

Kiribati experience in census and survey questionnaires design and content development

SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

REGIONAL MEETING OF HEADS OF PLANNING & HEADS OF STATISTICS (HOPS)
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 17-21 July 2010)

Questionnaire design/content development in the 2010 census project (Document presented by the Kiribati National Statistics Office)

PURPOSE

1. The main purpose of this paper is to provide a summary report of the Kiribati National Statistics Office experiences related to census questionnaire design and content development in the past censuses and surveys and in the 2010 census. The paper presents some discussion points as part of the recommendations for the conference to consider as improvement of questionnaire design and development for future censuses undertakings.

PAST KIRIBATI CENSUSES

2. With Kiribati past censuses since the early 1900, questionnaire designing had been always part of the census planning. When designing questionnaire, past and existing questionnaires were adopted as main framework for developing new questionnaires.
3. To accommodate and satisfy user's needs and data demands, census data users were identified and were informed about their involvement and role in the census. Data users were always asked to provide their questions to be accommodated in the census questionnaire. Data users were informed to prepare questions that would collect information that most required and needed in their area. These users defined as stakeholders would normally were represented in the Census Steering Committee but not all of them.
4. Census Steering Committee was also established to provide overall support to the census operations and specifically to deal with technical issues on questionnaire designing. One of the major task of the census steering committee was to approve the use of such questionnaire that had been developed.
5. In finalizing the questionnaire, software used for designing the questionnaire layout and format had some restriction to include most questions. In the past censuses, excel had been the most common software used to design the Kiribati census questionnaires. Final selections of census questions and the approval of the census questionnaire was always the responsibility of the Census Steering Committee and particularly the Census Commissioner and the team.

6. Census pilot as often referred to a comprehensive testing of all census procedures including testing of the census plan, organization, field logistics and the entire census system including testing the questionnaire design. This is a very crucial stage of the census plan which had been considered to be the best practices to be adopted to ensure that appropriate tools are employed during the actual census enumeration. Kiribati past censuses never undertook census pilot instead conducted questionnaire testing only. Testing of the questionnaire design and contents were usually carried out by some permanent and temporarily staff interviewing a number of households in urban and rural areas for a maximum of 2 weeks. Nevertheless, training of staff who carried out the testing of the questionnaires were never considered and never part of the plan. In most cases these staff involved received very little training or no training at all prior the exercise. Training as such is most required for these staff in order to assist them to understand the questionnaire.

KIRIBATI CENSUS 2010

7. Preparations and planning for Kiribati 2010 census begun in less than 2 years time starting with mapping out the work plan in late September, 2009. Furthermore, Kiribati 2010 census plan was even developed without prior discussion and arrangement carried out between Kiribati NSO and Kiribati Government on census supporting related matters.
8. Kiribati 2010 Census questionnaire design and development was also seen as part of this census planning document developed in late September, 2009. In the plan, questionnaire design should begin in December 2009 starting off with the first meeting with all stakeholders and data users to discuss about the questionnaire contents and format. However, this was not achieved and was not done as been planned. The first meeting with stakeholders about the census 2010 questionnaire design took place after about 5 months after what had been put into the plan. This was very late and caused problems in resetting the questionnaire format in trying to accommodate new additional questions identified from stakeholders.
9. Formatting and designing of the Kiribati 2010 census questionnaire was even carried out before consultation with census data users and stakeholders. The 2005 questionnaire was adopted with few changes and was updated as to be utilized in the 2010 census. And so the first draft of the questionnaire was produced with no or less user consultation done prior the layout and formatting of the questionnaire.
10. Late consultations with data users and stakeholders led to some key problems in changing the format of the questionnaire. This included another arrangement in trying to accommodate new additional questions in the questionnaire. Further considerations had to be made to go through the questions and made decisions on which to include or exclude provided that they were fit in the questionnaire.
11. Since scanning was adopted, the software used for designing Kiribati 2010 census questionnaire changed from excel to In Design which is applicable for scanning purposes. Even though there was more space available in the new format, this could not also accommodate all questions proposed by stakeholders. Due to late consultations with

stakeholders and data users, there was more time taken in formatting the questionnaire than it should have been.

12. Finalization of the census 2010 questionnaire design and content witnessed more involvement of technical assistance and advice. In the process there were advice requests on the selection of questions to be included, the explanation on the importance of such questions to be considered in the questionnaire. However, there is still a need for more involvement of the advisor's committee in approving the questionnaire.
13. Kiribati Census 2010 also planned for conducting a census pilot to test the actual field operational plans ranging from training of fieldworkers to testing of the questionnaire. However, at this stage with time constraints census pilot timing had not been confirmed. Yet the decision on whether to have the census pilot or only testing of the questionnaire had to be made.

EXPERIENCES

14. Past experiences showed that there were shortfalls in the Kiribati census questionnaire design and development. Even though normal and best practices were set up and followed for questionnaire design, evidence showed that there is a need for improvement in this area.
15. Questionnaire design had been carried out at the very last notice. Past questionnaires adopted were not carefully reviewed on how relevant the questions were at the time of the next census. There was never consultation carried out with existing guidelines on how to make decisions as to include questions in the questionnaire. Therefore, most questions asked in the last previous census were never considered to be changed. For example, some questions were still the same and were approached the same way as they were in the last two censuses without considering the output and use of such questions. Other cases, new questions were just added in upon the request of the department without clear understanding on what indicators are derived from such questions.
16. While data users and stakeholders were consulted about the questionnaire, they were not really well informed about their involvement in the census questionnaire design. When invitation letters were sent out to data users, they were only advised to prepare any questions that they identified as major needs and requirements in their respected department and offices. No further explanations included on what are these needs used for, how they would be collected and measured and whether they had been used or not. There was also very little explanation on the time and cost constraints to stakeholders about all questions asked in the census questionnaire.
17. In most cases, the selection of the questions was finalized by the census commissioner. The census steering committee should approve the questionnaire but this was not always the case as seen in past censuses. Nevertheless, questionnaire design and content was often finalized without seeking advice and comments from technical experts from or outside the country which could have added more value to the questionnaire.

18. Past census experiences showed that census pilot never been considered in the census plan, only for pre testing of the questionnaire. However, the pre test of the questionnaire had not been well conducted and practiced. Obviously very little or no formal training were carried out to staff who were testing the questionnaire on the field. Training is crucial for staff who carried out questionnaire testing in order for them to understand the purpose and the objective of the questionnaire. Therefore it is important that training has to be provided for staff testing the questionnaire suitability.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

19. With experiences and lessons learnt from Kiribati past and 2010 censuses planning and preparations in all census stages especially in the context of this paper on questionnaire design, this paper recommends that for future censuses the followings recommendations had to be considered in order to conduct a successful census:
- Earlier planning and discussion between NSO and Government in setting out census plan and securing funds and supports from Government and development partners prior mapping out census plan and strategies. Experiences showed that 3 years planning before census year is considered to be sufficient.
 - Once funding and Government support confirmed, NSO should lay out a work plan mapping out all census activities in detail and to ensure that best practices for each activities are accounted for.
 - For example in the context of this paper, that questionnaire designing approach and guidelines as mentioned should be all followed as:
 - reviewing all questions and their relevance and applicable in the census,
 - data users and stakeholders to be well informed and guided well in their contribution to the questionnaire and that guidelines should be provided on how to develop their questionnaire to meet their needs and requirements
 - provision of technical assistance and advices on questionnaire design to be a continuous part of the questionnaire design plan
 - and that finalization of the questionnaire design and content should involved a decision from a census commissioner, advisory committee (Census Steering Committee) and inputs from technical advisors and experts from inside and outside the country.
 - to conduct testing of the questionnaire design and contents as part of the census pilot.
 - inclusion of census evaluation at the end of the census as part of evaluating the accuracy of the census results.