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DATA FOR DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT IN GHANA

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Data for development can be likened to money in the economy and blood in the system of a human being...Without adequate and reliable data there cannot be any meaningful development. Without data we will only be speculating (Civil Society Organization Respondent)

I. INTRODUCTION

The attempts of African countries to develop their economies and to democratize their political systems have led to a renewed interest in the use of demographic and socio-economic data for decision-making and planning. This new direction calls for clear, timely, reliable, and relevant data. At the international level, initiatives such as the African Charter on Statistics, PARIS 21, and the Health Metrics Network have emerged to provide direction and technical support for strengthening initiatives and activities that harmonize measures and improve data collection processes.

This report is part of a four-country study involving Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal and Uganda. The countries were chosen based on their upcoming censuses, identified statistical capacities, active engagement in the production of data, and participation in many of the international data initiatives. The main aim of the case studies is to provide a broad picture of the demand for and access to data, quality of available data, and the perceived supply of demographic data among policymakers and other stakeholders. This study used in-depth interviews to hold discussions with policymakers/government officials, development partners, researchers, NGOs, and the media at the national and local levels. In general, respondents identified with the objectives of the study because the limited availability and sharing of data constitute challenges to their work.

Ghana, a West African country, covers 226,540 square kilometers and an estimated population of 22.9 million people¹. The country is ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous with over 50 different languages and groups². It is estimated that 51%³ of the total population lives in rural areas; of the 49% who live in urban areas, Accra and Kumasi account for 25% and 15%⁴, respectively. For the 2007 fiscal year, real GDP growth in Ghana was estimated at 6.3%⁵. The proportion below the poverty line declined from 52% in 1991/92 to 29% in 2005/2006⁶.

The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS), first developed in 2002 (GPRS I: 2002-2005) and extended in 2006 (GPRS II: 2006-2009), provides the framework for reducing poverty and improving welfare in Ghana. GPRS primarily aims to improve the links between policy priorities and national budgetary allocation outcomes; and enhance the monitoring process for the nation's schemes for development.

Monitoring the progress of the GPRS is spearheaded by the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) with the support of the Ghana Statistical Services (GSS).

¹ <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/africa/Ghana-facts.asp>

² <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/tribes/>

³ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ghana_statistics.html

⁴ <http://www.citypopulation.de/Ghana.html>

⁵ <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/12/57/40577770.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/12/57/40577770.pdf>;
<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/africa/Ghana-facts.asp>

GSS is the government agency responsible for collecting, compiling, analyzing, publishing, and disseminating official socio-economic statistics. GSS is governed by the Statistical Services Board, and is made up of 11 offices: 1 national office headed by the Government Statistician, and an office in each of the 10 administrative regions. The Service's main data activities include the census (last conducted in 2000); the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, first carried out in 2006; and the Core Welfare Indicator Cluster Survey, which was last conducted in 2003.

II. DEMAND FOR DATA

Broad variations emerged among the respondents in regards to the demand for data. Policymakers, development partners and researchers, for the most part, considered demand for data to be high, while civil society organizations and the media reported that demand was low. Despite their differences, however, they all considered demand to be increasing as a result of internal and external factors.

The internal factors frequently brought up were the development agenda of government; the stage of socio-economic development; the setting of national goals and the endorsement of international ones; the democratization of governance (Parliament, voting, etc); and the increasing interest of civil society in the body politic. For instance, as a result of the liberal political system since 1992, members of Parliament, civil societies and the press demand that the government show the outputs of its mandate in the form of data. The availability of and access to information technology has also influenced the nature and processing of data, putting pressure on governments to make data available in various formats. Government agencies now operate websites and provide information online, in spite of some attendant problems.

The most cited external factor was the push by development partners for more data to monitor the progress of the projects that they fund. Development partners have changed from project support to budget support for the activities of government within the last 4-5 years. As a result, development partners demand data from the government of Ghana so that they can in turn report to their organizations in a timely manner. The implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was, in particular, considered to have been a catalyst to the demand for some types of data. As one respondent pointed out, "some African countries would not have made maternal mortality a priority had it not been for the MDGs." The mandate of some international organizations has also influenced demand for routine data. For instance, the World Health Organization's request for routine data such as those on HIV/AIDS, polio and other selected diseases has influenced demand for data and information on those diseases in a way that would not have otherwise occurred.

Box 1: The Press creating awareness on demand for health data

In 2007 [a] reporter published an article on a ‘strange’ disease that had broken out in the Volta Region. Investigations indicated that it was lichenmiasis, a disease which was last reported on before independence. It brought out the role of the press in generating demand; in both cases, the health establishment had to respond to these publications. [Government]

Respondents generally identified census and household data as essential for measuring the impacts of development (impact indicators), and viewed survey, service and budget data as ideal for tracking inputs as well as outcomes of programs and activities (process indicators). However, media practitioners and civil society organizations tended to emphasize demand for service, household and budget data, while policymakers, development partners, and researchers emphasized demand for the whole range of data in both raw and processed forms.

In terms of the reliability and adequacy of available data, there appeared to be an apparent paradox in the impressions of the different respondents. Some respondents, especially officials at ministries and departments, intimated that there were enough data available in the system – census, survey, service and budget data - to meet various needs. The other side of the paradox was the inability of some potential users to search for and obtain data. That is, various ministries, departments and agencies were reportedly holding data which were not available to potential users. One respondent summarized this aspect by saying, “Ghanaians do not obtain data because they do not search for it... and foreigners get the data they need because they search.” This cultural dimension of demand for data recurred in a number of interviews and was associated with low statistical literacy in the country. The situation, according to respondents, has led to duplications of efforts in data collection in some instances, and the development of a number of management information systems, with some at various stages of development.

Impediments to Demand

According to the respondents, there are some major gaps associated with demand for data:

- Low critical mass of staff and the relevant expertise to collect, analyze, and interpret data. Among those mentioned were policy analysts, bio-statisticians and archivists;
- Not enough institutions with the capacity to analyze budget data;
- Some policymakers do not use data for decision-making, partly because they may not be aware of the available data, or they deliberately feign ignorance so that they are not challenged;

- Data are not packaged in a way that appeals to a wide range of users. Media and civil society organizations, in particular, reported that producers and researchers do not compile and produce data and information in formats that they can readily understand and this limits their use of such data;
- A number of international and research organizations undertake large and small scale data collection exercises and initiatives without the involvement of any national institutions. Some of these initiatives occurred because existing data could not meet the data demand;
- There is poor dissemination of information on available data, and on information stored in public and private institutions as well as research establishments;
- Some major producers of data are unable to meet user demand because some of the requests are neither comprehensive nor adequately stated; and
- Service data from some departments and ministries are considered to be poor and so are not demanded even if they are available, for example, school enrollment data from the Ghana Education Service (GES).

III. SUPPLY OF DATA

Since independence, Ghana has conducted and accumulated large amounts of data at the national level. Among them are four censuses (1960, 1970, 1984 and 2000); four Ghana Demographic and Health Surveys (GDHS), conducted every five years since 1988, with the fifth (2008) in progress at the time of this study; and other various surveys such as the Living Standards Surveys (LSS) and the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS). Budgets of Ghana from 1999, health data from the Ghana Health Service, and programs at the Office of the President are also posted on the internet. With improvements in technology, some ministries, departments and agencies have developed management information systems (MIS), such as “Ghana Info”, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and the health information system.

The interviews revealed that data sharing does occur between and among institutions, albeit on a sometimes limited basis. For instance, some ministries, departments, agencies and development partners have protocols as well as internet sites for data sharing:

- GSS, in collaboration with University of Minnesota, is in the process of posting 10% of the 1984 and 2000 census data on the internet;
- Development partners have established protocols for sharing data among themselves and with relevant government institutions;
- Consultations occur among relevant institutions on the processes of data collection and management. For instance, there was extensive consultation among producers and users during the planning for the 2008 GDHS; and the Ghana Statistical Service is collaborating with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to undertake an agricultural census in 2011; and
- There is evidence of simple and easy-to-read demographic materials that have been published by some agencies. For example, the National Population Council produces fact sheets on various demographic and socio-economic indicators at the national and district levels.

Quality

Quality of data was considered to be a function of the process of data collection, storage, and analysis. These factors are affected by the conceptualization of the collection and analysis process, the questions to be asked, the quality and integrity of field assistants, supervision, and quality checks at various stages of data collection, storage and processing. Respondents recognized that institutions such as GSS have undertaken large-scale, reportedly high quality, data collection at the national level. However, aspects of data quality such as comparability, timeliness, reliability and accessibility, are still seen as problematic.

Comparability: Two dimensions of comparability were identified: 1) Comparability within and between institutions; and 2) Comparability over time. The DHS is considered to be the best source of available data due to the regularity and the comparability of information over time. The censuses, which have been conducted since independence, are considered second in perceived quality. Household surveys such as the LSS are considered to be the least reliable. Collection for all three types of sources, however, tends to be inconsistent.

Issues of comparability were thought to arise due to a couple of reasons:

- Some ministries, development agencies, and research institutions collect their own data and with different methods and time frames, making comparability difficult.
- There have been changes and inconsistencies in the variables collected over time. For instance, data on ethnic background was collected in the 1960, but was not asked in subsequent censuses until the 2000 Census. This limits the use of data on ethnic background to assess changes over time for some variables such as disease patterns among groups. Responding to the issues, one researcher remarked that “while this is a genuine concern, the need to improve upon the quality and quantity of data always leads to revisions of questions in some of the surveys, as well as changes in the presentation of data which have been conducted over the years.”

Timeliness: Aspects of timelines that emerged were delays in the release of raw and processed data, and delays in meeting requests. Data from internationally organized surveys such as the DHS are always released on time. The release of censuses and data on government expenditures, however, tends to be delayed. When data are not released on time, it limits the extent to which it can be used to inform policy and decision-making, as well as limiting the time available for further analyses. As pointed out by one of the respondents, “unprocessed data loses its value after some time.” Delays in the transmission of routine service data from the local level to the district, region and national level also hinders data use. For instance, the Director General of the Ghana Education Service reported delays in the forwarding of data from some districts, forcing him to institute sanctions.

The second dimension of timeliness is delays associated with requests for data and information from government establishments. Responses varied from prompt response, to

unduly long waiting periods, to outright refusal. Research institutions, the media and civil society organizations, in particular, reported delays in requests for data. This presents a particular problem for the media, as they often work on deadlines. For instance, a request to the Ghana Statistical Service for 10% of the 2000 census has not been granted after four years of asking for it. It emerged that it is partly such delays that drive some institutions to conduct their own surveys.

Box 2: Regularity and Irregularity of Surveys and Censuses

The regularity of data collection exercises has been varied. While the DHS has been held ever five years since 1988, the GLSS has been irregularly: the third survey was held in 1991/92, the fourth in 1998/99, and the fifth in 2005/2006. Three of the four censuses post-independence censuses have been irregular. The Ghana Statistical Service is seeking to get an amendment to the Ghana Statistical Act which will make it mandatory for censuses to be held every ten years, specifically in years ending with a zero.

Nevertheless, national census and nationally conducted household surveys are considered to be reliable. The major content issue raised in the censuses is that of misreporting the age of the data. On the other hand, service data were considered to suffer from over- and under-reporting, depending upon the circumstances. For instance, there were reports of over-estimation of data for the school-feeding program from some districts.

Inadequate coverage also emerged as a major issue, especially at the local level. It was pointed out that neo-natal deaths for some ethnicities are not reported because children who die within the first week of birth are not considered to have been born. National household surveys do not adequately cover local levels, and the data therefore become unreliable when applied to the district level. This has been one of the major challenges for district level planning and development.

Accessibility: This aspect was defined in terms of the willingness to share data and or information. As indicated, there were examples of data sharing in the system. Respondents from the media reported good practices of data sharing from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning on the recent global economic crisis. However, there were examples of poor data sharing, which manifested itself in various forms including delays in the release of data and outright refusal of access to some potential users:

- Some civil society organizations and the media reported that individuals were not willing to share data for a variety of reasons including fear of being misquoted, possibility of the misuse of the information provided, and lack of appreciation for the sharing of data;
- There are reported weak linkages in the data collection chain. It was reported that data collection has not been given the attention it deserves, and as a result, people employed to collect data are in most cases statistically untrained, especially at the

- local level. Several respondents also alleged that some field assistants send in forged data, while others may collect the data but do not understand the role of the data, and are therefore unable to identify obvious mistakes in the data they collect.
- Some of the institutions with management information systems are unable to regularly update their websites. Part of the problem is that some of the information systems are established through extra-national initiatives, and the domestic institutions are unable to continue when funding for the initial projects end;
 - Data on income and expenditure or disbursement, which are demanded by NGOs and other civil society organizations are not available to enable them to track the use of funds;
 - Some civil servants use the confidentiality and oath of secrecy in the public service to deny potential users access to data and information;
 - Some potential users are unable to access data due to the systems used to capture, store and retrieve data. This particularly affects civil society organizations that need data in simplified forms for advocacy and government engagement.
 - Although various government administrations have expressed a high interest in data for development, none has provided substantial resources to complement those of development partners. Some respondents pointed out that large scale data collection has been largely supported by development partners. This has two possible implications: emerging issues which are not of priority to donor organizations may not be funded; and when donor-funding dries up, the process either slows or stops.
 - The GSS has faced a number of challenges, which include the inability to produce basic estimates on the characteristics of the population such as age-sex composition, school-age population, and socio-economic profile at both the national and local levels. To tackle these challenges, GSS has recently developed a National Statistical Development System (NSDS) and a strategic plan as proposed under PARIS 21.⁷ The remaining obstacle is figuring out how to secure the necessary funding to carry out the developed plans.
 - Adequate skills exist within various establishments such as research and tertiary institutions, ministries and other public and private institutions for collecting, collating and analyzing data. It is, however, necessary to mobilize the collective skills to support the programs of agencies such as GSS to collect and manage data at the national, regional and district levels.

According to respondents, improving supply of data for decision-making and research to inform policy will involve several steps:

- Promoting a national research policy to guide data collection and use for specific activities and for general development;
- Ensuring that relevant government establishments make all types of data available to policymakers and other potential users;

⁷ On Thursday, 27th November 2008, the Ghana Statistical service launched its five-year strategic plan which is expected to cost \$US107 million.

- Harnessing the collective skills within various establishments for the collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of raw data and processed results;
- Supporting moves to ensure that various types of data are collected and disseminated regularly;
- Providing training and incentives to assistants who collect routine and survey data at all levels;
- Ensuring that ministries and development agencies update their websites regularly; and
- Ensuring that data, when collected, are collated and released within a reasonably short period.

IV. NEEDS AT THE DISTRICT (LOCAL) LEVEL

In 1988, the Government adopted a decentralization policy, which devolved power to metropolitan/municipal/district assemblies. Given this structure of governance, policymakers at the district level need the same types of data as those at the central level for planning and administration. The specific data needs which emerged were census data on the socio-economic profile of residents; migration (including rural-urban) for both the sending and receiving districts; and service and budget data. Local governments particularly need these types of data to plan and implement national programs, such as those for agricultural production, universal basic education, and the health insurance scheme.

Wide disparities emerged among the districts in terms of data collection facilities, and the quality and quantity of available data. The Coordinating Director of one district reported that his former place of employment had better facilities and thus more reliable data than his current district because his former district received support through city-twinning (Sister-to-Sister collaboration with cities in Europe and America). District discrepancies were further attributed to the tendency of development partners to concentrate data activities in the three less developed regions of the north. Some respondents also observed that major cities such as Accra had expanded in the last three decades through migration, but there is no systematic data collection process on urban migration and related issues such as the provision of facilities and services in the newly settled areas.

Several challenges were identified by both policymakers and other respondents who deal with district administration at the local level:

- The concept of decentralization is not fully implemented in some cases, leading some departments at the local level to continue to operate as independent entities that bypass district assemblies and continue to directly report to their national headquarters.
- Some NGOs and CSO operating at the local level indicated that they are asked to route their requests for local data through national offices in Accra. According to one civil society respondent, he was told “no letter from Accra, no data”. This process was found to delay the granting of requests for data.
- Detailed census data are not compiled for districts and therefore they lack basic socio-demographic data. For instance, data available for districts from the 2000

- census only aggregates to age and gender; there is no basic information on settlements, or analytical regional reports that incorporate the various district characteristics. Given this situation, district assemblies use the data that are available to them, and which in most cases are not enough;
- Data from national household surveys such as the DHS and the GLSS apply only at the regional levels and not districts; and
 - Districts officials struggle to compile the data necessary for planning purposes due to the lack of human capacity and resources. In some cases, data are stored in hard copies due to a lack of facilities to convert data into electronic formats. Some districts also use self-designed formats that cannot be linked to existing national data, which results in incomplete data that cannot be compared over time.

Responding to issues at the local level

To improve data quality at the local level, and eventually at the national level, departments within district assemblies would need to be strengthened to enable them to collect reliable and timely data. Several strategies for addressing problems with local data have been suggested:

- District assemblies would have to be centrally supported in adopting innovative ways to collect, store and manage data in various formats;
- Subsequent censuses should compile and publish detailed district level data which can be used for planning;
- To operate as expected, district assemblies need the full complement of trained statistical officers;
- It should be possible for district officers to grant access to data without written permission from the national level; and
- District level data collection processes need to be harmonized in terms of the items covered, and methodologies for data collection and processing in order to enhance comparability between local and national level administrations.

V. INTERVENTIONS

Respondents had several suggestions for interventions to improve the quality of, demand for, and access to data:

- Pass the Freedom of Information Bill, which is currently before Parliament, in order to send a positive political message on data management and sharing;
- Greater resource commitment from government to complement the efforts of development partners to collect and manage data as a way to promote the collection of additional internally driven data;
- Provide avenues for Parliamentarians and other policymakers to have access to information so as to facilitate their work and promote the culture of accessing data for planning and decision-making;
- Ensure that initiatives to establish management information systems are brought together to provide a one-stop shop for data storage, management and sharing;
- Improve the vital registration system;

- Initiate a process to develop a core of communication experts who can translate data and research results into simple manageable forms that can be used by the media to inform people. The communicators will also assist in disseminating information on available data;
- Develop a process whereby funding agencies make it mandatory for the institutions and individuals they fund to share any data generated through their support; and
- Ensure the training of a critical mass of personnel for data collection, storage and analysis.