



*An enumerator interviewing in a village.  
Malawi, September, 2018*



## MALAWI and ZAMBIA

# Digitalizing Population and Housing Censuses

**This on-going project is being implemented jointly by the National Statistical Office (NSO) of Malawi and the Zambia Statistics Agency (ZSA), with support from the UNFPA country offices in these two countries. Other international partners include Iceland, Norway, the UK Department for International Development, GIZ, US Census Bureau, Standard Bank and UN Agencies: UNDP and UN Women.**

## CONTEXT

The governments of Malawi and Zambia have embarked on an ambitious goal of digitalizing their population and housing censuses. Digitalization would make available population data at a faster pace with an unprecedented level of detail that could better serve the needs of policymakers and communities. As part of this effort, the NSO of Malawi made a convincing case that technology could provide the stimulus for a leap forward in developing its national statistical framework. A plan was put in place for this purpose. Zambia undertook a learning visit to Malawi to further understand the process of adopting this new census technology along its path to build a robust national statistical system with a comprehensive monitoring framework.

One of the largest obstacles to realizing this vision for censuses is the inadequacy of the infrastructure required to use digital data collection and analysis methods. The telecommunications network in Malawi is nascent and requires technological

fixes to store data collected in areas with weak or no mobile connectivity. Electricity is sporadic and hard to access areas present real logistical challenges. In Zambia, the adoption of new technologies for the various census processes also require enhancements and further investments in management, data capture, mapping, data processing and storage, which are integral elements critical to the success of this census exercise.

## PROGRAMME APPROACH

Although Zambia has used new technologies such as computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) in recent national surveys, the country has never used this technology for the census. Thus, the application of the latest information and communication technologies such as digital mapping and Geographic Information System (GIS) presented the country with an opportunity, not only to modernize its census process, but also to support improvements in the quality, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and timeliness of census data.

This challenge led Malawi and Zambia to explore novel ways to use digital tools that mutually benefit each other's census experiences. UNFPA country offices in both countries shared this journey by partnering with the respective national statistical offices to support their first digitalized population and housing censuses. In both countries, UNFPA was the main broker in the relationships between the national implementing partners, Malawi's National Statistical Office and Zambia Statistical Agency and other development partners. In Malawi, the project was funded through a basket fund managed by UNFPA that acted as the lead agency in developing a clear joint strategy supported with technical expertise to design and implement the project.

The project partnership strategy was designed to encourage deeper regional and global cooperation and to support a longer-term vision to strengthen the national statistics infrastructure in the region. Efforts also ensured that the strategy was aligned with wider national policy development goals in both countries. At the same time, it encouraged access to peer-based expertise in the continent and globally. Experts from the US Census Bureau provided additional technical expertise to the statistical office guiding them on the right technological options for Malawi. This led to an agreement between the Government of Malawi and partners to procure 20,000 electronic tablets and power banks to support the migration to the new approach.

This revolutionary move to modernize the census of Malawi enabled real time transfer of data to servers which replaced the process of intake and data entry of forms by data entry clerks, thus, reducing timelines, budgets and errors. The computer tablets improved field management, monitoring of workflows and the timely publication of census results, way sooner and more efficiently than in previous timelines. A further 17 thematic reports on key development issues will be released in 2020-21. The collaboration also demonstrated how to maximize utility of technological hardware by facilitating transfer of the computer tablets in Malawi to Zambia in advance of the latter's census to be conducted in 2020. Malawi also plans to extend this journey towards a digital census with other five countries including Botswana, Kenya, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

This technological innovation helped both countries on three levels. Firstly, the statistics office has demonstrated how a population and housing census can be delivered efficiently by taking the best ideas from the continent and the industry. Secondly, Malawi combined technological solutions with human ingenuity to innovatively overcome census challenges. Thirdly, Malawi, has maximized the utility of procured hardware by reaching out to and sharing its experience in digitalization and physical assets with Zambia. The computer tablets are now in Zambia where they will be an essential part of the 2020 census.



*Official handover of the computer tablets from Malawi to the Zambia Statistics Agency. 2019*

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