

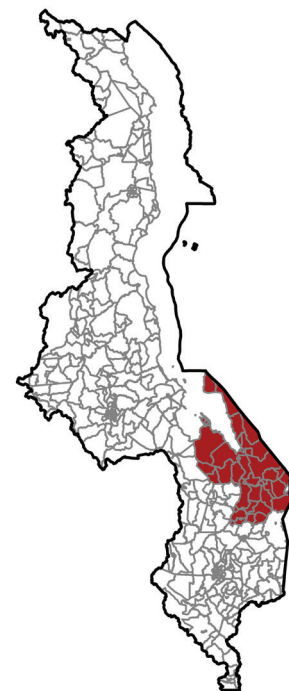
A newsletter from East View highlighting census data from around the world

THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES IN CONDUCTING CENSUSES

In a study published in *Nature Communications*, researchers from Aalto University in Finland show that the world's population might be severely undercounted. Based on the findings of this study, the official UN estimate of 8.2 billion might not represent the totality of the world population due to the lack of enumeration in rural areas. One of the authors of the study, Josias Lång-Ritter, says that data indicates that "rural populations have been underestimated by between 53% to 84% over the period studied." Although the accuracy of censuses has improved over the decades, a significant portion of the world's population is spread out in remote rural areas. This undercount has significant implications for disaster planning and allocation of resources.

Coupled with the logistical difficulty of reaching remote areas, the cost of producing accurate enumeration is an important reason why the world population is undercounted. According to a study published by the UN, "censuses are the largest, most elaborate and costliest data-collection activity that statistical offices undertake, and costs are rising. In many countries a census accounts for around 10-15 per cent of the budget of the statistical office over an entire decade." For the developing countries, the cost of a census is simply too high.

This is where international agencies like the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) step in to support developing nations in conducting censuses. For example, USAID has partnered with the US Census Bureau for almost 70 years to improve data collection in developing nations. Some of the recent USAID endeavors include partnering with the Malawian government to map affected populations using census data to assist in the country's response to Cyclone Freddy as well as implementing digital data collection for Lesotho's 2017 Census in collaboration with the local government. The latter collaboration produced vital data for administrative decisions on the location of schools and the number of vaccines needed for children in remote areas.



Planning, Organization and Costs

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Administration Adviser from the U.S. Agency for International Development; Messrs. Young and Porter, mentioned above; and, after his arrival in 1961, the United Nations population census adviser.

Meetings of the board, which during most of 1961, were held weekly, were chaired by the Director of Statistics. As implied in its name, the board's functions were advisory only; by the General Statistics Act the Director of Statistics was responsible for all decisions.

Left: Early mention of USAID in Jordan's *First Census of Population and Housing: 18 November, 1961: Volume IV: Methods Report*, p. 27. Global Census Archive. <https://gca.eastview.com/CENSUS-2565372B0.1.36>

Above Right: ADM 3/0 boundaries for Malawi, with Mangochi and Mangochi districts highlighted in red, from the Malawi 2018 Census GIS dataset.

Table 15. Private households by water tank suppliers and region, 2016

Water tank Supplier	Total		Regions				ROU		Savaii	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	6480	100	1046	100	1902	100	1635	100	1897	100
Purchased by household	2346	36.2	728	69.6	874	46	376	23	368	19.4
Red Cross	1071	16.5	41	3.9	302	15.9	363	22.2	365	19.2
Built by household	944	14.6	129	12.3	258	13.6	209	12.8	348	18.3
European Union	736	11.4	13	1.2	131	6.9	193	11.8	399	21
Government of Samoa	481	7.4	16	1.5	98	5.2	214	13.1	153	8.1
AusAid	176	2.7	8	0.8	63	3.3	70	4.3	35	1.8
USAid	149	2.3	8	0.8	18	0.9	32	2	91	4.8
NZAid	14	0.2	4	0.4	7	0.4	2	0.1	1	0.1

Special mention must be made of the institutions and individuals through whose untiring efforts this complex operation was successfully completed. Three special Committees, The Census Cabinet Committee (headed by the Prime Minister – then Minister of Finance), The Census Advisory Committee, and The Census Publicity Committee, which were responsible for general policy, co-ordination and publicity, gave in the execution of their duties inspiring leadership and encouragement.

Invaluable contribution in the form of human and material resources was provided by the United States Agency for International Development, whilst considerable help in mapping operations was received from the Geography Department of Fomah Bay College, University College of Sierra Leone. Mention must also be made of the 4,000 enumeration officers, the majority of them teachers, headteachers and civil servants, who combed the urban and rural areas, the swamps and forest zones of the territory in an attempt to include every person in the enumeration. Also, of the Government Printing Department which has successfully undertaken the printing of the census volumes, using for this major operation up to date offset printing equipment.

In addition to some commodity support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), AID also provided the supporting financial resources with which the U.S. Bureau of the Census recruited a number of advisory technicians for the project. The U.S. Census Bureau also performed for the project invaluable backstopping services both of a substantive and an administrative nature.

The contributions of the three committees established by the President's Executive Order No. XIII played a vital role. The Executive Committee, consisting of the President of Liberia as Chairman and his cabinet, represented the highest authority to ensure that the full resources of Government were mobilized and placed at the disposal of the Census. The Census Advisory Committee, composed of major government and non-government users of population data, advised the Census Commissioner on the content of the census questionnaire and related matters. The following agencies and institutions were represented on the committee: The Departments of Agriculture and Commerce, Education, Interior, Public Health, and Treasury; the University of Liberia; Cuttington College; Firestone Plantations Company; Liberia Mining Company; LUNGO; the commercial banks; the churches; USAID; and the United Nations and specialized agencies.

Top: Samoa's 2016 Census Brief No.4: Housing/Dwelling Details & Household Amenities and Capital Goods, p. 18. Global Census Archive. <https://gca.eastview.com/CENSUS-2450061BO.1.19>

Middle: 1963 Population Census of Sierra Leone: Volume 1: Number of Inhabitants, p. 3. Global Census Archive. <https://gca.eastview.com/CENSUS-2538696BO.1.3>

Bottom: 1962 Population Census of Liberia: Population Characteristics of Major Areas: Liberia and Major Political Divisions: Data on: Number of Inhabitants by Sex and Age, Social Characteristics, Economic Characteristics, p. vi. Global Census Archive. <https://gca.eastview.com/CENSUS-2542242BO.1.6>

The impact of USAID around the world is evident in the publications in the Global Census Archive (GCA), both in terms of the development of national statistics offices and the aid it provides for other infrastructure projects. In the GCA, the earliest instance of a mention of USAID is recorded in the "Methods Report" volume of the 1961 Jordan census.

Similarly, acknowledgements appear in the 1962 Liberia and 1963 Sierra Leone censuses, both of which were the first in those countries. Censuses also record the impact of USAID support in housing, agriculture, and other development projects. For example, a report from the 2016 Samoa census lists USAID among different agencies that supplied water tanks to urban and rural households. Instances like these offer a glimpse into the way in which international humanitarian and development agencies assist in improving living conditions across the world.

The GCA hosts over 8.5 million pages of historical and modern census publications from around the world. With tabular data and analytical reports from censuses, the publications enable quantitative and qualitative insights into the far-reaching implications of population data in the development of nations.

Further reading on international agencies and census data:

- Josias Láng-Ritter, Marko Keskinen & Henrikki Tenkanen, "Global Gridded Population Datasets Systematically Underrepresent Rural Population," Nature Communications volume 16, Article number: 2170 (2025): <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-025-56906-7>
- "Making Everyone Count: A Fireside Chat with USAID and the U.S. Census Bureau": <https://www.census.gov/library/video/2024/fireside-chat-usaid-census-bureau.html>
- Richard Leete, "Population and Housing Censuses: a Funding Crisis?": https://unstats.un.org/Unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/symposium2001/docs/symposium_04.htm#_Toc8789950
- USAID, "Population Data: The Underutilized Link Between Humanitarian and Development Assistance: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/population-data-underutilized-link-between-humanitarian-development/>



The East View **Global Census Archive®** (GCA) is an innovative program to collect official data and publications issued by the national census authorities of more than 200 countries, from the early 19th century to the present day, providing a key resource for scholars and analysts to find current and historical census data to support critical research into our changing world. GCA provides a single platform experience to explore the world's census publications: all countries and regions, the complete depth of published census materials, including original census publications in e-book form, as well as modern tabular data in Excel format and GIS files for advanced users.