

Vanuatu Experience in Coordination in executing censuses and surveys (Session 4.1)

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National coordination in the 2009 census project
(Document presented by the Vanuatu National Statistics Office)

PURPOSE

1. To briefly summarize census planning and design practices in past and present Vanuatu 2009 census project;
2. To discuss the role of coordination in census execution success, including lessons learnt from previous censuses and surveys that were incorporated into the 2009 census planning and design with a view to improving quality and timeliness;

BACKGROUND

Vanuatu has a relatively short history of population census taking. Two full national censuses of the country were taken prior to Independence. The first was taken in 1967 and the second in 1979. The second census in 1979 occurred just before Independence and was combined with an operation to prepare the electoral register for the country's first elections. It was the 1989 Census that was regarded as the first official census since the 2nd condominium administration and has since begun the interval of 10 years between censuses.

Initial census planning is the beginning of the census and attempts to outline the activities and resources required. It is inseparable from the budget plan thus both compliment each other and the combination would provide an estimate of the total cost of the census. It should be noted that the more time for planning, the better chance of getting well prepared for the actual enumeration.

Tab 1. Total census duration by census years

Year	Planning (lead time)	Data processing and output	Total years
1989	2 yrs	2 yrs	4 yrs
1999	2 yrs	1 yrs	3 yrs
2009	1 yrs	1 yrs	2 yrs

It can be seen from the above table that the total duration of the censuses have been gradually reduced. This is largely due to the improvements particularly in the processing stage particularly in the improvement in the speed of technology. However this does not necessarily mean the reduction of costs which in fact is the opposite due to factors such as inflation and population growth.

Perhaps the main focus of the planning is the tool itself in collecting the information. The questionnaire in this case needs to be incorporating the current and main policy areas as well as maintain core questions for comparability purposes. A pacific census model was used for this purpose and where possible, specific policy related was incorporated. For the 2009 census, these new areas include gender, disability and cultural aspects which are starting to emerge in the scene.

The draft questionnaire was tested during the pilot census. The pilot was able to assess the content and make changes where appropriate. In addition, there were several consultations made with other key agencies whom the questionnaire are more concerned with, to have their final say. The consolidated views were then reflected in the final content of the census questionnaire.

Resource mobilizing continued to be the main challenge despite several censuses already hence becoming a decennial activity. It requires a pool of resources ranging from human to financial resources. With a relatively young in terms of census history, donor partners have played vital role in their contribution to the census as well as including technical support. However it was in the last two censuses that the national government became the major contributor, largely due to the important role of the census in terms of national priority progress and monitoring.

While the Census may be an activity of VNSO, it is really a national event and therefore required a holistic approach and as required by the census Act, a steering committee comprising of key stakeholders both from government and non government entities. Several MOUs have been signed with state actors and donor communities to collaborate in different aspects of the census undertaking.

National Coordination was initially through technical support and this has been eventually taken up as locals become familiar and experienced with census undertaking. Being a major activity of the National Statistics Office, coordinating such a nationwide activity requires a lot of local knowledge and no one can do that better than a NSO staff.

VNSO stood by its mission and that is 'to collect, compile and disseminate quality and timely official statistical information to users in government, the private sector, the community and international organizations'. Over the past years, Information technologies have evolved and so is the data capture technology. Whatever technology it may be, quality and timeliness are the 2 pillars of any data. It is for these reasons that VNSO has opted to use in the 2009 census, the technologies of OCR and GPS, both having a different role in the census however both have the same purpose and that is to deliver a quality and timely census data.

Publicity has been an activity of its own and as well as the mainstream campaign effort, tactical initiatives were run to target difficult areas and Chiefs were used in these instance . All campaign activity has promoted the key message of confidentiality and the benefits of the Census.

There are a lot of lessons learnt in the current 2009 Census and much of which should determine the quality of the data. Unfortunately, the current census data is still in the data processing phase and not much speculation will be made as yet.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

Adopting new technologies such as that of GPS and OCR in Vanuatu has been a huge challenge especially being a first country in the region to have actually planned and actually use the 2 technologies. This is also a challenge for regional institutions like SPC who have been providing the technical support and who are also new to the technologies as far as census is concerned.

It has been an assumption that integrating such technologies would improve not only the data capture but being able to provide the outputs in a timely manner. This is yet to be seen once the data is final.

PROGRESS TO DATE

The 2009 Vanuatu census is currently in its data cleaning stage. The anticipated release for preliminaries results 6 months after enumeration did not really eventuate due to slight delays in data processing. However preliminary results tend to pinpoint the weaknesses that would have been otherwise executed.

While the pilot census served most of its purpose, testing of non private dwellings or institutions questionnaire was not carried out. This does have an impact in the actual enumeration. Although Household Listing was able to capture most institutions except hotels, the ability to ask the questions and to capture certain information regarding occupants was not tested. This tends to have resulted in a lot of blank fields.

One of the activity that had been unable to be executed as planned was the Post Enumeration Survey (PES). The absence of Post enumeration survey was not only due to inadequate funding then but mostly due to the timing especially where some areas still experiencing delays and would therefore be hasty to proceed with PES. In addition, should the PES take place, it would be around Christmas festive season where mobility of people will be very high and would therefore have some impact on the results. Ideally according to Census standards, PES should be conducted 2 weeks after the field enumeration. The absence of PES has proved costly in a sense where coverage was not clearly determined. The alternative approach used was matching individual records, but this also had its own limitations.

In terms of coordination, Census TA for the 2009 was very minimal. In fact this census saw the absence of full time TA unlike past censuses. However, continuous assistance was provided by SPC on ad hoc basis and particularly in relation to the new technologies introduced to the census (GPS and OCR)

KEY POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

While Vanuatu tends to have gained momentum in its experience from the Censuses and surveys, various challenges remain. Planning as in any form of activity is crucial and tends to determine the destiny of the project. For a census undertaking in Vanuatu, the ample lead time would have to be around 2 years prior to pilot census. After the pilot census, it is all about fine tuning and logistical arrangements ready for the actual enumeration

Part of the lead time is mobilizing resources where at times is not always adequate and therefore required backing up from the national government and so is the donor communities. It is for these obvious reasons that Census had to be carried out on a decennial basis. In a country like Vanuatu where political agenda and propaganda is still in its infancy due to the relatively young political history, influence from politicians tend to have some impact in the interview process thus requiring a nationwide but comprehensive awareness campaign to explain the purpose of carrying out the exercise such as that of a census and survey. With such diverse nature and complexity of culture existing with over 100 languages, there is not 'one size fits all' approach therefore it is challenging and therefore required a lot of time and effort before the actual execution of the field work.

However offices like VNSO always have on-going challenged like staff turnovers and inadequate staff despite a lot of demand for data by the government and the international community. The VNSO is currently implementing its institutional strengthening program which includes restructuring and filling in of the vacant posts. This should eventually add more resources as far as coordination is concerned.