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Socioeconomic and Demographic Surveys

Building Statistical Capacity

Socioeconomic and demographic surveys are used throughout the world to collect data on a population's characteristics for demographic and economic analyses, educational and manpower planning, poverty studies, and assessing progress toward national objectives.

Recurring surveys are important for monitoring and evaluating the effect of different policies and programs over time. For this reason, these data collection activities are indispensable for assessing progress towards Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the Poverty Strategy Reduction Papers (PRSP), the metrics of the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and other international development measures.

With a focus on specific topics, socioeconomic and demographic surveys collect data from a sample that yield results representative of the total population. Data may be collected from individuals, households, or establishments. In general, surveys can collect more specialized and detailed information than a national census.

Because of their smaller scale compared to a population census, socioeconomic and demographic surveys have the advantage of timeliness of results, lower overall costs, and more comprehensive data.

A well-designed survey can yield statistically reliable data at a fraction of the cost of a census, and more quickly. Internationally-administered surveys such as the USAID-sponsored Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), the World Bank's Living Standards Measurment Study surveys (LSMS), and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) have proven their distinct utility for collecting data on key social, economic, and demographic indicators as well as generating information for program development and policy formation.

The U.S. Census Bureau works with international assistance partners, such as the USAID Office of Population and Reproductive Health and other bilateral and international organizations, to provide training and technical assistance to countries.

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A well-designed survey program incorporates the following major components:

- **Planning and Design**: A survey questionnaire should be designed to facilitate the enumeration and data capture. It is imperative to test the questions to ensure both that they are clearly understood by the respondents and that the desired measurement topics are effectively captured.

- **Field Operations and Data Collection:** Field and office operations must be carefully planned to ensure the quality of survey data. A comprehensive training program for field supervisors, enumerators, and data coders is essential.

- **Data Processing, Analysis, and Dissemination:** Special attention should be given to data editing, data tabulation, data analysis, and the dissemination of survey results to ensure that survey objectives are met and that decision-makers and other stakeholders have the information they require.

The Census Bureau provides capacity building oriented technical assistance and training on all components associated with conducting socioeconomic and demographic surveys.

Socioeconomic and demographic surveys are vital for monitoring development outcomes over time.

This is one in a series of fact sheets introducing the Census Bureau and the assistance it provides to countries around the world. The Census Bureau helps countries improve their national statistical systems by engaging in statistical capacity building activities that aim to enhance competencies in several areas in sustainable ways. Topics in this series include:

- Statistical Capacity Building
- Population Census
- Socioeconomic and Demographic Surveys
- Population Estimates and Projections
- CSPro – Processing Census and Survey Data
- Demographic and Economic Analysis
- Geographic Information Systems
- Courses and Workshops