

DISCUSSION PAPER

Title: CHALLENGES IN PLANNING FOR A CENSUS IN REGION XI

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First of all, I would like to thank NSO Deputy Administrator Paula Monina G. Collado for inviting me to be a discussant in a topic which I am very familiar with. I must confess that I have to read the paper several times before I prepared my discussion. What I was looking for are “the plans and activities to be undertaken regionwide in preparation for the next census” which the paper proposed to do to provide solutions to some identified problems. Before I will discuss the problems enumerated and the suggested solutions, I would like to ask the following questions under each plan and make some few comments:

On Publicity Plans: How much will it cost to implement your publicity plan? How much is your budget allocated for the purpose for 2005? How does it compare with your budget in 2000 POPCEN for publicity purposes? This is important because if not funded, then what is the effect in terms of your target of 100% coverage of households and institutions?

On Partnership Plans:- Why is this called Partnership Plans? The caption is not appropriate. In business when you are partners, you have common interest. Census taking is the sole responsibility of the NSO, therefore you cannot impose on the LGU or other government agencies financial and logistics support. But you can prepare a strategic plan on the assistance that you would expect the LGUs or other government agencies to provide and strive to attain what you planned for. In III.A.1, there is no plan for financial and logistics support to implement. There is no plan also for A.1.2 Recruitment of census workers and A.1.3, Information dissemination about the conduct of the census.

On Mapping Plans: Where is the plan for mapping? I was expecting a listing of activities to be undertaken under this topic. For example, Inventory of maps at EA or barangay level. If there are newly created barangays, what are you supposed to do? If there are missing maps, what are you supposed to do?

On Recruitment of Census Workers: What is wrong with the teachers? Are they not willing to act as enumerators in a quinquennial census? Based on my experience, teachers are better off than recruiting census workers.

On Training Plans: The fastest way to learn is by doing the activity. Why is there no field demonstration where live respondents are interviewed? I did not see this among the techniques mentioned. Four days may not be enough if there are two forms, the short and the long forms. Sampling has a way of complicating field operations.

On Allocation of Census Forms: The most important part of the allocation of forms is the plan and the procedure. The proposed strategy is to allocate by enumeration area and distribute on a staggered basis. In 1980 the estimate of forms required was at barangay level. It follows that the allocation of forms is also at barangay level. If one enumerator is assigned to one barangay only, there is no need to distribute on a staggered basis because the enumeration may be finished in 7.5 days since the average size of a barangay is about 150 households. Perhaps the better strategy is to give the allocation per barangay so that if an enumerator is assigned to two or more barangays, he/she has to submit first the returns in the first barangay before giving the forms for the next barangay.

On Enumeration and Supervision Plans: The content of this plan is on supervision only and not on enumeration where the enumerator is also involved.

With the rest of the time I would like to discuss the problems encountered in previous censuses as presented in the paper and the corresponding proposal to solve them.

1. Shortage of forms: -According to the authors there was a massive shortage of forms experienced during the enumeration period. “Some enumerators stopped enumerating while waiting for additional forms to arrive. xxx Request for additional forms were not provided right away because the reserve forms at the provincial, regional and central office were already exhausted. (Page 2)

On page 9 of the paper showed that after the assessment done at the end of the census period some enumerators, team supervisors and census area supervisors tend to keep as many forms as possible to avoid shortage, especially when they heard massive shortages in other areas. As a result, many unused forms were returned after the enumeration period.

Comments: There was no shortage of forms. There was inefficiency in the distribution assuming that the allocation was done at the barangay or EA level as normally done in the planning process. Perhaps there was no Field Operations Manual that describes in detail how the Provincial Census Officer distributes the forms to the area supervisor, who in turn distribute to the team supervisor and finally to the enumerator. It is in the training of census officers and supervisors that should be given more attention on **field operations** so that they know how to manage the census enumeration and post-enumeration activities. In planning, we refer to the population growth of the municipality or city to base the allocation of forms. The projected population is then proportionally allocated to the barangays.

The reserves may be distributed as follows: Team supervisor, 5%; Municipal supervisor, 5%, Provincial office 5%; regional office 5%; and central office, 5%. Printing of forms therefore is 25% more than the required number allocated to enumerators. If distribution of forms is efficient, there should be no problem on shortage since estimates are more than the actual number of households.

In 1980, we did not experience any shortage of form because the distribution and allocation was well planned and well implemented by the Field Census Officers. At that time, the Field Operations Manual (FOM) contains all the plans for implementation including instructions on how to implement the plan. A one-day training was allocated on the contents of the Manual. In 1990, there was an FOM prepared but no training was done because the printing of the manual was delayed but all provincial census officers were given a copy each. Municipal supervisors did not have a copy of the FOM. This may be contributory to the "hoarding" of forms because they did not know the implications of their action.

The distribution of forms on a staggered basis may not be an effective solution to temporary form shortage. Proper implementation of procedures of allocation is the best solution.

2. Difficulty in coding occupation, industry, etc.: - According to the authors, "coding of write-in entries were relegated to the enumerators" and "this posed huge problems because they are not familiar with the PSOC and PSIC. On page 9, the solution to this problem is a "special session on the PSOC and PSIC will be incorporated in the usual topics to be discussed. This will attempt to familiarize the trainees with the coding system, thus avoid miscoding of certain occupations or industries and taking too much time doing it."

Comments: Was there a study to look at the most common errors in coding? Based on my experience in coding, it is easy to look for the code of an industry or occupation at the 5- or 7-digit coding classification system. Also based on my experience, it is easier for the enumerator to code the industry and occupation at the barangay level than at the provincial level because there is not much diversity of activities in rural areas. Most occupations are related to farming, fishing and forestry and logging. In some areas, mining. What is important is the emphasis on the concepts to facilitate coding. For instance, manufacturing as an industry, the concept of manufacturing should be emphasized i.e. that there should be physical or chemical change involved to be classified as manufacturing activity. The trainer, therefore, should have a mastery of the subject matter. On page 12, the recommendation is enhanced training techniques-enough time to discuss PSOC and PSIC." -the solution is too broad, what technique? The best way is for the enumerators to understand the classification system, the onedigit classification, two-digit, five-digit, seven-digit, etc. The moment they understand the concept behind the classification, it will be easy for them to classify any industry or occupation.

3. Unclear delineation of EAs:- Some enumeration areas have unclear boundaries. Hence, the enumerators had to agree among themselves as to what boundaries they prefer to follow. This often did not get to the attention of their supervisors until it was time to submit the accomplished maps and census forms. The proposal for 2005 is "verification of boundaries before enumeration"

Comments: The problem is not very clear. Usually, an EA is most often the barangay. It is only in urban areas where EAs are to be delineated so that the enumerator can finish the work within the duration of the census. What is the incidence of this problem in the region? Since the NSO has been conducting censuses almost every 5 years, it should be the responsibility of the municipal census officer to see to it that the barangays have maps and are already well defined with the help of the barangay captain and the officials of the municipality. This is supposed to be a continuing concern of the field offices.

Verification before enumeration may entail additional cost, if enumerators are not teachers. If teachers, still transportation allowance is required. If there are 35,000 enumerators in the entire country to work for 3 days just to verify boundaries, this will cost about P1,200 per enumerator or a total of P42 million. Can the budget afford this activity or is it part of the national plan which is funded? Field offices cannot engage in an activity that requires additional funding if not part of the budget. That is why some other alternatives have to be thought of to delineate the EAs prior to census operation.

4. Incomplete entries in questionnaires: -A number of questionnaires submitted have incomplete entries. The enumerators and/or team supervisors of such questionnaires often had to go back to the field in order to complete the questionnaires. Proposed solution on page 12- enhanced training techniques; enhanced supervision techniques. The discussion on page 10, "During the past censuses, the duties of team and census area supervisors are so enormous that the more important ones tend to be ignored in favor of other tasks. For instance, the team supervisor's time is spent mostly doing administrative matters such as collecting daily time records and other employment papers." xxx .

Comments: Based on my experience in planning for operations in a census, a team supervisor is assigned only 5 enumerators to supervise closely. If the duration of the census is 20 days, the first five days is supposed to supervise closely the work of the 5 enumerators, one day each, to ensure that what they are doing is correct. Also, there is instruction to review all the questionnaires submitted for completeness and consistency of entries. I do not believe that enhanced training techniques (whatever that is) and enhanced supervision are the solutions to the incomplete entries. Maybe sanctions have to be imposed, e.g., do not pay the wages or honorarium of the enumerator, team supervisor and census area supervisor if the quality of questionnaire is not acceptable. This should be emphasized during the training. The field demonstration part of the training and discussing the experience of the trainees after the field demonstration are perhaps the best methods in training the enumerator and supervisor in their work. (On the job training.)
The proposal that a monitoring system should be devised and adopted in Region XI is good and it can be adopted nationally. If I am not mistaken there was such a monitoring report in 1990 devised by no less than Mrs. Collado. However, no time has been devoted to analyze these important reports so that they can be used as inputs in planning for the next census.

5. Numerous callbacks:- The authors reported that their "enumerators had to live with numerous callbacks, especially in urban areas. Rather than interview domestic helpers who hardly know all information about the household, the enumerators had no choice but to come back another time to make an interview. The proposed solution is "more extensive publicity campaigns; more intensive partnership."

Comments: It would have been better if the "numerous callbacks" were translated into statistics to appreciate the seriousness of the problem. The table on page 3 did not show the gravity because the total household was not included so that a non-response rate can be derived. The ratio of the households with callbacks can be used to allocate additional fund for the purpose in the future.
There is no doubt that publicity increases the awareness of the population regarding the conduct of the census. But publicity is expensive, if the tri-media is used. Listing down all possible techniques and materials is easy to do but to translate them into reality is another thing. There should be some costing involved so that the most practical approach which is affordable can be planned for and implemented.

6. Delayed submission of Quick Count Reports: - According to the authors "some QC reports were not received per schedule of submission, defeating the purpose of the quick count operation. In the strategy proposed on page 11, the "accomplishment of summary reports required for the quick count operation of the census will likewise be prioritized" to ensure that "the progress of enumeration is properly monitored on a weekly basis at least." Proposed solution on page 12: Enhanced supervision techniques.

Comments: The gravity of the delayed submission has not been presented in terms of statistics. What could be the reason for the delayed submission? Is it the summarization of the report at the level of the enumerator? or Team supervisor? or Area Census Supervisor? Or is it the transmission of reports from the enumerator to the team supervisor to the area supervisor? The information on the main reasons for the delay including contributory factors are important so that the problem on delayed submission of Quick Count can be improved. Identify first the problem so that the proper solution can be determined.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

I appreciate the desire of the leadership in Region XI particularly Director Fusilero to prepare the census operations plan for the region. I know he is very competent including his staff who is equally competent. But I believe that the Field Operations Plan of a national census should be centrally prepared and that the region can prepare strategies that can be implemented effectively within the region but still within the national plan. In 1980, the census budget was cut by half and we have to re-plan the entire census operation during the Holy Week barely two weeks before the start of the census. If plan preparation is decentralized in the regions, what do you think will happen if there is a similar incident that will happen? The census can either be scrapped or postponed until all regions have revised their plans. Budgetary cuts are normally expected especially now that the government is in financial crisis. This was a frustrating experience we had encountered in the past. But we have to do the best we can when you are in government. GOODLUCK.