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### 2020 round of population and housing censuses in Africa

#### I. Context

1. At the first joint session of the Committee of Directors General of National Statistics Offices and the Statistical Commission for Africa, held in Tunis in December 2014, it was decided that the Africa Symposium on Statistical Development should focus on raising awareness among all 54 African countries regarding the 2020 round of population and housing censuses, which covers the period 2015–2024. It was hoped that the Symposium would keep up with the momentum that had already been generated in the 2010 census round, during which 47 African countries undertook national censuses. In order to sustain the gains acquired during the 2010 round of censuses in Africa, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in collaboration with key partners, developed an African regional programme on population and housing censuses for the period 2020–2024 which encompasses sustainable capacity development, technical support and South-South cooperation.

2. During an expert group meeting, held in July 2016 in Nairobi, the first revision of the African Addendum to the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses was initiated under the guidance of ECA. Representatives of the African Development Bank (AfDB), ECA and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reached an initial agreement to work together to implement a five-year Africa census programme. They also agreed to bring the subject to the attention of higher management in the three institutions, and to try to align the programme with their respective institutional plans.

3. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2015/10 on the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, urged Member States to conduct at least one census during the 2020 round of censuses, taking into account international and regional recommendations. It underscored the necessity of setting quality standards to ensure reliable and accurate results. The Council stressed the importance of the 2020 Programme to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and requested the United Nations entities concerned to develop statistical standards, methods and guidelines and to monitor the implementation of the 2020 Programme. It encouraged the development of international methodological guidelines based on national best practices in census-taking. Countries were advised to conduct a review of their various national experiences as far as census undertakings were concerned, in preparation for the development of international standards, while taking into account the changing landscape of census-taking.



4. The Africa Census Coordinating Committee was established in 2016. It is composed of representatives of AfDB, the African Union Commission, ECA, UNFPA and the census offices of a number of countries representing the continent's various subregions. Its terms of reference were jointly drafted by AfDB, ECA and UNFPA. ECA coordinates the work of the Committee, and, in partnership with the Committee, facilitates the implementation of various projects in national statistical and census offices throughout the continent.

5. The history of census-taking in Africa is presented in table 1. The success recorded in the 2010 round of African population and housing censuses was unprecedented. In that round, 47 out of 54 countries conducted censuses, which was 9 more than during the 2000 round.

Table 1

**Number of countries that conducted censuses in the 1990, 2000 and 2010 rounds, and the number expected for the 2020 round**

<i>Census decade</i>	<i>Number of countries</i>
1990 round (1985–1994)	44
2000 round (1995–2004)	38
2010 round (2005–2014)	47
2020 round (2015–2024)	50

6. It is expected that the 2020 round will improve on the achievements of the previous round. However, it should be noted that a number of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, political conflict and lack of funding, are likely to have a negative effect on census undertakings in some countries.

## **II. Main goal of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme in Africa**

7. The 2020 census round in Africa is part of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, the goal of which is for countries and areas to agree on a set of accepted international principles and recommendations governing the conduct of censuses; to conduct a census, at least once, during the period 2015–2024; and to disseminate census results in a timely manner. The 2020 Programme addresses issues that are specific to Africa by:

- a) Providing the direct technical support necessary for census planning, management, data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination;
- b) Building technical capacity for the various phases of census operations;
- c) Supporting countries in difficult circumstances in preparing to conduct population and housing censuses.

8. In order to succeed, the 2020 census round in Africa requires the active support of African countries, in partnership with pan-African organizations, the Africa Symposium on Statistical Development, regional economic communities, the Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat, UNFPA and other international entities.

### **III. Innovative approaches to be used in the 2020 census round**

9. Efforts to conduct fully digital censuses in the 2020 round will require the deployment of technology that ranges from cartographic tools at the planning stage, to the use of hand-held devices, the Internet, geographic information systems (GIS), cellular telephones and tablets at the enumeration and dissemination stages. The following strategic and advisory services have been or will be made available to African countries.

#### **A. Information technology**

10. Technology has played a major role in the 2020 round of African censuses, with over 50 per cent of countries planning to conduct a digital census. The use of technology in censuses brings better availability of census outcomes and timely reporting of results. With digital censuses, there is significant improvement in the quality of data. Collecting data about people and the houses they live in using a tablet with a structured questionnaire reduces interview error in collecting information – a common problem in paper-based interviews. Also, poor handwriting might make it difficult to capture information accurately from a paper questionnaire, thereby reducing the quality of data and requiring more work to correct the information. Using digital data collection approaches reduces the amount of time it takes to clean, validate and tabulate the data before making the results widely available. The early release of census results leads to an earlier realization of benefits from the data collected in the census.

#### **B. Knowledge management**

11. A network of experts at the subregional, regional and global levels will be steered through ECA, in collaboration with the Africa Census Coordinating Committee, national statistical and census offices, national mapping agencies, other regional commissions of the United Nations, and the Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat.

12. ECA will facilitate South-South technical support, with the aim of providing peer-to-peer technical assistance in various aspects of the census process, so as to strengthen the capacity of countries to carry out a successful census. Specifically, technical assistance is intended to support the efforts of statistical and census offices in improving existing census operations and in ensuring compliance with the revised Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses and other international guidelines that pertain to the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme. In this connection, an inter-country support mechanism would be promoted, whereby countries that have registered remarkable success in the implementation of a given census phase would support others that need technical assistance in that regard.

### **IV. Schedule of censuses in the 2020 round**

13. Table 2 presents the schedule of population and housing censuses in the 2020 round in Africa, by actual or expected census year and by country.

Table 2  
**Schedule of censuses in Africa in the 2020 round, by year and by country**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Equatorial Guinea	2015	June/July	Confirmed
Sierra Leone	2015	December	Confirmed
Lesotho	2016	April	Confirmed
Comoros	2017	December	Confirmed
Egypt	2017	March/April	Confirmed
Eswatini	2017	April/May	Confirmed
Mozambique	2017	August	Confirmed
Madagascar	2018	May/June	Confirmed
Malawi	2018	September	Confirmed
Burkina Faso	2019	November/December	Confirmed
Kenya	2019	August	Confirmed
Algeria	2020		
Cameroon	2020		
Congo	2020	June	
Côte d'Ivoire	2020		
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2020		
Djibouti	2020		
Liberia	2020	December	
Mauritius	2020		Postponed
Sierra Leone	2020	December	Mid-term
Sudan	2020		Postponed
Togo	2020	November	
Uganda	2020		Confirmed
Zambia	2020	August	Postponed
Botswana	2021		
Cabo Verde	2021	June	Postponed from June 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic
Chad	2021	April	
Ethiopia	2021		Postponed from 2020
Ghana	2021	March	
Guinea-Bissau	2021	March	
Mali	2021		Postponed from 2020
Namibia	2021	August	Confirmed
Niger	2021		
Seychelles	2021	August	Postponed from August 2020 because owing to the COVID-19 pandemic
South Africa	2021		Confirmed

Burundi	2022	August	
Central African Republic	2022		Confirmed
Libya	2022		Confirmed
Nigeria	2022		
Rwanda	2022		
Sao Tome and Principe	2022	May	
United Republic of Tanzania	2022		
Zimbabwe	2022	August	
Benin	2023		
Gabon	2023		Confirmed
Gambia	2023		
Mauritania	2023		
Senegal	2023		
Angola	2024		Confirmed
Guinea	2024		
Morocco	2024		
Tunisia	2024		
Uganda	2024		
Eritrea	To be determined		
Somalia	To be determined		
South Sudan	To be determined		

## V. Capacity-building Initiatives

14. The following capacity-building workshops have been undertaken by ECA, in collaboration with UNFPA and other partners:

a) A workshop on strengthening statistical capacity for census-taking and Sustainable Development Goal monitoring in East and Southern Africa (March 2019): The aim of the workshop was to strengthen the capacity of countries in the two subregions to undertake digital censuses during the 2020 round, using digital hand-held devices and geo-referencing, which will greatly improve spatial data analysis. ECA was responsible for approximately 50 per cent of the content of the workshop.

b) A workshop on supporting electronic data collection in censuses, and lessons learned from the use of hand-held devices (July 2019): The primary objective of the workshop was to enhance participants' understanding of the impact of device use on census business processes by sharing key lessons and the experiences of countries that have recently used the computer-assisted personal interview approach with countries that plan to do so in upcoming censuses.

c) A capacity-strengthening workshop in Zambia under the Geo-Referenced Infrastructure and Demographic Data for Development initiative (June 2019): The workshop was aimed at facilitating the production, collection, use, analysis and dissemination of high-resolution population, settlement and harmonized subnational boundaries data, in support of the 2020 census round

in Africa, national sectoral development priorities, humanitarian efforts, and the Sustainable Development Goals. The workshop also addressed issues related to geospatial data standards and data policies, including second administrative-level boundaries and the mapping of spatial access to health facilities in Zambia through GIS-based accessibility analyses.

## **VI. Advisory services**

15. Advisory missions have been undertaken to countries to assist them in the use of Internet-linked and electronic devices in implementing the 2020 round of censuses. The advisory services have addressed tablet-sharing, the use of technology in census-mapping, the provisioning of tablets, geographic information systems, and electronic operations dashboards.

### **A. Tablet-sharing**

16. The use of technology, in particular the use of mobile tablets, has become part of the 2020 census round in Africa. The expansion in mobile connectivity across Africa and the availability of Global Positioning System (GPS)-enabled mobile devices provide new opportunities for African countries to conduct digital censuses.

17. To fully conduct digital censuses in Africa, a variety of technology assets must be deployed at the cartographic, enumeration and dissemination stages. The availability of tablets will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness by digitizing all census processes.

18. As an example, ECA and UNFPA worked with the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics to support Bureau efforts to share tablets more widely by providing advice on technical approaches along with workflow recommendations to facilitate the sharing of the 164,000 tablets that were used in the country's 2019 census. They also worked with the Bureau and partners on the logistics of tablet-sharing related to shipping and payment.

### **B. Use of technology in census-mapping**

19. Census-mapping has seen rapid advances in the use of new technology, including GIS, GPS and digital remote-sensing. Almost all countries in Africa have received or will receive assistance in applying these technologies in their census-mapping activities during the 2020 round. Electronic mapping facilitates the use of GIS for analysis, dissemination and solving spatial problems and challenges related to technical development, research, planning and spatial analysis.

### **C. Provisioning of tablets**

20. ECA has developed an application to automatically load the correct software onto each tablet and ensure distribution to the right area. This will significantly reduce the risk of error and the amount of work (and hence cost) involved in loading the tablets in preparation for the census, while also speeding up the process. Kenya was one of the countries of focus for the implementation of digital censuses in 2019, using 164,000 tablets. Technical assistance was provided to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics in using the application to conduct its census. On the basis of the results of the Kenyan census, an expert group on electronic data collection and dissemination in censuses was established to assist countries that plan to conduct digital census in the coming years.

21. As an example, the use of the application to calibrate the tablets used in the Kenyan census saved a total of 506 person-days, which significantly improved the timely availability of data. Considering the importance of timely production and availability of such data, it was essential to have such innovative solutions. This resulted in significant savings on the salaries that would have been paid to staff if the calibration had been done without the application and if the census had been prolonged as a result.

#### **D. Geographic information systems**

22. ECA has been supporting the implementation of a digital census that integrates geographic information systems functionality into the workflow, and that uses workforce management tools to provide a holistic census solution, from pre-enumeration activities, to digital enumeration, to post-enumeration dynamic spatial analysis. In order to conduct a spatial analysis of census results, geospatial teams in national statistical offices have to work with the census tabulation and editing teams to produce spatial relational tables that drill down to the lowest administrative levels. Such support has been provided to Ghana and Sierra Leone.

#### **E. Electronic operations dashboards**

23. ECA has deployed reusable electronic operations dashboard as part of its quality-control efforts during fieldwork procedures. The dashboards enable monitoring in real time of progress made in, and the quality of, enumeration. They also help to improve processes by providing insight into the following key areas:

- a) Understanding the current status of field operations;
- b) Monitoring progress in census operations;
- c) Project management oversight and identifying trouble spots;
- d) Quality control and quality improvement.

24. The dashboards have been used in Kenya and are currently being customized for use in Ghana. It is anticipated that other countries that have yet to undertake their censuses in the current round will benefit from using the dashboards.

## **VII. Impact of COVID-19**

25. The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened the successful undertaking of censuses in many countries by causing delays and interruptions that compromise quality, or even the complete cancellation of census projects. Furthermore, domestic and donor financing for censuses has been diverted to addressing COVID-19 pandemic, thereby leaving census projects without crucial funding. Several countries that had scheduled censuses for 2020 and 2021 have already taken decisions to postpone them, with many others having yet to announce a way forward.

26. According to a rapid assessment conducted by ECA in April 2020, population and housing census activities were halted or suspended in 4 countries and postponed in another 7 of the 18 countries that had planned census activities for 2020. Some of the activities that were suspended included planning and mapping, which may have an impact on downstream processes and lead to a shifting of the entire census calendar. That is already the case for census activities in 5 countries, including Chad and Mali, where the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted resource mobilization activities, leading to the blockage and delay of all follow-on activities.

27. Similarly, the preparation of a pilot census in Botswana and census mapping in Namibia have been disrupted. In Côte d'Ivoire, data collection that was planned to start in April 2020 has been postponed to a later date. In Burkina Faso, the post-enumeration survey of the fifth population and housing census has been postponed to allow for the survey to be conducted within a reasonable time frame.

## **VIII. Way forward**

28. The 2020 census round (2015–2024) is taking place against a changing global landscape, as countries around the world have pursued a range of new global commitments, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. In the case of Africa, the next four years will be critical, with the added pressure that the 2020 round is the final round before the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals.

29. It is recommended that, as part of a way forward, African countries take the following actions:

a) To conduct a census during the period 2015–2024, given that population and housing census data are indispensable for effective development planning; for monitoring population, socioeconomic and environmental trends, policies and programmes; and for research and analysis of social and economic phenomena.

b) To mitigate the adverse impact of conflict, so that countries can undertake censuses within the 2020 round time frame. Innovative approaches, such as hybrid censuses, need to be considered for conflict zones that cannot be reached by enumerators owing to safety issues.

c) To adopt carefully planned, mixed methods for censuses, including combinations of traditional and Internet-based data collection and registry-based censuses.

d) To transition from manual to digital systems use of better methods and new technologies, which will increase the reliability and accessibility of statistics in a timely manner.

e) To consider new census methods for the 2030 round, including online, register-based, electronic and hybrid censuses. Such approaches would require extensive planning and the laying of groundwork well in advance.

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