

Census Questionnaire Planning

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Importance of the Questionnaire

- Defines the content of the census; if it's not on the questionnaire it's lost forever
- Critical to operational aspects of enumeration, quality of enumeration
- Distinguish **content** from **format**
- Critically linked to enumerator training manual, codebooks, administrative lists

Major Elements

- Questionnaire/enumerator **identification**
- **Household** items
- **Individual** items
- **Sample** *versus* non-sample questionnaire
(when applicable)
- **Affiliated documents:** training manuals,
coding manuals, administrative geography

Affiliated Documents

- Questionnaire must be designed in conjunction with affiliated documents
- Enumerator/Supervisor training manual(s)
- Coding manuals for office coded items
- Lists of administrative units and enumeration districts

Content *versus* Format

- **Content** refers to *what information* the questionnaire is intended to obtain
- **Format** refers to the *design and layout* of the questionnaire
- Both are important, but in very different ways, so *distinguish between them!*
- In this workshop **we are concerned primarily with content**

Coding and Classification

- **Coding** is the assignment of numbers to categories, *e.g.*, 1=male, 2=female
- **Classification** is the assignment of a questionnaire response to one of a set of categories, *e.g.*, the occupation ‘engineer’ to ‘Professional and Technical’
- These two *very different* operations are often referred to by the word ‘coding’

The Importance of Classifications

- Classifications as much as questionnaire items define the information content of the census
- Specifying them is a critical decision
- Decisions should be made in light of what was done in previous censuses and
- In light of international recommendations and standards

Questionnaire Precoding

- Questions may require no coding (in the sense of classification), *e.g.*, sex or age
- Questions may be **precoded**, meaning that the categories into which responses are to be classified are printed on the questionnaire
- Other questions, *e.g.*, occupation and industry, must be **office coded**

International Standard Classifications

- Certain items, such as **employment status**, are coded in accordance with (or at least in consideration of) **international standards**
- For example, the International Labor Office (ILO) *International Standard Classification of Occupations, Revised Edition 1968*, (Geneva, 1969)

Recommended Classifications

- The United Nations Statistical Division recommends certain classifications
- For marital status, *e.g.*, categories should identify *at least* never married, married, widowed and not remarried, divorced and not remarried, and married but separated
- The first four of these categories are widely used, the last less so

Place of Residence Classifications

- Classifications of place of *current* residence are generally dictated by current administrative geography
- Careful attention must be paid to place(s) of *previous* residence, however, because (i) administrative geography changes (ii) less detail will be obtained for previous than for current residence

Questionnaire Structure

- Questionnaires are characterized not only by their content and format, but by their ‘structure’
- Questionnaire *structure* refers to which questions are asked of which persons
- *E.g.*, marital status is not asked of all persons, only persons over some lower age limit

Deciding Questionnaire Content

- These are arguably the most important decisions in the entire census operation
- They often receive less attention and less systematic analysis than they deserve under pressure of operational matters
- How should these decisions be made?
What information is needed? What considerations are relevant?

What Information is Needed?

- The questionnaire from your previous census (if any)
- The United Nations Statistics Division *Principles and Recommendations*
- National and international classification standards and recommendations
- Questionnaires and related documentation for related statistical operations

Relevant Considerations: 1

- Ability to collect useful information in a census enumeration
- Necessity of limiting number of items and time required for completion
- Appropriate balance between adapting to new conditions and maintaining statistical continuity

Relevant Considerations: 2

- Interrelationships between different items on the questionnaire
- Relationship to other data sources
- Political considerations, broadly understood
- International standards/recommendations

Hard Questions

- If we include this question, what will we or others do with the resulting information?
- What tabulations will be made, precisely and in detail?
- Who will use them, specifically, and for what, exactly?
- Do we or others have a track record for using information of this kind?

No Fixed Rules will Ensure Success

- This is perhaps the most important point, but ...
- Time and resources should be allowed for thinking through conditions, needs, possibilities
- It would be useful, perhaps, to have case studies of these decisions, but I am not aware of any

Questions?
Comments?
Discussion?