

UTILIZATION OF THE 2001 POPULATION CENSUS DATA OF NEPAL

23rd Population Census Conference

16 - 18 April, 2007

Christchurch, New Zealand

T. S. Bastola,

Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal

Background

Nepal is geographically located along the Himalayas. The country has an area of 147,181 square kilometres and is bordered by the two most populous countries of the world, China and India. It extends 885 kilometres from east to west and is non-uniform north to south both in dimension (average 193 kilometres) and in terms of terrain. Nepal has an extremely large variety of topography – ranging from lowland plains to the highest mountains in the world.

For administrative purposes, Nepal is divided into 75 districts which are grouped into three geographical and five development regions. Within each district there are village development committees in rural areas and municipalities in urban areas. In total there are 58 municipalities and more than 3,900 village development committees corresponding to about 36 thousand wards (the lowest administrative units in the country).

The first population “count” of Nepal was undertaken in 1911. Since then nine more censuses have been accomplished in the country. The last census was conducted in 2001. The next census is due in the year 2011.

The 2001 Population Census of Nepal

The tenth decennial population census of Nepal was conducted on June 10-26, 2001. For the first time, two types of questionnaires were administered in this census: a “Short” form for complete

enumeration of all households in the country and a more detailed “Long” form used for a sample of about 20 percent of households. Sampling was done by taking a “one in eight” systematic sample of housing units in each enumeration area, with complete enumeration in 6 districts and 52 of the 58 municipalities. Both the questionnaires collected information at household as well as at individual level.

The 2001 population census (**the 2001 census**) collected information on all residents of Nepal based on their usual place of residence. It excluded temporary visitors, tourists, resident foreign diplomats and refugees. For the census purposes, households were classified as dwelling or institutional type.

The number of households enumerated in the 2001 census was 4,253,220 spread over in more than 36 thousand wards. The population count stood at 23,151,423. Political insurgency in some parts of the country prevented enumeration in 947 wards (including two urban wards) corresponding to about 79,000 households.

Utilization of the 2001 Census Data

Population census is the single most important source of data on different aspects of population of a country. It provides a data set on the population at all levels of a country’s administrative units. The census data are of immense help in formulating development plans and policies and for implementing developmental activities in the country. In Nepal, the 2001 census data have been extensively utilised for several purposes. The current Tenth Plan (2002 – 2007), for example, is based on the basic information provided by the 2001 census. Some of the major areas where the 2001 census data have been utilized in Nepal are highlighted in the following.

Poverty Mapping

A report on “Small Area Estimation of Poverty, Caloric Intake and Malnutrition in Nepal” was published in 2006. This exercise has combined survey and census data to estimate consumption-based welfare indicators (including estimates of poverty, caloric intake and malnutrition) for small geographical areas such as *Ilaka* and municipalities. The resulting database has been projected onto geographic maps using GIS mapping techniques. The whole exercise is known as poverty mapping work.

The poverty mapping work underpinned four basic sources of data. The 2001 census provided household level data which, in turn, could provide reliable estimates at highly disaggregated levels such as municipalities, village development committees and wards. Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2003/04 included a detailed income and consumption expenditure information. The 2001 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey contained a database on child nutritional status which provided target variables for estimating stunting, wasting and underweight.

Due to relatively small sample size of the above two surveys, the collected information are representative only for broad regions of the country. The 2001 census, on the other hand, does not contain the necessary information on consumption or other indicators of wellbeing to yield reliable indicators of the level and distribution of welfare such as poverty rates. A statistical technique known as “Small Area Estimation” used the above three data sets to estimate consumption based welfare indicators at sub–district level. The GIS data prepared by the Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Unit of WFP Nepal were finally used to complete the Nepal poverty mapping work.

Sampling Frame

The success of any census or survey depends to a large extent on the availability and quality of the frame. One of the basic objectives of a population census is to provide frames for other censuses and surveys. The 2001 census, inter alia, aimed “to provide reliable frames for different types of sample surveys”. Accordingly, the 2001 census data have been already used to construct frames for the following major census and surveys.

- A) National Sample Census of Agriculture, 2001/02: The inventory of number and area of agricultural holdings obtained from the 2001 census served as the sampling frame to select enumeration areas for the 2001/02 sample census of agriculture. The enumeration area was defined as a ward or a combination of wards and consisted of 30 or more holdings. To select the sample of enumeration areas, districts were divided into four groups according to their importance from the agricultural production point of view.
- B) Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2003/04: A complete list of all wards in the country, with a measure of size, was developed in order to select the sample of wards to be visited. The 2001 census was the best starting point for building such a sample frame. A data set with basic information from the preliminary results of the 2001 census was constructed at the ward level. This data set was used as a sample frame for the survey.

- C) Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, 2006: This survey used the sampling frame provided by the list of enumeration areas with population and household information from the 2001 census. The primary sampling unit for the survey was a ward or group of wards in rural areas, and sub-wards in urban areas. The sampling frame was representative of 96 per cent of the non-institutional population.
- D) Nepal Labour Force Survey, 2007: The frame was based on the household list prepared for the 2003/04 Nepal Living Standards Survey. The list was based on the preliminary results of the 2001 census which consisted of 4,311,747 households and 23,214,681 individuals. For the frame, large wards were divided into sub-wards of clearly defined boundaries supported by cartographic work. Small wards with less than 30 households, on the other hand, were appended to neighbouring wards of the same village development committee. The final sample frame consisted of 35,069 enumeration areas spread over 58 municipalities and 3,914 village development committees.

Exclusion and Inequality Issues

Nepal is a pluralistic society with diverse caste/ethnic, linguistic and religious communities. This diversity is the unique feature of Nepal. This uniqueness has its inherent disadvantages too – it is said that gender dimension and “the interaction of history and the country’s geographic, ethnic and linguistic diversity” have contributed to social exclusion and economic inequality. Greater inclusiveness of different communities in all walks of life has become the main issue of the present day politics in Nepal.

The Interim Constitution, 2007 of Nepal has laid down the principle of inclusiveness while choosing the candidates for the upcoming Constitution Assembly election. While listing the candidates on the basis of “Proportional Electoral System” the political parties should make sure that various groups of population including women, *Dalit* (suppressed group), underprivileged tribes, aborigines, backward region, *Madhesi* and other classes are proportionately represented according to the law.

The Tenth Plan (2002–2007) seeks to address gender and ethnic/ caste related disparities and facilitate social inclusion by mainstreaming such efforts. The poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) of Nepal has reinforced the social inclusion as an important social objective.

Reliable information is a basic starting point to address the emerging issues of social exclusion in the country. In the absence of a separate “anthropological/linguistic” survey, population census has remained the single most important reliable source of information on caste/ethnicity and their various socio-economic characteristics. The 2001 census is the latest key data source of different communities of Nepal.

Apportionment of Seats

In Nepal, the House of Representatives dissolved in 2002 was reinstated as the result of the historic mass movement in the April 2006. The reinstated House unanimously approved the promulgation of the Interim Constitution on the evening of January 15, 2007. According to the new Constitution 2007, there will be a Constituent Assembly to formulate a new Constitution by the Nepalese people themselves. The Constitution Assembly shall be composed of (a) elected members on the basis of first-past-the post, (b) members elected on the basis of proportional electoral system, and (c) members nominated by the Interim Council of Ministers.

For the purpose of election of members to the upcoming Constitution Assembly on the basis of first-past-the post, “administrative districts shall be treated as election districts, and the ratio of the number of seats allocated to any district shall be, so far as practicable, equal to the ratio of the population of that district ..., as determined by the last census preceding the concerned election”. This provision in the Interim Constitution of Nepal has further increased the importance as well as the utility of the 2001 census.

Population Monograph

An analytical report of the 2001 census has been presented in the “Population Monograph of Nepal, 2003”. It was prepared by the eminent persons in the related fields. The monograph is published in two volumes containing an in-depth analyses of twenty one different topics related to the population of the country. It provides a comprehensive analysis of interrelationships among various aspects of population and establishes their patterns and trends.

These publications are of great help to all those who want a thorough knowledge on the socio-economic and demographic situation of the county. In recent years the monograph has

become more popular ever, especially among the students of population studies. The books are in great demand among general users too.

Gender Perspective Analyses

A separate analytical report based on the 2001 census was prepared in gender perspective. “Population Census Results in Gender Perspective, 2002” published in three volumes, each volume consisting of two chapters with selected gender tables along with their analyses at the national level. The report encompasses demographic and socio-economic characteristics by gender at the national level as well as other geographic areas of the country. This report has to a large extent fulfilled the existing gender data gaps in the country. Topics included in the report are: gender and socio-economic well being, gender and household headship, gender specific indicators on education, awareness and media exposure, work and work burden, marriage and gender concerns on reproductive status of women, and gender concerns on migration statistics.

Population Projections

Estimates of country’s population size and its structure are the primary information needed for long term planning of developmental activities in the country. This is the main reason why population projections are done. As we know, population projection is the computation of future changes in population numbers. These computations are done, in general, under certain given assumptions about future trends in the factors responsible for the population changes (rate of fertility, mortality and migration).

The result of the 2001 census was taken as the base year population in the “Population Projections for Nepal, 2001–2021”. The computations were done at low, medium and high growth rates of the same population based on different assumptions of how these rates will change in future. The projection has been done at the national, sub-national (region, rural and urban) and district level.

Population and Socio-economic Atlas

“Population and Socio-economic Atlas of Nepal, 2004” was prepared as a component of the dissemination strategy of the 2001 census. The source of thematic data for the Atlas was mostly the results of the 2001 census. The source of spatial data was the digital topographic database created by the Survey Department of Nepal. The Atlas was been prepared with the joint effort of the Survey Department and the Central Bureau of Statistics with the assistance of the European

Commission. Altogether 210 thematic maps covering various areas have been included in the publication. The Atlas has been a very user friendly reference material to the planners and policy makers as well as to the politicians and the social inclusion advocates.

Conclusion

Population censuses are taken to obtain information on the state of the population at a given point of time. It gives an opportunity to find out the total number of inhabitants for an area. The 2001 population census data of Nepal have been utilized in various fields of socio-economic sectors. It has been used to develop a set of benchmark data for different purposes. It has also provided data for small administrative areas of the country on population, housing and household facilities. The 2001 census data have been used to prepare frames for censuses and surveys. Sex disaggregated data on several topics included in the census have been helpful to address the current gender issues. It has provided detailed information on special groups like women, children, the aged and the disabled along with information on caste and ethnic groups of the country. These data have been extensively used by several interest groups for advocacy as well as for planning and monitoring purposes.