

## CONCEPT NOTE

### UTILISATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATABASES IN CENSUS PROGRAMMES OF PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES - PHASE I: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

##### Summary

The Statistics for Development Division (SDD) of the Pacific Community (SPC) is seeking to expand and strengthen its support to Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) in maximizing the use of administrative databases in census programmes, with an initial focus on civil registration databases. This initiative aligns with the priorities of the Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy (TYPPS) and in particular objective 1 which aims to ensure that *PICTs have technical capacity and statistical capability to manage and implement core statistical collections, including greater utilization and integration of key administrative databases*. The project will be undertaken in two phases. The first phase will entail awareness raising; gaining understanding of the potential constraints, benefits and options from greater use of administrative databases; exploring what administrative databases are available to countries for use in census/population statistics; and options for future action from those countries who wish to take the work further. The second phase will involve piloting these approaches in selected countries that want to do so.

##### The Pacific Community

The Pacific Community (SPC) ([www.spc.int](http://www.spc.int)) is the principal scientific and technical organization supporting development in the Pacific region. It is an international organization established by treaty (the Canberra Agreement) in 1947 and is owned and governed by its 26 members, including all 22 Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs). SPC's headquarters are in Noumea, New Caledonia, and it is one of nine member agencies of the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP). The Statistics for Development Division (SDD) (<http://sdd.spc.int/en/>) of SPC is the main stakeholder in the implementation of the TYPSS (<http://typss.org/>), which was adopted by PICT leaders in 2009 in recognition of the need for a comprehensive plan to drive improvement and development of statistics in the Pacific region. TYPSS proposes a regional approach to provide regional strategic leadership to improve the scope and quality of national statistics. The ten-year strategy (2010–2020) outlines a series of short and long-term programs to contribute to national statistics capacity development and regional coordination and capability. SDD's strategic framework is guided by TYPSS and its current work program by the Business Plan 2018–2020.

SDD's goal is to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems and social and economic planning agencies to provide policy-makers and analysts with important demographic, economic and social indicators for planning and decision-making. SDD plays a significant role for TYPSS as a large and

comprehensive technical provider to national statistics offices (NSOs) in the Pacific region. SDD's technical assistance role has been strongly endorsed by NSOs, in particular the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) where resources are limited, and technical assistance and supplementation is essential.

## A. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Data and statistics underpin the United Nations 2030 sustainable development agenda as demonstrated by the 232 statistical indicators or performance metrics, which have been formulated to enable every country in the world to benchmark progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the Pacific region 132 of the SDG indicators have been selected as a sub-set of the global indicators as the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development. Annual and where possible sub-annual reporting of data to monitor the indicators is recommended especially if the SDG indicators are to serve as a management tool, informing national planning and policy making and budgetary processes. Generally, availability of regular, high quality, disaggregated and georeferenced data is critical in enabling governments to build responsive governance systems and hence in achieving the fundamental goals of inclusive and sustainable development. As demands for data increase, the need for much better (including cost-effective) investments in building and strengthening statistical capacities cannot be over-emphasized.

Population and housing censuses provide an important source of the needed demographic, economic and social statistics data. The United Nations recognizes five key approaches to a census namely: full field enumeration (traditional census); rolling census; Combined methodology (Census enumeration plus administrative data and/or surveys); Base register and existing sample surveys; and fully register based census. During the 2010 round of censuses, a majority of countries in the world (72%) applied the traditional census methodology, with a smaller (though increasing) proportion of countries (28%) relying on administrative registers for similar purposes. Conversely, the United Nations recognizes administrative data sources as a critical component of statistics production. For example, with respect to demographic and social statistics data, the United Nations through its principles and recommendations for vital statistics systems recognizes civil registration as the "single best source of information on vital events (live births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, divorces etc.) for administrative, demographic and epidemiological purposes".

The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) provide a good example of the utilization of administrative databases in their Census programmes with most of these countries progressively shifting from the traditional census approach to fully-fledged register-based censuses; these include In Denmark (since 1981), in Finland (since 1990 ()) and in Norway (since 2011). Spain (and Italy) have transitioned through a 'combined census' – mixing full enumeration with the use of administrative data over a period of at least 20 years e.g. Spain held a traditional census in 2001; used combined census and administrative data in 2011; and is planning on a register based census in 2021.

In the regional context, it is worth noting that the 2018 New Zealand Census adopted a combined methodology – i.e. combining administrative data and census forms data to create the census dataset to compensate for the lower than expected participation in the 2018 Census<sup>1</sup>. A major pre-requisite for the Nordic countries switch to register based censuses was the existence of population registers

based on national identification systems and supported by robust legislative framework, Information technology and operational requirements to use these systems (e.g. registration of changes in physical address) among others. Experiences of the Nordic countries reveal significant advantages of administrative databases over other methods of data collection including in cost efficiency, lowering the burden on survey respondents and in improving data accuracy and security by reducing the number of persons handling the data both within and outside the national statistics office. Another advantage is the possibility of directly calculating specific demographic rates with potentially no numerator-denominator bias.

## B. REGIONAL CONTEXT

While some Pacific countries are known to rely on administrative databases to complement their other collections especially for demographic analysis, no country in the region has undertaken a combined and/or fully register-based census i.e. making use of existing administrative sources, nor established a Central population register. Conversely, in the recent past, there have been significant advances in the development of administrative records and considerable improvements in the quality of data provided from these sources. An equally important development in the Pacific is the increasing interest to establish robust IT platforms for civil registration (specifically, systems that are person-based and that include unique identification codes), in the interest of improving efficiency in administration and service delivery, including enabling mechanisms of sharing of data with other critical government departments. The Pacific regional workshop on legal identity held in July 2019 underlined these priorities under recommendations 3, 4 and 5.

Prospects for establishment of population registers and exploring the potential for making greater use of administrative databases haven't been explored much in recent regional statistical gatherings. However, literature suggest that there could be critical benefits to be derived especially in reducing the cost of statistical production and improving the availability of relevant, accurate, timely and comprehensive vital statistics. Further, some existing country context suggests that there is the potential (in terms of access to administrative databases and IT/people capacity) to make greater use of administrative databases for statistical outputs – including in the census.

## C. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF WORK OF THE PROJECT

Recognizing the importance of administrative databases including in providing timely information and data on population and demographic change, SPC is commencing on a project aimed at capacity building of PICTs (national statistics, civil registration and other officials) on the rationale and methodologies for the use of administrative databases for census purposes and secondly (based on country readiness) supporting selected Pacific Island countries in the implementation of expanded use of administrative databases for censuses. Key activities of this project include:

- I. Preparation of discussion and methodology papers on the subject for presentation at the Pacific Statistics Methods Board meetings;
- II. Delivery of a webinar series on the use of administrative databases in censuses, including the pros, cons and benefits of this approach, experiences of different countries, and options for use based on different country contexts; and

- III. For those countries that may wish to explore the project further, support in preparation and implementation of country proposal(s) for sensible next steps, including setting of a road map to explore the opportunities and requirements for greater use of administrative databases for census/population purposes.

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