

(at least in certain countries) because it would imply admitting that the administration is not flawless.

The only option for the research community (including the national statistical offices) to maintain the census or to make viable alternative methods acceptable to policy makers (and the general public) is to indicate the use (and the need) of the census for planning purposes; and to underline at the same time that good planning is impossible to understand societal change.

- The case of less developed countries

Many African countries have not participated in the 2000 round of censuses. The mostly cited argument for not undertaking (or postponing) the census was the cost involved. End of 2001 UNFPA in collaboration with PARIS 21⁷ organised an international expert group meeting in Pretoria, South Africa. The subject of the *Meeting: Mechanisms for Ensuring Continuity of 10-Year Population Censuses: Strategies for Reducing Census Costs*. There were about 50 participants and 30 presentations. The conclusion of the 4-day Expert Meeting was that cost reduction did not seem to be a realistic target: the cost of conducting a census is proportional to the population size and a cost of US\$1 per head can be regarded as 'normal'⁸. The general conclusion, however, was that the census needed to be made as attractive as possible for all 'stakeholders', at both national as international level⁹.

3. The future of the census: a(n) (basic) instrument for socio-economic analysis

The basic hypothesis for the reasoning below is 'that there is a way back'. The 'classical' census is 'dead' (especially in its purest form, i.e. organised the census organised on a de facto basis). On the other hand, one may believe that it must be possible (although certainly not easy) to convince policy makers that a census

⁷ Established in November 1999 in response to the UN Economic and Social Council resolution on the goals of the UN Conference on Development, the PARIS21 Consortium was launched to act as a catalyst for promoting a culture of evidence-based policymaking and monitoring in all countries, and especially in developing countries. The Consortium is a partnership of policymakers, analysts, and statisticians from all countries of the world. We focus on promoting high-quality statistics, making these data meaningful and designing sound policies. Our role in PARIS21 is to foster more effective dialogue among those who produce development statistics and those who use them, through facilitating international events, supporting country-based activities, regional workshops, and subject matter task teams. [source: www.paris21.org]

⁸ There are of course other factors that intervene in determining the cost of a census, such as accessibility and characteristics of the habitat.

⁹ Interestingly, at another UNFPA/PARIS 21 meeting, two years later, again in Pretoria, but this time focused on Population Census Data Dissemination and Use, participants reached a similar conclusion.