



Technical Consultation on  
Making Children Visible in Routine Surveys  
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# The Population Census and Data on Children

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# Focus of the presentation

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- The potentials of a census
  - What are some of its characteristics
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses, with respect to analysing issues of particular concern for children
  - Using Ghana as an example, what is the scope for enhancing the survey instrument to take account of children's issues
  - Some recommendations



## Why the population census?

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- Many countries conduct a population census (or variations of it) every ten years
- Although for still too many countries, this is the main source of data, i.e., there are no other sources to count on
- It is one of the few sources that cover the whole country to the lowest geographical level

Majority of the countries that did not conduct a census in 2000 round are in Africa

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Census conducted



■ Census conducted (1995 - 2004)

Source: United Nations, *World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*



# Essential features of a census

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- Individual enumeration
- Universality within a defined territory
- Simultaneity
- Defined periodicity



## Individual enumeration implies...

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- Each individual in every living quarters is enumerated separately
  - Children are covered as members of the households, in the living quarters, community, locality, district, province/region, etc.
  - Whatever characteristics are covered in the census questionnaire, will be available on each child



## The principle of universality within a defined territory ensures that....

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- Every person within the scope of coverage (usually the whole country) is recorded
  - Children are covered even in the most remote parts of the country (in the scope of the enumeration)
  - Children's characteristics can be presented in detail to the lowest geographic levels
  - Locality-specific differentials can be derived



## Simultaneity...

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- All individuals are enumerated within the shortest possible time, with few exceptions. In any case
  - all information are in respect to a the same specified point in time and well-defined reference period.
  - the same reference period applies to each individual, although the reference period may differ from one characteristic to another



## What the census provides...

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- The census does very well, what it is established to do
  - Counting the population
  - Providing information about the basic characteristics of the entire population (either usual or actual residents, national and non-nationals, etc.)
  - Ensuring equal treatment of every individual in-scope




# Ghana 2000 Population/Housing Census

## Basic characteristics of individuals

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Characteristics	No. of questions
Relationship to head of HH	1
Age, sex, marital status	3
Nationality, ethnicity, religious affiliation	3
Birthplace, locality, region, country	2
Place of usual residence	2



## Ghana 2000 Population/Housing Census Basic characteristics (2)

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Characteristics	No. of questions
Literacy (language), education	4
Economic activity, number of days & hours worked, occupation, industry, employment status, sector,	8



# Ghana 2000 Population/Housing Census

## Additional information...

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Children ever born, children surviving, children born in last 12 months	Females 12 yrs+ (5 questions)
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Like Ghana, many countries have to rely on the census for measures of fertility and mortality

### Complete birth registration



■ 90% or more births registered (1995-2003)

Source: United Nations, *World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*



# Summary of the Ghana 2000 PHC coverage

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- General information
- Household listing
- 17 items
- # of hsehold members
- All members (characteristics)
- 23 items
  - Of which 8 are on economic characteristics
- Females 12 yrs+
- Housing (entire household)
- 5 items
- 17 items



# What is available on children from the census

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- Educational characteristics (for all 3 yrs+)
  - Ever attended or attending school now
  - Highest level of schooling attended
  - Highest grade completed
- Economic activity (for all 7 yrs+)
  - Activity status, days and hours worked
  - Occupation
  - Industry
  - Employment status
  - Employment sector (private formal/informal, public, etc.)
- Migration (for all 5 yrs+)
  - Birth place
  - Place of usual residence
  - Place of residence five years ago



## Prospects for getting more on children from the population census

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- If these questions were analyzed in greater depth, they could provide:
  - A better understanding of the situation of children in these broad areas...
  - Some indications on how to address some of the data gaps with respect to key areas of concern... such as



## The census as a source of data on critical issues for children...?

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- Child labour
- Child trafficking
- Progress in the educational system, etc.



## Introduce specific questions

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- In the entire census
- On a sample basis
  - As part of the long form in the census (if applicable)
  - In a post enumeration survey connected to the census (if applicable)



## Additional questions in the main census

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- Need to compete with other more established set of questions
  - For the Ghana census for example, would need to replace some or all questions on economic characteristics and/or fertility
- Difficult to accomplish
  - No other source for these other also critical policy relevant information



## Other difficulties ... derived from the major strengths of the census

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- Enormity of the exercise - covering an entire country, within a few days
  - The scope and depth of interviewing are severely limited...
  - Very few questions or none at all beyond the basic characteristics included
  - No particular attention given to any specific policy interest



## What the census does not do well...

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- Usually a third person reporting – if you need to interview the specific individual
- Questions have to be simple and information common knowledge to the person usually at home to be interviewed
  - Not enough time available to probe for more complete information
- Only a few questions can be asked on any particular issue – cannot develop a comprehensive set of information



## Defined periodicity... the potential problem

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- The recommended interval is every 10 years
  - While most countries conduct a national census every ten years
  - Some countries are not able to maintain this interval
  - While a few others have a census every five years
  - Still others have the potential with a national register system to do a census count more frequently



## Ten years still to long ...

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- There is no time to spare when it comes to children's issues ... they would need to be monitored and tracked at much shorter intervals
- It should be possible to interview other individuals (including the children themselves)



## There is need for direct and more in-depth reporting ...

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- It should be possible to interview other individuals (including the children themselves)
- Probing would sometimes be required
- More questions are needed than can be accommodated in the regular census questionnaire



## So what can be done...?

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- Maximize the use of available data from the census:
  - To identify the main problem areas, with respect to issues and geographic locations
  - To determine additional set of data that would be needed



## So what can be done...(2)?

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- Encourage national statistical systems to reduce dependence on census for data on topics that are best collected from other sources
  - Improve vital registration systems
  - Promote the labour force surveys
- Develop and test modules on children's issues for inclusion on regular and ad hoc national surveys
- Continue to sensitize national governments and statisticians on the need for data to monitor progress on children's welfare and related issues.