

Best practices in user participation: recent experiences at the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics

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Abstract

To improve efficiency in meeting the demand for more and better official statistics, in consonance with global best practices, users consultation is current practice at the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). The strategy has been implemented at different levels for planning and monitoring censuses and surveys. Forums, meetings, workshops, video-conferences and online consultation are some of the instruments used to promote the participation of different categories of users such as students, individual researchers, academics, administrators, policymakers, government and so forth. The paper presents the most recent practices at the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in the 2010 Census as well as in ongoing projects such as the Integrated System of Household Surveys (SIPD) and the National System of Sample Surveys for Agricultural Establishments (SNPA).

Keywords: user consultation, official statistics, census, household survey, agricultural survey.

1. Introduction

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE - has the duty of keeping ongoing activities to promote the processes of production, dissemination and use of information related to statistics and geography, in order to improve the General Plan for Statistical and Geographical Information - PGIEG. To be successful, IBGE counts on the participation of various segment of the government and society. Aiming at activities which represent the fulfilment of this duty, IBGE has held, in 1968, the first National Conference of Statistics - CONFEST. The experience was successfully repeated in 1972, 1989, 1996 and 2006. The next Conference is planned to take place in 2014.

Users consultation has been current practice at the institute over the last years as strategy, to improve efficiency in meeting the demand for official statistics. The strategy has been implemented at different levels for planning and monitoring censuses and surveys. Forums, meetings, workshops, video-conferences and online consultation are some of the instruments used to promote the participation of different types of users such as students, individual researchers, academics, administrators, policymakers, government and so forth.

The paper presents the most recent practices at the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics on the 2010 Census as well as in current projects to develop the Integrated System of Household Surveys (SIPD) and to establish the National System of Sample Surveys for Agricultural Establishments (SNPA).

2. The 2010 Brazilian Census

In 2010, IBGE conducted the twelfth Census, which was a big picture in breadth and depth of the Brazilian population and its socio-economic characteristics and at the same time, the basis on which it shall settle the public policy planning for the next decade. The 2010 Census was a full-length portrait of the country with the population profile and the characteristics of the households, ie, it showed how many we are, our characteristics, where we are and how we live. The preparatory phase of the Census began in 2007. In addition to technical discussions, conducted by technicians of the directorates of Surveys, Geosciences and Information and Technology, a part of

administrative and dissemination areas; conduct pilot and cognitive tests; different levels of users participation were experienced over two years preparation.

Forums

Through national mobilization, IBGE received inputs from users of Census data to improve the content of the 2010 questionnaires. An extensive consultation was carried out through expert group meetings and the IBGE's portal. Users were convened to evaluate the 2000 Census questionnaires and the International Recommendations for Population and Housing Census and then address comments, suggestions and demands for the 2010 Census questionnaires. Over 2008, series of meetings were held with experts on disability, religion, indigenous; representative of the Brazilian ministries; and members of the Working Group on Linguistic Diversity. Besides, more than 9,000 consultation letters were sent to Census' users. Through the portal, users could submit their comments and suggestions for the 2010 Census. Representatives of Municipal, State and Federal Governments were the main contributors, but also representative of universities, research institutions, private sector, general public, among others, addressed their demands. General and demographic characteristics of the population was the domain with more participation, followed by dwelling characteristics, education and employment. The suggestions were evaluated by experts from IBGE, based on criteria such as level of relevance, feasibility, methodological suitability and cost. At the end of the consultation period a big meeting with the users took place in Rio de Janeiro, to present the results of the consultation as well the first version of the 2010 Census questionnaires, which were used in the first pilot test.

Census Advisory Committee

To achieve the 2010 Census IBGE counted also on the cooperation of representatives from various sectors of the society. The topics to be investigated in the Census, how to ask the questions, what are the measures and procedures to ensure the quality of the operation, have been also discussed with users through this channel. For this purpose, the 2010 Census Advisory Committee was established in April 2008. The Committee was composed of 12 members from different academic backgrounds and notorious knowledge in their areas of expertise, to assist IBGE in the preparation, conduction and analysis of the results of the 2010 Census. The scope of the job covered the different dimensions of such a broad operation, particularly with regard to defining the content of the questionnaires, the sampling strategy used in the data collection, the completion and evaluation of the pilot and cognitive tests and also the dress rehearsal, the definition of methods editing and imputation and plan for dissemination of results; monitoring of data collection, and finally, evaluation and analysis of the results. The Advisory Committee was chaired by the IBGE's directress of surveys and had as members teachers and researchers, whose background were in statistics, economics, demography, sociology, geography, planning and regional development, public policy, social inequality, education, and labour market.

Municipal Commissions of Geography and Statistics and State Census Commissions

As in previous censuses, IBGE installed committees to work as a communication channel between the Institute and representatives of the society. The Municipal Commissions of Geography and Statistics and the State Census Commissions were composed of different local segments to support and monitor the census operation, from the planning to dissemination phase. Commissions were formed by representatives of IBGE, executive, legislative and judicial branches, in addition to civic organizations. The implementation of such commissions aimed to foster joint action IBGE/society, and transparency into the work of geography and statistics. The Commissions functioned as a permanent forum where the census

activities had its follow up, so that problems arisen during the planning or data collection could be solved immediately to not affect the results. The main objective of obtaining users participation in the Census was effected successfully, creating conditions for its realization. Mobilization of the population and support for the installation of data collection stations, among other initiatives, counted on the support of local public and private institutions. The commissions played a key role to bring transparency to the work and facilitate census operation in several stages from preparation to dissemination. The expectation is that its members feel a direct interest in serving their communities and facilitate the journey of the IBGE for conducting the 2010 Census, quickly and efficiently and, above all, with reliable results. The commissions remain active even after conclusion of Census data collection, to increase the participation of local society in the production and dissemination of information produced by IBGE.

Let's Count!

Dissemination activities during Census planning and data collection, also created conditions for the users participation. One successful example was the project *Vamos Contar!* which was driven to primary and secondary schools, both public and private, throughout Brazil. Prepared by the IBGE, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, sought to publicize the importance of information obtained by the Census as instruments for the exercise of citizenship through the distribution of teaching materials, maps and dissemination material. The design guidelines contained proposals involving didactic and conceptual content, procedural and attitudinal, in harmony with the National Curriculum for teachers working with maps, with statistics, geographic and cartographic and so their students can better understand the realities of Brazil, as well as the various utilities Census results for the country. All material was designed so that activities could be implemented in accordance with the needs of the teacher and their pedagogical planning. As a result, teachers students and their families had their first contact with the Census and were encouraged to participate in the operation not only answering correctly the census questionnaires but also actively in their community.

3. Integrated System of Household Surveys (SIPD)

The increasing demand for socio-economic and demographic data, which mainly comes from various sectors of the government and researchers, has been a reality for the official institutes of statistics all over the world, comprising a huge challenge as the resources become more limited.

In this context, IBGE has been reformulating its work process, aiming to implement the Integrated System of Household Surveys (SIPD¹). In this new model, the planning, accomplishment, analysis of the results and dissemination of the main IBGE household surveys will be carried out in an associated way, optimizing the required resources and enabling important advances in the production of data about households, families and people.

The project is being developed focusing on three fundamental targets: 1) the design of a Master Sample; 2) the production of short term labour market indicators for all Brazilian states by the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD Contínua²), implemented in 2012; and 3) the estimation of household consumption based on a continuous process of Expenditure and Income Surveys (POF Contínua³), that will be implemented in the current decade.

In order to provide a regular and close relationship between IBGE and users of its household surveys data, a biannual SIPD seminar was created, giving the users the opportunity of being informed about the development of the project as well as to make

1 In Portuguese, Sistema Integrado de Pesquisas Domiciliares.

2 In Portuguese, Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua.

3 In Portuguese, Pesquisa de Orçamentos Familiares.

new requests and give suggestions.

The involvement of users in the SIPD development process has two substantial dimensions. The first one, and most obvious, is related to the demands and contributions that users can give in the definition of the main products and potentialities that SIPD will generate. Moreover, it is an IBGE commitment to provide broad access to information about conceptual definitions, methodologies and survey procedures as they are being established.

The second dimension is concerned with the analyses of the results produced by the surveys that are being implemented. This point is extremely important especially when the subject is data on employment, unemployment and incomes that will be obtained by the PNAD Contínua. For the years of 2012 and 2013, users will be able to compare PNAD Contínua results with the official results, produced by the current labour surveys, PNAD and PME⁴, and make inferences on the relationship between them. After this period, only PNAD Contínua will be carried out.

The first SIPD seminar was held in November, 2006. The event attendees were experts in data produced by household sample surveys, particularly short term labour surveys. Its aim was to discuss more carefully some issues on labour indicators raised in the Second National Meeting of Producers and Users of Social, Economic and Territorial Information, held three months before by IBGE. In this previous event, various aspects of the SIPD project were presented, including the sample design and the proposal for short term labour market indicators.

This first SIPD seminar was especially important for the definition of the Rotational Scheme of PNAD Contínua.

Posteriorly, ten seminars have been held. The methodology, the questionnaires and the first results of the PNAD Contínua pilot test, as well as all the other steps of the implementation of the survey, have been presented and broadly discussed with users. In the same way, the POF Contínua project have been presented and discussed in these seminars.

The experience has been so productive that there is no projected date for ending these series of seminars. The next one will happen in July of 2012, where some new subjects such as child labour and migration will be discussed. These topics will be incorporated as modules of PNAD Contínua.

Besides the SIPD seminar, the project has been presented in a huge number of events that were promoted by the government, universities and statistical organizations.

IBGE website contains updated information about the advances in the project. Several articles and all the material used during the SIPD seminars are available, in Portuguese

only, <http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/indicadores/sipd/default.shtm>.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that IBGE leads an inter-ministry committee to discuss the social statistics of the country, which aims to create an integrated vision of the various data bases: Censuses, sample surveys, administrative records. The proposition of topics for the SIPD is an important task of this committee.

4. National System of Sample Surveys for Agricultural Establishments (SNPA)

Agricultural and rural statistics were widely discussed by users and farmers in 2006 during the V National Conference of Statistics - CONFEST, which had 13 sessions dedicated to the subject. In fact, the topics under discussion were the start of a comprehensive program to reformulate the IBGE agricultural and rural survey system.

On the other hand, the increase in demand and turmoil in the agricultural commodity markets, supply crises and extremely volatile agricultural prices in recent years, and surveys on the quality of agricultural and rural statistics on a global scale

⁴ The national annual survey, called Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios and the monthly labor force survey, carried out in six Metropolitan Regions, called Pesquisa Mensal de Emprego.

led to the development of the “*Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics*” unanimously endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission⁵.

The Global Strategy includes the overrun of the agricultural survey program centred on production data and points to an increase in the thematic scope of agricultural and rural statistics covering economic, environmental and social aspects. This outlook makes reference to emerging topics and urgent policy objectives relating to agricultural and rural activities, such as agroenergy growth, climate change, water usage, the biodiversity crisis, food security, fighting against rural poverty, and rural development as a whole. It also recommends certain methodological and operating integration standards for agricultural and rural research.

In a condition shared by many countries, the Brazilian system of ongoing agricultural studies is based on subjective surveys. It basically produces production estimates not associated to estimating error or measuring accuracy. In fact, the proposed reformulation program is closely in line with the global strategy.

Apart from the current research review, its key element and major innovation is adopting the National System of Sample Surveys for Agricultural Establishments (SNPA), including setting up a Roll of Farmers and Agricultural Establishments; a master-sample of census track with agricultural and rural activity, in addition to two regular surveys using probability sampling of agricultural establishments: a conjunctural quarterly National Survey of Agricultural Production (PNPA), and the annual multi-purpose National Survey of Agricultural Activity (PNAG)⁶. The expected impacts in producing agricultural and rural statistics with the reformulations and structuring of the SNPA are very important⁷, requiring a good discussion scheme with farmers and users.

In the particular case of agricultural statistics IBGE first used a firmly consolidated institutional network. This is the GCEA System, based on the institution in 1971 of the Special Commission for Planning, Control and Assessment of Agricultural and Rural Statistics (CEPAGRO) at a national level, with representation of IBGE and the Ministry of Agriculture⁸. This included the organization of Agricultural Statistics Coordination Groups (GCEAs) in each Brazilian State, seconded by local and regional committees, in order to provide the technical support and cooperation required for collecting and disseminating information relating to the agricultural activity. This structure, however, was mainly based on attention to the conjunctural follow-up of agriculture by public administration agencies.

Implementing the SNPA in order to achieve the desired objectives, however, entailed adopting a widespread contact mechanism with users, which was correlated to the above description (item 2). It was also designed to report on the progress of the SNPA Project and gather contributions for its planning, as well as obtain more subsidies for reformulating current studies.

The first SNPA seminar was held in November 2010 and the second in October the following year. The early SNPA seminars were specifically dedicated to topics relating to content, concepts and scope of the investigations and relevance of the statistics produced and to be produced, with less emphasis given to methodological and operating aspects. Documents were disseminated therein with proposed reformulations of quarterly livestock farming surveys (Slaughter, Dairy, Eggs and Leather) and an Grain Stocks Survey, as well as the SNPA project.

The next SNPA seminar is scheduled for May 2012, now to be held every six months, when reports will be made on the first results and aspects of adopting the reformulations in the quarterly surveys underway, and information given on pre-tests relating to Grain Stocks Survey and to SNPA.

5 See <http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-capacity/ess-strategy/en/>

6 See [6].

7 See [5].

8 CEPAGRO is one of the oldest active Brazilian public administration commissions. And since its creation, it has held 461 monthly ordinary sessions.

Documents, reports, presentations and other material relating to the reformulation projects for IBGE agricultural and rural surveys, are provided in the IBGE portal <http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/indicadores/prpa/default.shtm>.

The SNPA seminars have been attracting a wide spectrum of users and producers of agricultural and rural statistics, including farmer associations, and very specialized technical agencies and main government bodies relating to the topic, which will provide rich discussion, key contacts and contributions.

Lastly, experience has shown a successful practice as a strategy of user participation in statistical planning.

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