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The Use of Population Census Data for Environmental Analysis

Jose Miguel Guzman, UNFPA

Abstract

Despite their potential, censuses have not been sufficiently exploited as key data source for environmental studies and climate change analysis. However, information requirements to investigate and analyze the impact of environmental changes on the socioeconomic and demographic conditions of the population have increased significantly in recent years. Censuses collect information on all households, which allows for the production of statistics for small areas. The 2010 census round could become one of the most important sources of data for environmental analysis[1] and, in particular, will provide additional information that can help in the calculation of emissions and in the identification of vulnerable populations to environmental disasters caused by climate change, thus providing an evidence-base for both mitigation and adaptation policies. This paper will present an overview of the potential of census data, provide some examples of the use of census data in particular countries, and highlight the potential of such data to provide evidence in still unexplored areas. It aims to call attention to the need to act now in order to better position environmental statistics in censuses, through the inclusion of questions and the development of methods for processing and analyzing geo-referencing population data.

[1] The document "The Indicators of Sustainable Development: Guidelines and Methodologies Third Edition" prepared by the UN Division for Sustainable Development (2007) presents a list of 50 core indicators, which are part of a larger set of 96 indicators of sustainable development. Around 40% of these indicators can be calculated (partially or totally) using census data. See a detailed list of these indicators in the Annex.