

# **Agricultural Censuses, Advantages and Limitations**

## **A Case of Lesotho**

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### **Introduction**

1.0 The World Agricultural Censuses (WAC) have been taking place in many Countries of the world through which the structures of agriculture in the countries are established. Characteristically, these Censuses have total coverage and narrow scope particularly in the developed countries of the world. Lesotho conducted her first Agricultural census during the 50's and had since undertaken his regularly every ten years; the last in the series was the 1999/2000 census of Agriculture.

2.0 Most developing countries, however, had always not been able to full coverage of their agricultural censuses because of a variety of reasons, the key technical reason being the absence of frames of holders/holdings in these countries. Therefore, what regularly takes place are sample censuses which is an exercise in-between a full census and a sample survey. Essentially, it is a large-scale sample survey through which essential domains have estimates. The large sample surveys are designed to collect information on the structure, input and output of agriculture in the countries. Such data are essential for the full understanding of the performance of agriculture sector in the economy of the countries and in order to better plan its development.

### **Advantages**

3.0 Of course, carrying out a full census enables a total coverage of the country. Practically all the agricultural holdings are covered making it possible to have estimates of the measured variables at the lowest domain level. It is also possible through total coverage to compile the frame of holdings which is then used in subsequent years for sample surveys like in the Annual Production Survey (APS) to collect current agricultural statistics. Because the scope of the agricultural census is narrow or small, the exercise could be attached to a population census exercise and could bring down the overall cost for each of the exercises. The agricultural census also collects such basic statistics that helps to profile the agricultural structure in the entire country and these sets of information become useful in designing the Interrelated policies for government.

### **Limitations**

4.0 All the same, full coverage in an agricultural census has some drawbacks which would need being noted so as to decide on which strategy to adopt for producing agricultural statistics. Some of the limitations are:

(i) Because of the huge expense in collecting, processing and in analyzing the huge set of census data, lack of adequate finances could make a census impossible.

- (ii) Lack of technical and administrative resources is also a limitation. There are usually not a number of enough personnel in all areas of data collection and processing. So as desirable as a full coverage is, the lack of executive capacity is a serious limitation.
- (iii) For a very expansive operation as the agricultural census, effective supervision of the operation is often not achievable and this has implications for uncontrollable and huge non-sampling errors.
- (iv) It is only in surveys that a comprehensive scope could be covered as such large scope is not practicable in full census.
- (v) There will always be a quick release of results when the operation is not as large as for a full coverage census of Agriculture.

## **Conclusion**

5.0 It is for the reason of these limitations and the fact that developing countries and especially in Lesotho have many small holders and without any frame available for them that a mid-of-the-way approach has been adopted in a number of developing countries cases; a sample census is usually undertaken. This allows for a much larger scope and estimates at only regional/national levels. However, with the use of small - area statistical estimates technique this limitation may be overcome.

6.0 Lesotho conducts a sample census. The country has about 785 Primary Sampling Units (PSU's) in rural areas and 252 PSU's in Urban Areas. The agricultural census had been designed to cover 110 PSU's in the rural and 20 PSU's in the urban stratified multi-stage sampling is adopted for the selection of households with districts as domains and ecological zones as strata. The results coming out have been found useful for purposes of planning and policy designs even at the lowest administrative units.