

THE 2010 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS

A vital tool for national development.

Ghana is preparing for the next national census in September, 2010 after the previous one in April, 2000. Indeed, the forthcoming Population and Housing Census marks the 119th year of census taking in Ghana.

The first population census which was conducted in 1891 during the Gold Coast era was to enable the colonial governors to plan an effective way of formulating policies aimed at developing the Gold Coast as of that time.

Present day population census goes beyond the usual count of all people in a specified area at a given time. It also collects other demographic, social and economic information. It is a large-scale and major statistical activity of a country that requires a considerable amount of resources. This might be one of the reasons why many countries take censuses at intervals of no less than 10 years.

In Ghana, like in many other countries, population and housing censuses have been taken every 10 years or so.

The 2010 Census like that of the 2000 includes the counting of houses which will provide information the existing housing units and information about their characteristics and constructions that have an impact on maintaining health and to create normal living conditions for households, hence, the name Population and Housing Census.

I believe that this 2010 Census would be designed to meet various data needs such as providing basis for updating population data up to the lowest administrative unit (village), providing valuable input in monitoring the progress for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), providing the basis for developing population registers and population administration system, among others.

The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) is the main implementing agency for the preparation of all census activities, including data collection, data processing, data editing, tabulation, plan and final dissemination of the results.

Need for Census

Undoubtedly, a country's population census is the primary source of national level data about the size and characteristics of its population. The Census, being the largest and most significant statistical activity undertaken in the country is expected to provide the Government of Ghana and its development partners with detailed demographic data for every region, metropolitan municipality and district. The provision of this vital information and data is central to the country's planning for development programmes.

Quality data and indicators are particularly valued and crucial in the following areas:

Planning, implementation and monitoring of all development programmed in the country.

Information to track progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Development frameworks such as the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (9GPRS).

The Census will also provide detailed information about the size and characteristics of Ghana's population and allow for a comprehensive gender analysis of population-based indicators as well as shedding light on social inclusion. By strengthening the GSS, the quality and coverage of the population data, including issues of gender and social inclusion, can improve; produce a more accurate picture of the entire population's current and potential contribution to economic development. This would enable more precise budget planning, including projections for spending in social sectors.

Importance of Census

The importance of a Population and Housing Census can hardly be over emphasized. It is considered as a useful mechanism for providing an adequate data set on the population at all levels of administrative units. Census data provide the most important database for socio-economic development planning and policy formulation at national and sub-national level.

The data on population size, growth, composition and distribution provide the most important and critical inputs to the preparation of demand projections for food, clothing, shelter, nutrition and healthcare, education, employment and assessment of various other basic requirements.

Census data provide the most indispensable input for the analysis of the past, present and future growth of the population.

The 2010 Census will also throw light on the location and composition of the population in terms of family structure, age-sex distribution, the labour force and other social and economic characteristics.

Such data will provide the basic information to analyze and understand fundamental social and economic issues of the country and the dimension and scale of answers and approaches required to tackle Ghana's most pressing development needs: agricultural and rural development, poverty reduction, democratic governance, education, environment, disaster risk management and provision of health and population services. Employment, energy and housing. It will also shed light on the condition of women in Ghana and the diversity of people and cultures present in the country.

Census data can be translated into geographical statistical atlas. This could be of great value for the development planning purposes, particularly for sectoral, regional and local level planning.

Census data combined with household income and expenditure survey data or any other living standard survey can produce thematic maps on various health and demographic parameters including ICPD and MDG indicators. The data collected by the census also provide framework for other socio-economic surveys and statistical investigations.

The utility and need of census data are particularly high in a country like Ghana where there is no regular household survey programme and vital registration system.

There is an urgent need for conducting a national Population and Housing Census in 2010 for various reasons:

Maintain the continuity of the census undertaking after every 10 year interval.

Assess the impact of the various Development Plans implemented over the past decade on the quality of life of people, particularly poverty reduction, including monitoring of MDGs;

Gauge the magnitude and nature of significant population movements in the form of labour work (both inside and outside the country) during the last decade.

Recommendations

Clearly, an exercise of this nature cannot be implemented smoothly without any challenge. Census requires a considerable amount of resources; hence, it is very expensive. The 2010 Census is estimated to cost GH64 million out of which the government has provided half.

The government and its donor partners are kindly entreated to make available the remaining half to facilitate smooth implementation of the exercise.

Not only should qualified and skilled enumerators be selected but also they should be given appropriate and desired training required making the exercise successful. As much as possible enumerators must avoid petty takes such as wrong spelling of names, communities, etc. and must have effective communication skills.

It is thus, recommended that enumerators be recruited from their areas of residence where they are familiar with the geographical and social characteristics. In addition, they must also avoid double counting, one of the major problems associated with census.

Adequate public education must be given to the people. Undertaking a census exercise in a country like ours where majority of the people are illiterates could be challenging. However, if the people are well educated the exercise will be easier to conduct. The Information Service Department, the National Commission for Civic Education, media, Assembly members and other stakeholders must intensify the public education given to the people. They must sensitize them on the importance of the census exercise. It is important for the public to know that the census is to provide data for national development and not a means of collecting taxes as others have already perceived.

In fact, techniques for taking census have steadily improved over the years. Technological advances in sampling methods and data processing have greatly changed the modern census taking operation. The government should therefore provide modern Information and Communication Technology (ICT) equipment to facilitate the exercise.

In view of the above, I want to entreat all fellow Ghanaians to get involved and get counted,

for a reliable census data is an indispensable look for national development.