

November 2021

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AFRICAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

Twenty-seventh Session

15 – 18 November 2021, Virtual Host – Dakar, Senegal

AGENDA ITEM 3

GENERAL CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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POSITION

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I. PRESENTATION OF THE GCA

The General Census of Agriculture (GCA) is a large-scale statistical collection operation that is part of an integrated approach to the development of food and agriculture statistics, as recommended by the FAO in the 2020 World Programme for the Census of Agriculture.

1) **Different stages of the GCA**

The different steps listed are described very briefly:

- Establishment of the technical coordination body of the GCA composed of executives from the Ministries of Economy, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

These officials have been appointed by their supervisory Ministers, the national census office is composed of officials from various backgrounds (statistician, demographer, agronomist, zootechnician etc.).

- Design and validation of collection tools

The design was carried out with all the managers with support from the FAO International Consultant in Agricultural Statistics. The validation of collection tools was done at two levels: (i) at the first level, by the Central Bureau of the General Census of Agriculture (BCRGA); then (ii) at the second level, the Directors General of the administrations made their suggestions.

- Design and validation of computer programmes

The applications section designed the programmes with support from the FAO International Computer Consultant.

- Testing of questionnaire tools and computer programmes in a pilot census

This test made it possible to evaluate the behaviour of the application and also issues of coherence. The application was stabilised after two weeks.

- Recruitment of staff by level

Recruitments was done in each provincial department of agriculture. The best applicants were recruited after they had taken a written test.

- Staff training

Training was carried out at two levels: at the central level, trainers were trained and then assigned to the provinces to train the agents. These same provincial supervisors also recruited the agents in the provinces with the support of the provincial directors.

- Household enumeration

It was carried out in, in two phases, using CAPI and PAPI throughout the country because of the Covid 19 related measures and protocols. These two approaches made it possible to approach the collection with little difficulty. Where there were challenges with the tablets, paper was used.

- Data processing

Data collection has been done with Surveys Solution and processing with SPSS. Results are available, leaflets and brochures are being printed at FAO for final comments before printing and distribution.

2) Objectives

The objective of the General Census of Agriculture (GCA) is to collect structural and detailed data on agriculture, livestock, food security, fisheries and aquaculture, forestry, horticulture (market gardening) and fruit growing. To provide the Government and rural sector stakeholders with reliable, relevant, up-to-date and sufficiently disaggregated data to meet the needs of planning, monitoring/evaluation.

3) The categories of staff

The management staff of the GCA consisted of:

- 2 Head-Quarter, 9 Collection Supervisors, 26 Application Supervisors and 34 Assistant Supervisors.
- 720 enumerators, divided into teams of 6, were responsible for administering the questionnaires (enumeration form and basic module) and synchronising the data (by Bluetooth and Web).
- 120 Team leaders, whose roles were to assign farm households to interviewers, administer the community module, control and validate the quality of data from the field, synchronise data (Bluetooth and web) and ensure the smooth running of applications.

II. GCA AND THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

The COVID 19 pandemic is a major health crisis caused by an emerging infectious disease that emerged in late 2019 in mainland China.

This pandemic has affected the whole world, health systems have been put under severe strain with an increasing number of deaths, while economies of countries have been hard hit. Gabon, like other nations, has suffered the same impact.

II.1 Suspension of activities

The first phase of the General Census of Agriculture (GCA) started on 05 December 2019 and was temporarily interrupted on 5 April 2020 throughout the country due to the COVID19 pandemic, which everyone knows the negative impacts it has caused and continues to cause throughout the countries.

The GCA's teams showed tremendous courage by continuing to work a month after the first case was reported in Gabon. The first patient to die of the novel coronavirus, second in sub-Saharan Africa after Burkina Faso.

II.2 Measures taken

Gabon is adopting strict measures to combat the epidemic, including limiting international flights to one per week and per company, closing of schools and banning gatherings of more than 30 people. Movements of people from Greater Libreville to the interior of the country was also limited.

Following the government's relief measures and the importance of the GCA, the national GCA coordination has drawn up a timetable for the resumption of activities for the enumeration phase in areas that had already begun and those that were uncovered across the country.

This phase started on 20 August 2020 with the training of trainers. Field data collection started on 15 September and ended on 15 October 2020. As 70% of the data was collected, only 1/3 of the agents were retained to finish the collection.

The following activities have therefore been taken up and carried out:

Staff capacity building when activities resumed

- Refresher training for agents by category was organised by the General Coordination (Investigating agents, team leaders, supervisors).

Awareness-raising measures for staff

- The resumption of advertising spots to inform households that they can receive the interviewers;
- Communication and awareness-raising by a doctor. Indeed, the agents were informed about the disease, the modes of contamination and the barrier measures (how to wear a mask, how to wash one's hands, etc.) to avoid the spread of the virus;

Staff protection measures:

- All the agents involved were screened (PCR test) and issued with a certificate attesting to their status;
- The provision to each agent and to the drivers of a batch of 100 bibs and hydroalcoholic gel so that before starting an interview, the interviewer must provide the respondent with a bib and then wash his or her hands with hydroalcoholic gel while respecting the barrier measures, i.e., respecting the distance of one metre between two individuals;
- Limited number of passengers in the transport vehicle due to COVID 19 restrictions (3 per vehicle);

- A bottle of gel has been provided for each vehicle.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, we can say that today the staff of the GCA have incorporated the Covid-19 measures into their routine, reminding us that it is a permanent danger, because there are different variants of the virus. Hence compliance with all Covid-19 protocols, respecting social distancing during meetings, during field interviews remain the first precautions to take.