Be counted in census - 2001

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The census of population and housing is an exercise of national importance. It requires the participation and co-operation of every person in the country. The best way to co-operate is to provide accurate information at the shortest possible time. Further, every person in the country should be enumerated and each person should be enumerated only once. If a red label with a number is not pasted on your house by the end of March 2001, contact the grama niladari of your area to get a number and ensure that your house is listed so that you are counted in the census of population and housing to be taken in June 2001. Be counted.

The thirteenth census of population and housing of Sri Lanka, is conducted during this year in its most basic form, population census is a count of the number of inhabitants in a country. Census taking has its beginning in ancient times and was undertaken primarily for taxation purposes. From these early population counts, the modern census evolved from around the seventeenth century, with the characteristics of universal coverage, wide scope of inquiry and provision of information for statistical and planning purposes.

Only a census provides the unique opportunity to collect information on each person at a fixed time and to obtain data on age, sex, nationality, educational attainment, marital status, sources of livelihood, occupation, living conditions, condition on buildings, and dwelling etc. This stands out as the main advantage of the population and housing census. This is the only means to take a momentary photograph of the country's population and housing situation.

The decision to conduct the census in 2001 is in line with the recommendation of the United Nations (UN) that a national census be taken at least once in every 10 years. The value of census data is increased if it can be compared internationally. Therefore, the UN has recommended that countries may wish to undertake a census in years ending in 'O' or as near to those years as possible. First Census Of Population in Sri Lanka had been conducted in 1871. Thereafter censuses have been taken in 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1946, 1953, 1963, 1971 and 1981. The population of these census years have been 2,4, 2,8, 3,0, 3,6, 4,1, 4,5, 6,3, 6,7, 8,1, 10,6, 12,7 and 14,8 millions respectively. The Second World War delayed the 1941 census till 1946. The last census was conducted 20 years ago in 1981. The census planned for 1991 could not be taken due to the unsettled conditions, which prevailed at that time.

Generally the planning for a census requires about 3-4 years. There are four main stages of the census taking operation. The first stage is mapping. That is preparation of complete and up to date maps marking the grama niladari divisional boundaries and small enumeration areas known as Census Blocks. Each grama niladari division is divided into a few census blocks and the criterion used here is to have 60 - 80 housing units in a census block. The whole country is divided into about 100,000 census blocks. This stage has now been completed.

The second stage is the listing operation. This operation commenced in February 2001 and is expected to complete by the end of March 2001. The census enumeration is key persons in this operation. Either the grama niladari or any other person designated by the Divisional Secretary/Deputy Census Commissioner, visits all permanent, semi-permanent and temporary housing units and other buildings in his/her GN division. They list these units by census block. Starting from an easily identifiable location all these units except those used for raising animals, storing firewood etc are serially numbered. In each census block, numbering starts with 1. This number is written on a red label and pasted on the front door frame or other prominent place so that it is visible to the census enumerators. This label has to be there at least until the end of the year 2001.

In addition to numbering, some key information is also collected during listing. This includes name of the heads of the household, number of persons normally sleeping in the unit, type of unit, whether there are agricultural operators, people engaged in fishing whether any other economic activities are carried out within the premises. A list consisting of these particulars of all housing units is called a frame. One might wonder why information on agriculture, fishing and other industrial activities are also collected in this census.

The information collected by this operation will be the base for numerous other censuses, surveys and other studies that will be conducted by the Department as well as other institutions to gather information on various demographic and socio-economic aspects of the country until the next census is conducted. The census of population and housing will be followed by the census of agriculture and census of industries. As such the reliability and accuracy of findings of these censuses, surveys and other studies largely depend on the accuracy and completeness of the information collected by the listing operation.

Preliminary census is the third stage. Preliminary census is scheduled to be taken during the month of June 2001. An enumerator is assigned to each census block. This enumerator visits all housing units in the census block listed during the listing operation. A questionnaire designed to get information on all the individuals in the unit as well as the structure of housing is filled for each and every housing unit of the census block, including any that may have been missed during the listing.

The fourth stage is the final census. From 6.00 p.m. to midnight, on the day that the final census is taken people are requested to stay home as far as possible. The census enumerators, who took the preliminary census, will revisit all housing units of their respective census blocks during this period of time. At this operation enumerators check whether the persons whose names appear in the questionnaire completed at the third stage are actually staying in the unit.

If they don't, it is noted in the schedule. On this day, people in the streets, railway stations, bus halts and other outdoor places are also counted ensuring that every single person living in this country is counted.

The census questionnaire has been designed to obtain comparable information at small area level, providing a wealth of inter-related information on households and individuals on a consistent basis across Sri Lanka. The effort and cost of taking a census is worthwhile when results meet needs and are delivered effectively. Accordingly, the importance of ensuring that the content of the survey meets the requirements of the user is a key strategic aim. The Department is grateful for the significant input from users, without which the Department would not have been able to develop effective questions for the 2001 census.

Prior to the first phase of user consultation, the Department developed a substantial list of possible Census topics, mainly based on previous Census experience underlying changes in the society and ensuring minimum burden on the public in responding to the questionnaire. Collecting housing information from all units rather than from a 10 per cent sample as has been done before and collecting detailed information from disabled persons are the main differences in the 2001 questionnaire as against those used before.

Important statistics on population and housing of country will be compiled based on the information collected from the census. These statistics will be released as publications as well as in electronic form to meet the needs of the modern world. For the first time in the history, maps have been prepared showing the GN boundaries, census blocks and location of housing units. It is expected to establish a geographic information system consisting of spatial data and other attributes on the population and housing of Sri Lanka. Such a system is a long felt need in deciding urban and other socio demographic features of localities. The population and housing census is probably the most comprehensive source of information on the people and housing stock of the country. It meets a variety of needs and provides benchmark data for all demographic, social and labour force statistics and they are widely disseminated. The Census Ordinance, which was revised by Act No. 55 of 2000, guarantees the confidentiality of census data.

Accordingly every person is required to provide the information asked for in the census and every census officer is required to discharge his/her duties to the best of his/her ability. The law on statistics provides that statistical data are confidential and could be used only for statistical purposes and disseminated only when aggregated.

District administration plays a major role in conducting the census. Special gazette notifications have already been issued appointing District Secretaries, divisional secretaries and assistant divisional secretaries as census commissioners. Deputy Census Commissioners and Assistant Census Commissioners respectively. All grama niladaries have been appointed as listing officers. Arrangements are being made to recruit at least GCE (A/L) qualified personnel from the localities to be appointed as census enumerators for the preliminary census and final census operations. These appointments are made only for these two operations. Census taking officers have to sign a written oath not to disclose information submitted by respondents to unauthorized persons.

An enumerator, who is appointed to obtain information necessary for census, will ring or knock at the door of every dwelling three times during this year. First to paste a label on the frame of your front door before the second week of March 2001 and then to get the information about all the individuals in your household within the first three weeks of June 2001. Finally on the Census day between 6.00 p.m. to midnight to take the final count. Second and third visits are made according to the numbers given to the households during the listing stage. The census is an exercise of national importance. It requires the participation and co-operation of every person in the country.

The best way to cooperate is to provide them with accurate information at the shortest possible time. Information each person provides is aggregated to provide the basic demographic, social and economic situation in the country.

Such information is vital for development process. Every person in the country should be enumerated and each person should be enumerated only once. If a red label with a number is not pasted on your house by the end of March 2001, contact the grama niladari of your area, to get a number and ensure that you are counted in the Census of Population and Housing 2001.