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SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY
STATISTICS FOR DEVELOPMENT DIVISION (SDD)

2020 WORLD ROUND OF POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES –
PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES' CENSUS PLANNING MEETING:
INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS/STANDARDS, CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGIES AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

Noumea, New Caledonia, 27 July – 31 July 2015

PART 2.a: Draft Pacific core set of census questions
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1. Introduction

These recommendations are made in accordance with requests by Pacific Leaders to develop systems to improve comparability of statistics between countries, and following recommendations following the 2010 Census round to develop core modules for demographic and other commonly collected census and survey data. In addition, the *Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy 2011 – 2020* calls for the harmonization of standards and methods, classifications, and systems. These goals lead in turn to the broader effort to increase cohesiveness and integration of data collection efforts for all the countries supported by SPC.

Adopting shared questionnaire modules also meets the need to identify cost-saving measures through improved efficiency and reduction in the duplication of effort producing training manuals, data entry systems, and other materials necessary for census and survey operations.

As articulated in the 2012 Census Review meetings, Census commissioners, managers, and other leaders from National Statistics Offices should not view standardization as a compromise to their national sovereignty. Adhering to agreed-upon standards is a pragmatic recognition of the costs and complexity associated with major projects like a census or survey. Collaboration and teamwork among PICT partners is essential to producing consistent, comparable, and useful statistical indicators throughout the region.

2. Advantages of implementing standardized procedures

The primary advantage of using standardized questionnaires and census procedures is the improvement in comparability of statistics that this produces. Research reaching from the 1960s through recent years has consistently shown that even minor differences in format, question order, or labelling of response categories can produce statistically significant differences in respondent's answers (Sudman and Bradburn, 1974; Krosnick and Presser, 2010.)[1] Correspondingly, it follows that producing comparable statistics across a region as heterogeneous as the Pacific, agreement on common standards for measurement is only the first step toward this goal.

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[1] Sudman, S., & Bradburn, N. (1974). *Response effects in surveys: A review and synthesis.* Chicago: Aldine.
Krosnick, J. A., and S. Presser. 2010. "Questionnaire Design." In *Handbook of Survey Research,* 2nd ed., ed. J. D. Wright and P. V. Marsden. West Yorkshire, UK: Emerald Group.

A secondary advantage, but one that produces immediate, tangible benefits, is the savings in time, costs, and other staff resources that adopting a common set of questions will bring. In short, why should each country have to re-invent the wheel?

3. Recommended Design and Format

The proposed format is based on a review of survey methodology research and should help countries achieve improvements in several related quality benchmarks. Streamlined question flow will increase speed of enumeration and reduce item-level undercoverage. The open-spaced format has been shown to reduce respondent's perceived burden. For countries utilizing traditional in-person interviewing, open spacing will improve accuracy by providing sufficient space for interviewers to write legibly. Additional spacing between items and check boxes will also facilitate adaptability of forms for scanning and optical character recognition.

The use of rosters will help standardize data entry and processing systems, and having a roster foldout flap available for reference has been shown to improve enumerator adherence to inclusion rules and skip patterns.

The modular approach means that the respondent answers for all family members on a given topic, e.g., education, before moving on to the next topic. Research comparing different modes of data collection has found that, "topic-based interviewing may better accommodate the respondents' natural tendency to provide certain types of information for the entire household and facilitate interviewers' data capture needs. In addition, it may also prevent interviewers from delivering a nonstandardized interview due to perceived question redundancy."[2]

4. Recommended Questionnaire Modules

SPC, in collaboration with Census Commissioners and other country representatives at the Pacific Island Countries' Census Planning Meeting in July, 2015, has identified 8 modules that form the core set of topics that each country in the region should include in the 2020 round of censuses. The are:
   o Roster
   o Housing
   o Agriculture & Fishing
   o Population Characteristics
   o Disability
   o Education, Languages, and Literacy
   o Economic Activities Last Week
   o Fertility

Having all countries agree to these core modules is intended to ensure that each member country can produce indicators on the same minimal set of indicators and that these indicators are comparable between countries in the region. Following the July meeting SPC will be sending out revised drafts of the standardized questions to be included in each module. Efforts will also be made to send out recommended question-wording and ordering for supplemental (i.e., optional) items within each module that some countries may wish to collect. For example, some countries with long-term or intergenerational migration patterns want to collect data on "Parent's Birthplace" but this may not be relevant for every country.

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[2] From Hunter, J. and Landreth, A.. 2009. "Person-Based Data Collection in Practice: An Evaluation of Interviewer/Respondent Interactions" *Survey Methodology #2009-12. U.S. Census Bureau* *<https://www.census.gov/srd/papers/pdf/ssm2009-12.pdf>*

Agreement on the format, question-wording, and design for each module has yet to be reached. The following section summarizes the kind of data to be collected in each module and outlines some of the indicators or statistics that rely on specific individual questions.

A. Roster

Completing a Roster for every household in the country is the absolute minimum required to enumerate a population. Every country in the region should be following the recommended practice for enumerating the *de facto* population, or the population actually present within the national borders on Census Night. The completed rosters provide the total count of occupied housing units and number of households, and the total population count by age and sex.

The census count is to include tourists, temporary and long-term migrants, persons living on ships in port, babies just born, and anyone else alive and within the nation's jurisdiction at the time. It is recommended that census operations include plans to enumerate hotels, temporary structures, and other unusual residences. However, some countries may be able to collect data on temporary visitors through their immigration or customs office.

B. Housing

The core housing questions are focused on dwelling characteristics, construction materials, and household assets. The most important use of information collected in this module is for disaster management and response. The focus of questions on characteristics and assets is to measure MDG indicators on living conditions and relative poverty (i.e., persons per room, water access, etc.). These questions are also important for the measurement of progress toward national development goals and provide policy-makers in the country with information on the demands on the nation's infrastructure.

C. Agriculture & Fishing

The primary purpose of the core questions in the Agriculture & Fishing module is to identify households engaged in any subsistence activities for a sample frame for follow-on projects like agricultural censuses, aquaculture surveys, or other such data collections. For countries with substantial household-level food production, an extensive range of supplemental agriculture and fisheries questions will be prepared.

D. Population Characteristics

The population characteristics module is focused on a small number of demographic characteristics that most countries already collect. These items include questions on birthplace, ethnicity, citizenship, and related origin or background characteristics. This module will also include date of birth, which previous census experiences has shown needs to be asked in addition to the age question (from the roster) due to the common problem of age-heaping, or rounding, particularly when proxy respondents provide age estimates.

E. Disability

This module exactly replicates the core disability questions as recommended by the UN, WHO, as developed by the Washington Group. Countries are encouraged to include health-related questions in this module, including behaviour-based questions on alcohol, tobacco, and kava consumption.

F. Education, Languages, and Literacy

The core education and literacy questions are designed to calculate the indicators desired by UNESCO/ISCED and other organizations, or as required for MDG indicators. Due to the complexity and variety of educational systems existing in the region, countries should have the flexibility to employ any categories for educational attainment needed to for their national reporting requirements. They are encouraged to seek input from SPC education subject-matter experts and UNESCO advisors to ensure compatibility with international standards.

Literacy refers to the ability to read and write in any language. Most countries in the region will want to ask a separate question on literacy in the local/national language. Literacy is self-reported; although some experts recommend a simple test to determine literacy, there are no internationally-recognized standards available.

G. Economic Activities Last Week
Country representatives at the meeting agreed to adopt a 13-item set of standardized questions to ensure comparability in labour force indicators across the region. The need for this extended list of questions was reinforced during discussions on gender statistics, as well as in discussions on "home duties" and household-level subsistence activities that questions used in previous censuses have missed.

H. Fertility
The core set of recommended questions for the Fertility module were agreed to with little discussion. Country representatives agreed to have no upper age limit for fertility questions. This will allow demographic analysis to contribute to quality control through comparisons of completed fertility, as well as better indirect estimation of adult mortality.

5. Conclusion

The use of standardized modules with identically-worded questions will improve the comparability of indicators throughout the region. A common core will also increase the efficiency of technical advising and data processing support provided by SPC.

Revised drafts of each module will be circulated after the meeting for review and approval by country representatives and subject-matter experts from partner agencies.