

## **Importance of National Population Censuses for Measuring Development Progress in Africa**

### Extended Abstract

Measurement of progress on the development agenda is of major interest to governments and the international community. Briefly encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), these measurements in Africa are based on estimates obtained from secondary data and surveys that lack national representation. Moreover, the MDGs are a framework of indicators for development, not a strategic framework for development progress. Therefore, they are short of identifying the needed policy interventions and where outcomes are needed to make some progress on the development agenda. This is reflected in social development, and particularly the evolving demographic and population changes within each country, receiving less attention in explaining Africa's progress, and in the strategies to accelerate its development in the future.

Population and housing censuses are the most important source of information for developing the detailed national pictures for gauging the progress of countries on the development agenda. This paper will highlight the importance of national data coverage through periodic population and housing censuses for measuring development progress. In addition to obtaining accurate national indicators, it is important to understand the details of the national picture, to identifying areas where policies and interventions are needed to accelerate progress on the development agenda. Therefore, the paper will emphasize the need for comprehensive understanding of the demographic map of a country, to identify within country differences in fertility and mortality by place of residence, levels of education, and some other differential factors; and to appreciate the outcomes of these differences in terms of changes in the sex composition and age structure of populations. Moreover, the paper will highlight the need to recognize rapidly changing population distribution, and the challenges and opportunities it presents for development.