Strengthening the National Statistical System through Language Policy: A Case Study in the Statistical Centre of Iran

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Abstract:

Communicating statistics to people around the world in a way that everyone can obtain the best of it and analyze the socio-economic situation for a better life, is so crucial that the NSOs are speeding up their activities in order to improve their statistical methodologies and benefit from the best practices in this field. By considering the fact that statistics has played an increasingly important role in our science, industry, health and business, making people comfortable with it and encourage them to participate in the statistical activities of the NSOs as the focal point for official statistics in every country has come to the fore. As statistics is produced by the human activities, so the statistics should pave the way for a better life for humans.

In this paper the language policy used by the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI) for encouraging people to have active participation in the statistical practices in line with the 'No One Left Behind' policy is studied. The SCI as the sole focal point for the official statistics in the I.R. Iran has done various activities for promoting the active participation of the respondents in its statistical surveys and censuses including use of new tools for publicity and public awareness such as SMS, preparing of packages for public awareness, training film for household, and multimedia software. These activities aimed at conveying this message to all the people that 'everyone counts'. The language policy used by the SCI in its last National Population and Housing Census in 2016 led to high turnout of households. This policy is reflected well in the instructions and guidelines prepared for all the surveys and enumerators through the language policy that as a nation all the formal documents and legislation must be in Persian language but for communicating this information to people and making them comfortable with the data collection, the native languages or dialects is recommended to use. The language policy and experience of the SCI in encouraging the active participation of individuals in the statistical activities and leaving no one behind is to use the language of people and native people while talking to individuals about the statistics and its importance. This paper concludes that using spoken dialects of people in different parts of the country in the publicity is crucial for encouraging people to participate in the statistical activities and making them comfortable with data collecting.

Keywords: Population Census, Language Policy, Publicity Campaign

1. Introduction:

The 2016 Census was the Eighth National Population and Housing Census in Iran which was conducted on September 24, 2016, throughout Iran. By providing accurate statistics and information on the size, structure, and characteristics of Iran's population, this census served as an appropriate tool and main sources for the country's planners, policy-makers, and officials to design and implement social, economic, and cultural programs. Furthermore, this census was one of the fundamental activities in national statistical system of Iran due to provision of essential frames for implementation of sample surveys within the areas of population and household.

The main object of the census publicity is to encourage the wide ranges of households as much as possible to participate in the census by providing the accurate data on the characteristics of the

households. Building trust and winning the heart of people to encourage them to participate in the census and entrusting them about protection of their data was the ultimate goal of the publicity campaigns in this census.

Advertisements convey a wide variety of meanings, ideologies, discourses, and 'do not simply reflect the world and construct reality' (Hart 1991), but are, 'specific representational practices' (Dyer 1982:115) which society interprets for itself. Advertisement is capable of manipulating the perception and the behaviour of the consumers. Each advertisement is a cultural document and has a cultural shadow which carries to readers to share and negotiate the cultural themes. These symbolic and the iconic conversation is ritualized enactments through the dimensions of cultural esteem. This helps to preserve the culture and help to read the cultural perception becoming natural. [Journal of American science 2010; 6(2):6–11]. (ISSN: 1545-1003).

'We pledge that no one will be left behind' – this is what countries declared when adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They vowed to reach the furthest behind first. Members of minority groups are often disadvantaged and discriminated against; in short, they are often the furthest behind. But they are also poorly understood due to a lack of data. Leaving no one behind means ensuring that data are gathered, so that policy-makers know the size and nature of minority groups, such as gender minorities.

People get left behind when they lack the choices and opportunities to participate in and benefit from development progress. All persons living in extreme poverty can thus be considered 'left behind', as can those who endure disadvantages or deprivations that limit their choices and opportunities relative to others in society.

Language is part of the identity and is a symbol of unity for societies. Language has been put in the spotlight by the authorities and used as a vehicle to maintain their control and sovereignty over the laymen. Significantly, language policy and planning is affected by ideologies or systems of ideas masquerading through social, political, and religious ideas (Van Dijk, 2006). This system of ideas has been so strong that it has penetrated almost all human activities, consciously or subconsciously. Through language policy the countries decide how to deal with the language issues in their territories in order to have the national unity.

In committing to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States recognized that the dignity of the individual is fundamental and that the Agenda's Goals and targets should be met for all nations and people and for all segments of society. By considering the fact that all the people and societies deserve a life of happiness and dignity, obtaining information on people and knowing the exact statistics on the different aspects of their lives, helps the policy-makers and authorities to decide with open eyes and have the needed measures to assess the results of their decisions on the lives of the people. In this regard, it is crucial that all the people from different backgrounds and ethnicities feel comfortable with the statistical activities conducted in every country. Conveying this message to people with different socio-economic backgrounds that they are part of the motherland and deserve a life of dignity and promotion needs a language at the first step. Authorities should use a language that encourages people and implies this message to them that for better future for themselves and their children, it is necessary for every individual to provide the needed statistics. The language conveys this message to every individual that you are as important as other. This is the philosophy behind the strategy of 'No One Left Behind' adopted by the countries while approving the SDG as a way to promote the human and make the future a better place.

The field of language planning and policy is concerned with the policies both explicit and implicit that influence what languages are spoken when, how, and by whom, as well as the values and rights associated with those languages. It is important to develop language policies that ensure the access of minority populations to prestigious forms of national standard languages and literacy while supporting the intergenerational retention of minority languages, both indigenous and immigrant languages.

2. Methodology:

National population and Housing Census provide one of the most major approaches for getting a general picture on socio-economic characteristics of the I.R. Iran for planning, monitoring and

evaluating national and regional services and activities. These censuses allow detailed disaggregation of data by small geographic areas and small population groups. Nowadays, most countries implement the NPHC every 5 or 10 years. In the I.R. Iran, based on Article 4 of the Act of the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI), the census shall be implemented once every 10 years according to the Presidential decree. So far there have been 5 incidences of population census in Iran in the years 1956, 1966, 1976, 1986, and 1996; all taken in accordance with scientific methods. However, it is widely recognised that conducting a population and housing census is one of the most expensive and complex data collection operations, comprising of a series of many interrelated activities. National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) are increasingly facing a number of challenges in conducting population and housing censuses, ranging from falling participation.

For addressing 'leave-no one-behind' focus of the 2030 Agenda, the target 1.1 of the 'Regional strategy to improve population and social statistics in Asia and the Pacific' says that key population groups, and their needs and issues, are identified for target interventions in national and sub-national development policies and programmes, with such population groups and issues incorporated in relevant monitoring frameworks. As provided by this strategy, having access to population statistics is very crucial for inclusion of all people in social life.

People who were the data providers for the enumerators in the 2016 National Population and Housing census had some social consideration for providing data on themselves. The prevalent considerations were about keeping individual privacy and lack of collaboration in data provision. By considering the different aspects of population census, more than 20 working groups for more than two years helped to design the 2016 National Population and Housing Census in Iran. In the organizational structure of the 2016 National Population and Housing Census, there were two posts for public affairs: Person in charge of Public Relation and Advertisement in the province and the person in charge of public affairs and advertisement in the sub-provinces. The SCI prepared and distributed the guidance for conducting the publicity campaign for the 2016 Population Census. This guidebook presented the roadmap for publicity of this census. The main goal of the publicity campaign was to disseminate information on the importance and benefits of the census and encourage people to provide correct information. The ultimate goal of the SCI behind this implied strategy in the guidebook was to increase the statistical literacy, awareness and culture among respondents. In this regard, the people in charge of the publicity campaign in different provinces focused on environmental campaigns, informing the informed local people, and mass media and IT technology in order to reach as many audiences as possible. By considering the coverage of TV in all the provinces and existence of operating provincial branches of national TV in every province which broadcast programmes in dialects spoken in every province, the person in charge of public relation and advertisement in the province and the person in charge of public affairs and advertisement in the sub-provinces were actively dealing with the authorities in the provincial TV branches and offered the needed information on importance of census to them for making the advertisements on participation in the data collection phase of the census. By considering the fact that speaking the dialects used in every province can be used to ensure people and make them sympathize with you, using of the spoken dialect and local languages for producing the TV shows on census and contacting people were emphasized. Talking to students and publicity in the schools were also important for realization of the census goals. In this line, teachers gave lectures on census to the students in local languages.

The important note in all of the information dissemination and publicity campaigns across the I. R. Iran which was so implicit and natural to all of the people was the usage of language for convincing people and building trust among them. The SCI established this strategy that in conducting the publicity and advertisements for this census, the people in the provinces could use the spoken dialects and even the minority languages in order to convey the information to the respondents. Using the local dialects and even the minority language for making communication was so essential that the authorities in all the government agencies used this way for making contact with local people and conducting oral publication for the census. In other words, the spoken dialects, local language and minority language was used to motivate people to take part in the census.

Advertising today is expected to speak to people, 'in their own language'. The people in charge of public affairs in some provinces created groups on social messengers like Telegram and published the

news on census and census slogans. In these groups, many motivating and trust-building messages for public were published. With regard to the ease of access to the Web and penetration rate of cell phone among Iranian people, these groups were very useful for information dissemination on census. Some groups were created for journalists who helped to publish the up-to-date news for all the media at no time.

Some provinces recorded radio and TV programme on census and used the local language or dialects for the characters in the shows. This usage of language paved the way for obtaining the trust of people and finding a way to their mind to establish the role and importance of the census and statistics in their lives. People working in the Public Information booths in provinces used the spoken dialects and local language to encourage people to participate in the census and clarify the process of data collecting.

Local language and spoken dialects in every province contributed a lot to make people familiar with the population census in Iran in 2016 and facilitated the process of obtaining information from the households on their status. The SCI used the higher strategy of making public campaign at national level by using the official language of the country (Persian) but in the provincial levels the authorities were able to use the spoken language of people in order to make them familiar with the census and creating this sense among them that all of them are of equal importance in the statistical survey and the population census helps the policy-makers to have better understanding, exact idea and statistics to make the development plans.

3.   Result:

The internet-based Population and Housing Census in Iran was conducted from 24 September to 15 October 2016. It was the first e-census in the I.R. Iran and the results showed how successful the publicity campaign was to encourage people to participate in the census. Astonishingly, the ratio of E-census response (47.5 percent) proved that the publicity campaign had been successful across the country. Some countries had conducted the e-census with different participation rates at different years (table 1.) but the case in Iran was noticeable since its participation rate was achieved at the first try.

Country	Year of Census	Response (percent)
Japan	2015	37
Canada	2016	68
Canada	2011	54.8
Canada	2006	18.5
South Korea	2010	47.9
South Korea	2005	0.9
Singapore	2000	15
Norway	2001	9.9
Australia	2016	54
Australia	2011	33
Australia	2006	9
New Zealand	2013	35
New Zealand	2006	7
Spain	2006	30
Spain	2001	0.01

Table 1. Ratio of E-census response in selected countries

Valuable cooperation provided by the Iranian people as well as effective contribution of government and public agencies and organizations to the census surely played an essential role in successful implementation of this census. Moreover, this high turnout of households proved that the publicity campaign was fruitful and achieved its goal to make people comfortable with the statistical activity and remove their social considerations for not participating in the census. The language policy used by the

SCI and public relation officers in the provinces to use spoken dialects of people in different parts of the country in the publicity for encouraging people to participate in the statistical activities and making them comfortable with data collecting was in line with realization of the target 1.1 of the 'Regional strategy to improve population and social statistics in Asia and the Pacific' with the ultimate goal of 'leave-no one-behind'. Using the local languages and spoken dialects won the hearts and minds of people and entrusted them that they were important for the future of the country and their provided statistics would help to pave the way to provide better opportunities and better life for them and their next generation.

4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations:

There is no doubt that high rate of participation in the electronic phase of the 2016 National Population and Housing Census in the I. R. Iran was a result of trust of respondents to the census and the people who conducted it. One way of accomplishing this goal was the successful publicity strategy through which the households and people were encouraged to have active participation in this important survey at national level. Winning the hearts of people and having full participation of people in a statistical survey resulted from this reality that people had entrusted to the policy-makers and were assured that their statistics would lead to better opportunities for them and the upcoming generation. Conveying this knowledge to people that the statistical survey like National Population and Housing Census provide the policy-makers with data and statistics needed for national development, and establishing a mutual understanding between people and policy-makers need a shared mechanism among the members of a society. This common tool is meaningful usage of language. In other words, the multi-voicedness used in the publicity campaigns overcomes the fear and doubt of people to provide statistics on themselves.
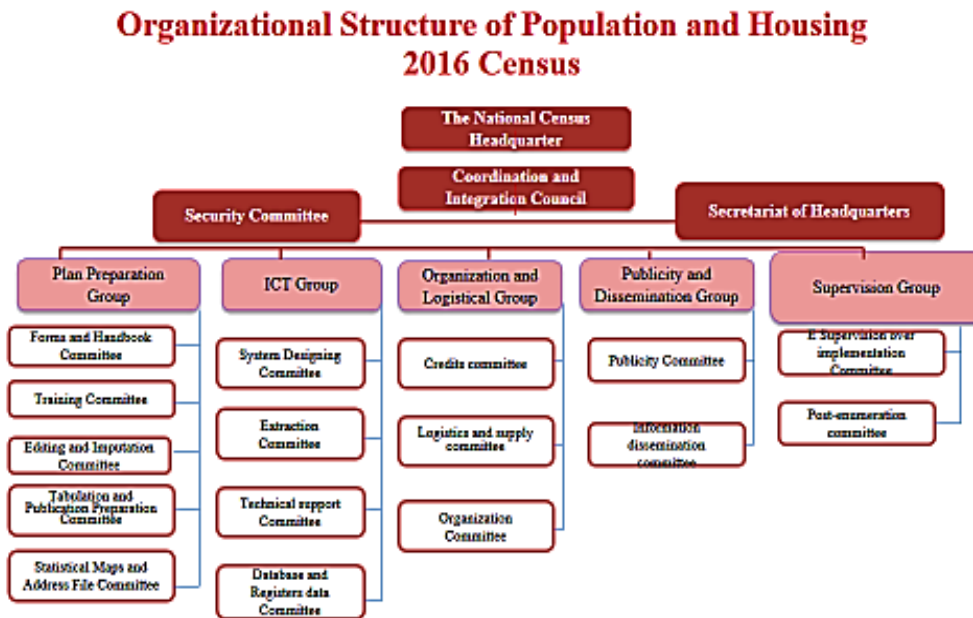
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Annex One: Organizational Structure of Population and Housing Census 2016, I. R. Iran

Organizational Structure of Population and Housing 2016 Census

Translation of some posters