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REGIONAL CENSUS COORDINATING
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PROGRESS REPORT – SURINAME

Please find attached Paper entitled “Progress Report” submitted by Suriname.

REPORT

TO THE REGIONAL CENSUS COORDINATING COMMITTEE

**14TH MEETING,
Port of Spain, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
9, 10 November 2006**



General Bureau of Statistics of Suriname

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1-INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

After more than 23 years Suriname conducted the field work of its Sixth Population and Housing Census during 31 March 2003 to 30 June 2003. Suriname was thus the last CARICOM member State to conduct a Census in the 2000 round. **On 5 August 2003, havoc struck!** Because of arson in the vacant premises next doors, the Offices of the General Bureau of Statistics (GBS) were almost completely destroyed by fire. At that time the staff was busy with checking, vetting, coding and otherwise processing the completed questionnaires. Selected information of the PES Enumeration blocks and the partially verified Census tallies of the number of males, females, dwellings and households were already keyed in, and hence could be salvaged. Everything was in motion to launch the provisional results on 22 August 2003, so as to obtain coverage from the overseas press, present for Carifesta (held from 24 to 30 August 2003 in Suriname)

From 18 August 2003 to 13 February 2004, the GBS operated with very limited staff from the premises of the “Supreme Audit Institution of Suriname” (Rekenkamer). As of October 2003 the GBS resumed Cartographic activities, hoping it could eventually convince the Government to have a new Census. A memo was written to the Minister of PLOS (with Statistics in his portfolio) in which it was outlined what was salvaged from Census 2003, what would be possible and what wouldn't be and advising the Government to have a new Census.

The material that was saved from the fire enables the GBS to provide:

- a) 100% “De Jure” information on males/ females per District and partially per Ressor
- b) 100% information on dwellings and households, per District and partially per Ressor
- c) 100% information regarding the institutional versus the non-institutional population
- d) Sample (3% Enumeration blocks and 4% Population) information of the non-institutional population regarding: Place of birth; Age; Relationship to Head of the Household, Place of Usual Residence and Place where the Census night was spent.

The material does not allow us to check for possible double counting¹ (i.e. over-coverage) of persons. At that time we could not have foreseen that only in February 2004 we would obtain proper accommodation. The Government sensibly decided that first priority would be to ensure proper accommodation, after which a decision would be taken on redoing the Census or not. As of 17 February 2004 the GBS resumed its activities from its new premises, owned by the foundations thanks to a loan by Government.

On 25 February 2004 the Government took the decision to retake the Census and as of 1 March 2004 the GBS went into higher gear.

From 2 August 2004, up to 11 October 2004: Census Base count, Follow-up (i.e. completion) counts and PES-counts took place. By the end of January 2005 provisional results were released at a Press conference. As of 31 August 2005 up to 27 October 2006, nine Volumes, of which 4 at the Country level and Five at the District level have been produced and disseminated with final results of the Seventh Population and Housing Census. That concludes our program for disseminating substantive final results.

It should be emphasized that Suriname conducted its last Census only in 2004 and cannot be expected to have completed the Census cycle around the same time as all other CARICOM (associate) Members.

¹ These are people reported as usual resident on more than 1 address. This is particularly problematic in the interior of Suriname.

2- QUALITY CONTROL ISSUES AND EVALUATION

It is sometimes erroneously assumed that quality control issues and evaluation only come into play at the end of the project cycle, i.e. apply merely to the final product. These issues apply to the total project cycle to ensure that the error level of the final results is within tolerable limits. To assure that this is the case, checks on quality need to be performed at each stage². If we exclude the item of relevance of the topics included in the questionnaire and proper training and instruction activities (which surely serve to ascertain quality), then the following emerges.

During Planning and Preparation, one has to make sure that all instruments are properly designed and vetted. For instance, as regards the questionnaires: crowding of questions in order to save space (but at the expense of readability) has to be avoided at any rate. Firstly the ABS internal team and later on the Census team, took care of these. One must also not forget that the Council of Ministers, the State Council and the National Assembly also see and vet the questionnaires, before they are established by decree of the President. It was also imperative that Cartography made sure that the complete area of Suriname was covered and that no area was included more than once!

During Field operations (limited here to sheer data collection), one has to avoid inter alia: incomplete data, duplications and omissions, improper approach of special groups to be enumerated, and errors caused because of proxy respondents providing answers. The use of proper instruments (i.e. check lists and the likes) and procedures (repeat visits and random re-interviews by superiors) as well as proper top-down and bottom-up communications was invoked to minimize errors during this stage. **In the coastal area 10% random re-interviews were imperative. In the interior we have opted for 5% random re-interviews by supervisors.** All supervisors and controllers were instructed to check the daily output of their sub-ordinates so that in case of errors it would be relatively easy to return to the respondent.

Data Processing deserves a separate treatment (also see chapter 4 in this document). First it should be noted that after the disastrous experience of the Sixth Census the aim of the GBS was to capture the data as soon as possible so as to be able to produce a back-up of the data base. It was thus decided to vet forms on a sample basis. During Data Processing, attention was paid to both visual/clerical checks and mechanical checks. For arguments sake we shall discuss in turn: coding, data entry and electronic data processing. During *coding* forms were checked by a controller, also on a sample basis. During *data entry* besides the utilization of range checks (i.e. validation checks) and basic consistency checks (i.e. flow/skip pattern) were built into the program, the classic system of dual data entry was used. This certainly increased the cost for data processing and hence total census cost, but in our opinion it is rivaled by no other system for clerical data entry. During *electronic data processing* so-called intermediate and advanced consistency checks (e.g. number of females [males] in a household is larger than the household size or a 15 year old person with a Ph.D.) were instated. At any rate, a proper registration at each stage and at each task was necessary.

It should also be noted that although we are aware of the fact that an integral approach is the optimal approach of data editing, we opted for a sectional approach, running parallel to the four national Volumes scheduled for publication. This was decided in order to be able to provide the national and international community with a more or less continuous flow of information and thus retain their interest in the Census and its results.

During Dissemination proper proofreading of all hard copies and checks on the adherence to confidentiality standards for hard copies and soft copies (diskettes and CD's) were performed.

² Reference is made here partly to the usual Project Activities

During Evaluation (limited here to technical evaluation of Census results) a combination of three methods will be used. *Demographic Analysis* (a macro-level instrument), *Post Enumeration Survey* (i.e. PES, a micro-level instrument to enable Coverage and content) error checks and *Comparisons with external sources* will be utilized. We shall shortly discuss each in turn. It should be noted that an Evaluation publication is planned for the end of November 2006, and this will be the last planned publication to be shared with the public.

Given the facts that the previous Population and Housing Censuses in Suriname have been conducted in 2003 and 1980, *demographic analysis* will be both a so-called single-census evaluation and a two-census evaluation.

(a) The single census evaluation will be limited to the computation of several indices to provide an indication of the quality of age and or sex data, e.g. Myers' Blended index, Whipple's index and the UN age-sex accuracy index. Also, general checks to examine internal consistency will be performed (e.g. the sex ratio at birth of children ever born should be similar for different age groups of women).

(b) The two-census evaluation will comprise both a simple roll forward of the 2003 provisional results and a cohort-component projection of the 1980 Census Population, under various assumptions, to 2005

The PES was conducted, mainly to provide information on coverage errors and to a lesser degree on content errors. The PES results may be used to provide a so-called one-number Census, which is increasingly promoted inter alia in the United Kingdom and in the USA.

Finally, comparisons with external sources (e.g. Old Age Pensioner records, Civil Servants registration, Health Coverage Records, Subscribers' lists of the Electricity company, etc.) will be used to perform checks on plausibility of numbers achieved.

Whatever measures are taken, one cannot believe that a Census (or any other project of that size) can produce results which are completely free of errors! To complete this section we like to present a quotation that we have included in all, but the first Volume with final results of the Seventh Population and Housing Census of Suriname:

**A Census is like decision by a court of last resort –
there is no higher or equal authority to which to appeal.
Hence there is no trustworthy means of determining the degree of error
to which a census count of population is exposed, or the accuracy with which
any particular census is taken. But no well-informed person
believes that the figures of a census, however carefully
taken, may be relied upon as accurate to the
last figures (US Bureau of the Census)**

3- PUBLIC RELATIONS AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

As Suriname was preparing to release Population Census data, more than 24 years after the previous Census had been conducted and over 13 years after the final results of that Census had been released, it is understandable that people were impatient and this opened the door for speculation. Ethnicity and Nationality have (openly or covertly) always been important in Suriname and while people would only request of us to speed up the process to release detailed information it was clear what they really meant. In April 2005 we released a dissemination plan (publication calendar). The plan³ and the realizations are presented below:

Country Reports	Title	Period planned	Realized/presented
Volume I (18) ⁽ⁱ⁾	Demographic and Social Characteristics	July 2005	31 August 2005
Volume II (23)	Employment and Education Characteristics	October 2005	30 November 2005
Volume III (12)	Fertility and Mortality	January 2006	10 February 2006
Volume IV (35)	Characteristics of Living Quarters, Households and Families	April 2006	19 May 2006
District Reports ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾			
District Volume I	Paramaribo	June 2006	14 July 2006
District Volume II	Para and Wanica	July 2006	10 August 2006
District Volume III	Nickerie and Coronie	August 2006	13 September 2006
District Volume IV	Commewijne and Saramacca	September 2006	29 September 2006
District Volume V	Marowijne, Brokopondo and Sipaliwini	October 2006	27 October 2006
	Technical Evaluation Report ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾	November 2006	
	Census Administrative Report ^(iv)	December 2006	

(i) Minimum planned number of tables between brackets. It should be noted that instead of the 88 tables originally planned, the four country reports contained a total of 190-251 tables, because of various requests received. The larger number is obtained if all (62) constituent tables (pertaining to the “ressorten” of Suriname, of Table 9 in the first Volume are counted separately.

(ii) With all applicable tables of Volume I to IV of the Country Reports

(iii) This was originally scheduled for November 2005, but it was postponed with 1 year as it was thought more suitable to finish all results with substantive information first

(iv) This was erroneously included in the Calendar, as it will not be available to the public.

Notwithstanding what we envisaged to be full transparency, the GBS was attacked a few times in the press, with people stating that no data on ethnicity would be released because either the President or his political party would forbid it. We had to send quite some letters to the editors to defend the independent stance of the GBS and the authority of the Director to decide what is going to be released and our Public Relations unit had to work overtime to keep up the image of the GBS.

It is interesting to note that during 15 August to 2 September 2005 we had an instructor in CSPro from the US Bureau of the Census to conduct a 3 weeks training in CSPro at the Introductory level, 2 weeks for EDP and non EDP staff, and at the advanced level, 1 week for EDP staff. The instructor was also interviewed by parts of the press and firmly stated that “people at the GBS know exactly what they are doing with the Census and should be given time and space to do their job”. **Finally, the storm was withered but only after Volume I was released everybody seemed happy.**

³ Please note that the GBS also has legal obligations to provide the Civil Registration Office with certain information and although the law does not specify a period, both institutions agreed to October 2006!

4- DATA PROCESSING AND EDITING FOR CENSUS-7

It is fit to start this section with sharing with this meeting the fact that extensive discussions took place⁴ as to whether keying should be abolished and instead either scanning technology or the use of handheld devices should be introduced. We finally decided against this, given the very short run up to the Seventh Census, which meant that a change in an already familiar procedure would be very risky.

As regards data processing⁵, it was decided that not all the Questionnaires would be vetted, but from all Ressorts (63 in total, of which 62 legal and 1 synthetic) only a sample of forms was thoroughly vetted. Our opinion was that we needed the material in electronic format soonest in order to enable proper back-ups in several locations. The plan was that computer edits should remedy possible problems. Most likely this approach of vetting only a sample impacted negatively on subsequent activities. The Computer editing program that was applied to the database resulted in an enormous amount of error warnings. A lot of the problems could not be resolved from behind the computer but required inspection of the Census questionnaires. By the end of June it became clear that the publications calendar (with 4 Substantive Volumes, commencing in July 2005 and 5 District level publications) issued in April 2005 would have to be amended. It was decided that in order to minimize delays, especially of the first Volume, instead of an integral approach a sectional approach (running parallel to the volumes to be published) should be followed (also see chapter 2 in this document).

It is worth noting that the problems we faced made one thing very clear. An electronic back-up of Census 6 material would not have sufficed as for a lot of errors one needs to go back to basics, this is one needs to go back to the Census forms.

⁴ We were also lucky to be able to consult CARICOM and selected colleagues, most notably from St Lucia and Anguila on this issue.

⁵ 15 Personal computers were used in 3 daily shifts for a period of circa 6 months (5-7 working days per week) to capture all data necessary to produce the final results. It should also be mentioned that the data for producing the provisional results were captured over a period of circa 2½ months, using 10 personal computers in 1-2 shifts (5-6 working days per week).

5- PLANNING and PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT CENSUS

First it should be noted that, inter alia because we are satisfied with fixing the Census date at the beginning of August and also because we want to make sure that we benefit optimally from RCCC coordinating activities, the 8th Population & Housing Census is planned for August 2011.

Within the framework of the 7th Population and Housing Census, 2 permanent units have been created within the General Bureau of Statistics, which will certainly be conducive to preparing for future censuses. These are a Cartography unit, placed under the Household Surveys Section, and a Census Office. The Census Office will be the custodian of the census results and all properties that have not been allocated.

Preparatory activities

1- CARTOGRAPHY

In terms of activities, it is envisaged that Cartography updates will take place continuously, in order to keep our sampling frame (either addresses or enumeration blocks for cluster sampling) up to date and to make sure that no more listing nation wide, in a relatively short time preceding a Census, is necessary. Cartography is also crucial to a series of inter-censal surveys planned or already executed or in execution (Extended Household Surveys, MICS, Informal Sector Survey, etc.)

2- USER CONSULTATIONS

These are planned to commence in late 2007 or early 2008 and we shall make sure that all stakeholders understand that while we certainly want to entertain their requests we have to reckon with all major deciding factors, namely (not in any particular order):

- (a) United Nations recommendations
- (b) Regional, i.e. CARICOM (RCCC) recommendations
- (c) Continuity and comparison with previous censuses
- (d) Requests from national stakeholders and national requirements and needs
- (e) A proper distinction between Census questions and survey questions
- (f) Response and respondent burden on both enumerators and respondents

3- Budget Estimates

Rough and ready budget estimates will be made as of April 2007, and most likely the GBS will start making firm budget estimates after the Project of the 7th Census has concluded, which is foreseen for September 2007.

4- Staff Training

a) Apart from Cartography activities this is the only component, which will take place on a continuous basis. In this respect we want to acknowledge internships requested and granted by our colleagues of St. Lucia and the Bahamas last month, respectively encompassing GIS, and Special Operations and Training. The GBS of Suriname is very grateful for these opportunities which met with very favorable remarks of our staff in question. The services provided by CSO St. Lucia and CSO Bahamas are herewith particularly commended!

b) Also some overseas training at the US Bureau of the Census is envisaged. Actually, these were planned for 2006, but were all canceled by USBoC and thus we are looking forward to participating in **“Census Planning & Management”, Sampling and Statistical Methods and in Improving Data Quality** next year. We like to recommend these to all RCCC members!

CLOSING REMARKS

- 1- Conducting a Census in 2004, the last year of the UN 2000 Census Decennium, presented both disadvantages and advantages. Some disadvantages were (a) that we could not fully participate in the coordinating effort of CARICOM since most CARICOM members conducted their Census in 2000 or 2001 (b) Given our time table (e.g. our administrative report is only scheduled for completion in December 2006) we obviously have problems in participating properly in Census 2000 decennium evaluation activities of the UN, CARICOM or other organizations. The main advantage of being the last member to conduct a Census is learning from successes and problems of all other members.
- 2- Suriname's next Population and Housing Census is planned for August 2011 and formal preparations are supposed to commence in 2008. The activities which will continue to take place are Cartography activities to keep our sampling frame up to date and preparatory to the next Census! Also Training people in proper Census Management issues will remain high on our list of priorities.
- 3- While in the Seventh Population and Housing Census, there was implicit adherence to the so-called RATAACC (**R**elevance, **A**ccuracy, **T**imeliness, **A**ccessibility & **C**larity, **C**omparability, **C**oherence) quality attributes, these attributes will be adhered to explicitly in the Eight Population and Housing Census.
- 4- The years 2003 and 2004 have been very challenging for the GBS. Conducting a Population and Housing Census after more than 23 years, starting from scratch was a Big Job. However, repeating the operation within 16-18 months was a Herculean job indeed. We want to share with the RCCC that we are very proud of our relatively small staff for the accomplishments!
- 5- Finally, the acknowledgements in all our publications are in Dutch, but we want to share with you that we have also acknowledged: Statistics Programme of CARICOM and our SCCS colleagues of Jamaica, Barbados, St. Lucia and Belize for their "instant assistance" via e-mail whenever we needed advice for a multitude of problems. We are sure that the SCCS and RCCC are very useful instruments that have proven their worth. **We may have to adapt to a changing environment or we may change because of a pro-active stance, but SCCS, RCCC and (the Statistics Programme of) CARICOM are certainly here to stay!**