

South African Statistics Council

Statement on the results of the Community Survey (CS)

1. Background

Stats SA conducted the Community Survey in February 2007. The Council has been intimately involved in monitoring all the processes (including the sample design, questionnaire design, listing, fieldwork, communications campaign, data processing, data analysis and dissemination) in this survey, since the inception of the new Council in June 2005.

The focus of this statement is on the data analysis conducted by a team of consultants on behalf of the Council.

2. The objectives of the Community Survey

The main objectives of the Community Survey conducted in February 2007 were to:

- provide data at lower levels of geography (at district and municipal levels) in addition to national and provincial levels;
- build human, management and logistical capacity for Census 2011; and
- provide the primary data as a base for population projections.

3. Main findings

The main findings of the investigation conducted by the Council are as follows:

Demographic rates

Fertility and mortality rates derived from the Community Survey data are entirely plausible.

Service delivery indicators

Most of the service delivery indicators compare well with other surveys conducted by Stats SA and other surveys, such as All Media and Products (AMPS).

There are some concerns with certain variables and Council suggests that warnings be issued to caution users on data relating to:

- Institutional population (merely an approximation to 2001 numbers and not new data);

- Unemployment in the Community Survey is higher and less reliable because of questions that were asked differently;
- Grants (do not match the (SASSA) data and should be interpreted with great care);
- Income (includes unreasonably high income for children – presumably misinterpretation of the question, listing parents' income for the child); and
- Distribution of households by province has very little congruence with the General Household Survey or last census.

In the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame, it is difficult to determine whether the differences are due to sampling error, biases or the reality that has changed beyond our expectations. There may be other variables that will require similar warnings after further interrogation.

Systematic errors

A number of systematic errors were observed in the data, which include:

- An underestimate of men relative to women;
- An underestimate of children younger than 10 years;
- An excess of those aged 85+, in particular among men;
- Missing women aged 20–34 from the Coloured population;
- Maldistribution of the population by province;
- Excess of people aged 10–24 in Western Cape and Gauteng; and
- A shortfall of women aged 20–34 in Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo.

With reference to the systematic errors in particular, Council advised that Stats SA use a set of revised weights – even though the weights are aimed at addressing sampling errors, which when applied provide more credible estimates of the population at national and provincial levels. This will be achieved by using CS data to determine an estimated population for the country and each province against which the CS data can then be calibrated.

Data at municipal and district levels

Council found that the confidence intervals at some municipal levels are very wide. It then recommended that further analysis and investigation be conducted into the data to ensure that reliable data are released at district and municipal levels.

Other issues

Council made extensive comments and recommendations on the detailed reports received from Stats SA over the past two years on the following:

- Sample design
- Listing

- Questionnaire design
- Fieldwork (including non-response)
- Logistics
- Data processing
- Data analysis
- Data dissemination

While the focus of this report is on the data analysis, there are important lessons to be learnt from all the stages of this survey that will be valuable for Census 2011. Council recommends that Stats SA should prepare a consolidated report on lessons learnt for 2011.

4. Main recommendations

In view of the findings of the investigation conducted by the Council, we make the following recommendations to the Minister and Statistician-General for approval, in terms of Section 13 of the Statistics Act (Act No.6 of 1999):

- The Statistician-General releases the data of the Community Survey disaggregated at national and provincial levels (summary statistics and tabulations, not the dataset) in October 2007, using the proposed weights as discussed with the Statistician General.
- The Statistician-General releases the data of the Community Survey disaggregated to district and municipal levels on 31 January 2008.
- Further investigations into the stability of the data be conducted at district and municipal level prior to the proposed release on 31 January 2008.
- Stats SA includes warnings to users on the following variables:
 - Institutional population
 - Unemployment
 - Grants
 - Income
 - Distribution of households by province
- Stats SA maintains key databases on population, housing and school enrolment. This is particularly, necessary if a large sample survey such as the Community Survey is to be calibrated against a dwelling frame, a housing register, a population register or school enrolment data.
- Stats SA prepares a consolidated report on lessons learnt from the Community Survey to provide a coherent basis for the planning of Census 2011.

- The data gathered in the Community Survey be used to revise the models to determine the mid-year population estimates.
- Stats SA gives urgent attention to the development of key high-level skills required to conduct a survey of this nature.

5. Conclusion

Council also wishes to record their sincere appreciation to the Statistician-General and the management team at Stats SA for the professional and transparent manner in which they have engaged with Council.

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Chairperson

South African Statistics Council

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