detailed planning, careful preparations, and strong commitments from the country. PICTs are mandated to conduct the census at the given interval and must be prepared well in advance, particularly with challenges most PICTs faced in securing funds to support their census. When conducting a census, many efforts are placed into the process to ensure the quality of data. Likewise, the pilot census would also play an important role to ensure quality assurance and quality data collected in the census by carrying out a comprehensive testing of the entire census system. PICTs should acknowledge the importance of conducting the pilot census in their upcoming 2020 round census as in-line with recommendations agreed in the 2012 Census review meeting.