

Best Practices

Population and Housing Census Vital for Policy Intervention Related to the Population

Population issues started drawing serious attention of governments and policy makers largely in the 1940's and 1950's. These were periods, in which scientists made an extraordinary progress, devising new methods of controlling infectious diseases and hence prolonging life. This in turn led to an unprecedented rate of population growth which caused worldwide alarm of a possible global population explosion. In addition to the aspect of the problem density-wise, it was also perceived that rapidly increasing population ahead of economic development was a major contributing factor to the problems of under-development because it slows down development and paralyzes growth.

Although population explosion is a worldwide phenomenon, it is however, acute in the case of the Third World nations. This is because most of the developed countries have managed to reduce the fertility rate of their populations to the minimum (0.3% on average) while in the developing countries it is rising at an alarming rate. Poverty in these countries exacerbated the complexity of high fertility rates.

Anxious to control the situation, many governments, especially in the developing world have, for the past several years, been striving to balance the size of their population with their economic growth by devising and incorporating population policies and strategies into their national development plans.

In the case of Ethiopia, after many years of little or half-hearted intervention population issues were given serious consideration after the establishment of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in 1991. The formulation of the country's population policy in 1994 testifies to the growing interest in population growth. The Ethiopian Population Policy aims to reduce the fertility rate through formal

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and non-formal family planning programmes at the end of which, the couples would be able to make their decision as to the number of children they are going to have.

In addition, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has adopted and implemented various legal provisions that facilitate implementation of the new population policy. One of these measures is the establishment of a National Population and Housing Commission that is accountable to the House of the Peoples' Representatives, the highest legislative body in the country. The Commission is in charge of coordinating and overseeing the overall conduct of population and housing censuses.

The Ethiopian Constitution in Article 103 provides for the Population and Housing Census to be conducted every 10 years.

Population and Housing census is vital in the development process as it provides reliable and timely information pertaining to the size of population, its demographic, social and economic characteristics as well as the number and conditions of houses available in the country during a particular period of time. This is vital for governments, policy makers as well as other stakeholders empowered to devising appropriate policy intervention measures that will guide their future actions.

In Ethiopia, Population and Housing Census was conducted for the first time at the national level in a coordinated manner in May 1984. Population size of Ethiopia stood at 39.5 million. Ten years later, in October 1994, the second census proved that number rose to about 53.5 million.

The Third National Population and Housing Census was conducted recently from May 29 to June 1, 2007.

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The Census was conducted across the nation save the Afar and Somali regional States. The Census in these States has been postponed to October 2007 due to the climatic conditions of the regions and the pastoralist way of life of their people.

Based on the experiences and lessons learnt from the past two censuses, exhaustive preparations have been made to make the Third Population and Housing Census a success. According to available information over 90,000 enumerators and 18,000 supervisors, all teachers, have taken part in the nation-wide campaign. Due to the good relation they have with the public, teachers are assumed to be the right social group to extract and collect accurate and reliable information from the community.

The budget required for the whole operation until the announcement of the final result has been estimated to be in the regions of Birr 500 million. Some 90 percent of the budget has been allocated by the Government while the balance, 10 percent was secured from donors including the United Nations Development Programme, the Government of Japan, the British Overseas Cooperation Organization and others.

Similarly, Regional Information Officers, as well as community and religious leaders were mobilized to help raise awareness among the people about the importance of the census for future development plans.

It is expected that the information that will be obtained from the Census will be of great significance for the efforts being exerted by the country to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.