

PRESS RELEASE BY THE CHIEF CENSUS OFFICER

2020 MID-TERM POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS

Following the proclamation by HE the President of Sierra Leone, Stats SL will be conducting the first Mid-Term Population and Housing Census in Sierra Leone. **December 4** has been declared the census night. Activities to make this possible have already commenced.

In this Press Release, I wish to inform the public of key issues related to the forthcoming Mid-Term Census:

1) A Mid-Term Census is a standard, internationally recognised practice. For a country like Sierra Leone that is embarking on fundamental structural changes, the availability of up-to-date information is crucial for effective implementation of plans and programmes at all levels. This first Mid-Term Census will provide that.

2. In addition, the Mid-Term Census allows us to update data collected during the 2015 Census, check the statuses of localities in the country, update Stats SL's cartographic databases, and set baselines and capture progress of specific national goals. In this case, we will directly address issues of the Medium-Term National Development Plan and SDGs.

Learning from the past to improve on the future

3) Every massive national undertaking like a census will invariably be faced with diverse challenges. The 2015 Census had its challenges. Stats SL will address previous challenges and is prepared to face any others and effectively address them as the exercise progresses.

4) We are aware that some challenges might be identified only after the end of the activity, as it occurred after the 2015 Census. These have been recorded as valuable lessons learnt for application in the forthcoming Mid-Term Census.

5) For the previous census, it took some time to do the actual census takings after the cartographic work was completed. It was presumed that new localities might have come into existence, in between that period. This time, with the Mid-Term Census process in place, we will conduct the census takings almost immediately after the cartographic work ends in November.

6) During the 2015 Census, paper questionnaires were used and as such, data collected in the field had to be manually coded and inputted into a database. As a result, **we realised only after the activity that some specific things that we would have liked to do with the data today, cannot be done.** For instance, **for about 59% of the country**, we currently know the totals of some enumeration areas that were composed of several localities, called Type 3 Localities. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide the number of people belonging to each of those villages/settlements/localities. In other words, from the 2015 Census we conducted, it is easy for us to determine how many people there were together in the group of villages, but we cannot tell the exact number of people in a village. The Mid-Term Census can help fill in these gaps, as it will allow Stats SL to go back and ensure that answers are provided to problems such as the one highlighted above.

After noting the gaps, some of which are listed above, we did ask UNFPA to sponsor the trip of a consultant who worked with Stats SL's team in 2015. **He was presented with the gaps we had identified and requested to advise on the best way forward. He worked with us for a month and recommended that we needed to return to the field.** We agreed. If we are to do so for 59% of the country—I refer to my example above, why not just do it for the entire country? This was the genesis of the Mid-Term Census Proposal.

How do we plan to address the Gaps?

7) In addition to the shortcomings mentioned earlier and for which we have learnt lessons, this time around we will use modern technology that will enable us collect, store and retrieve information rapidly. We will for the first time use Computer-Aided Personal Interviews (CAPI) or generally Computer-Aided Data Collection (CADC) for that purpose. Use of tablets will: ensure more data quality through embedded plausibility checks; reduce data collection costs; and ensure enumerators go to all parts of the country because we can track their movements from HQ.

We will follow this procedure:

- a) Each tablet will be assigned to a specific enumeration area (EA), where details of the localities (settlements) are stored.
- b) All field data will automatically be transferred to a server at our HQ. Software makes it possible for monitors to see where the data are coming from and determine progress of the data collection.
- c) We will have a Situation Room, where dashboards will be displayed with charts showing what is happening in the field.

By so doing, the significant gap identified in the 2015 Census will not recur.

In addition, since we will involve many stakeholders – some were part of the 2015 Census processes, continued dialogue will ensure that we handle any process and other challenges we faced in 2015.

We invite every Sierra Leonean to stand up and be counted beginning December 4. We also ask every Sierra Leonean to help Stats SL monitor and ensure that the process put in place, is credible.

Thank you and God bless you.

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