



PUBLIC POLICY BLOG

Why does Census Data matters in PNG?

Peter Michael Magury

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Census data are the lifeblood of decision-making. The data is important for designing, monitoring, and evaluation of policies for sustainable development. Papua New Guinea's (PNG's) development agenda such as the forthcoming Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) IV, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), PNG Vision 2050, and Development Strategic Plan 2030 need census data for proper implementation of development programs and interventions. Without official census data and information, there is a risk that the country's sustainable development strategies may not be achieved.

The Census data, broken down at the lowest geographic level, is the foundation for any strategic plan that PNG wants to undertake. It is the root of decision-making for redistricting, community development planning and the development of the MTDP IV and SDGs as follows:

Redistricting

The direct purpose of the census is to allocate political representation on a regular basis. According to the Statistical Services Act 1980, an accurate census count is critical to government officials as they take action to govern democratically and to deliver basic

services efficiently and equitably at the national level. Like the national government, provinces use census data for their own redistricting, and to determine PNG parliamentary representation.

Planning wards and communities

Provinces use census information in different ways as they meet the increasingly different needs of their districts and Local Level Governments. According to the National Statistical Office in 2015, provinces use census data to conduct vital duties such as assessment of property, record keeping, and maintenance of rural roads, administration of elections, judicial functions, and relief for the marginalised communities.

Census data are also used for the following:

- Drawing district boundary lines
- Analysing labour supplies
- Forecasting housing needs in urban areas
- Forecasting future transportation needs
- Establishing disaster management programs and priorities
- Planning for hospitals, clinics, and other health services
- Planning services for people with disabilities
- Understanding consumer needs.

Medium Term Development Plan IV and Sustainable Development Goals

The priority for the national government in planning for the Medium Term Development Plan IV and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and their 169 associated targets, is to ensure conducting of the next census to address the strengths and weaknesses of data sources and the gaps the country is currently facing. Getting the next population census count right is critical because, according to the United Nations (2022), eight years from now, by the end of the 2030 Agenda, there will be nearly 10.71 million people living in Papua New Guinea, all of whom should have reliable access to energy, food, water, education, and employment.

Conclusion

Census data is the root of decision-making for political representation, redistricting, development plan and the implementation of the MTDP IV and SDGs in PNG. Without this census data, the

implementation of the government's sustainable development strategies, policies and plans will be restricted. Thus, it is important for the Government of Papua New Guinea to consider conducting national census soon to contribute to making informed decisions for the country.

About the Author

Peter Michael Magury is a Research Fellow with the Development Indicators Research Program at the PNG National Research Institute. Prior to that Mr Magury was a Research Fellow with the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Research Program. Mr Magury received his Bachelor of Science from the University of Papua New Guinea and his Master of Science in Statistics from the Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne. He also completed his Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the University of Papua New Guinea.