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**SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN USERS AND PRODUCERS OF
OFFICIAL STATISTICS: THE CASE OF THE 1996 POPULATION CENSUS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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Abstract

Under its new management the Central Statistical Service (CSS) in South Africa has, like many other government institutions, been undergoing rapid and far-reaching transformation towards meeting the development needs of the new democratic order. The 1996 population census serves as a case study of the relationship between the CSS as prime producer of official statistics and the users of such statistics, in the context of fundamental social change.

The relationship ranges over three periods: firstly, the period of the apartheid era, concluding with a short phase of contestation, after the change of government but before the new CSS management was installed; secondly, the current period of transformation driven by the new management; and thirdly the envisaged period of consolidation. We demonstrate how, moving through these periods, the importance of substantive co-operation between a genuinely representative range of users and the producer of official statistics in defining common goals and output began to be recognised.

Events in the apartheid period demonstrate the dangers of the monopoly of official statistics sustained by the CSS of the time, when issues of social relevance, accessibility of products, and regard for disadvantaged respondents had the lowest priority. As change began to unfold, serious conflicts arose from the divergence between new user needs and CSS products, with negative implications for the system of official statistics. The transformation phase demonstrates the beginning of genuine co-operation between users and producers in re-orienting the new CSS towards relevant products from an accessible and user-friendly institution. The consolidation period presents the vision of the future towards which the new CSS is working.

I. Introduction

1. This paper provides a dynamic perspective on the interaction between users and producers of official statistics, taking as its main example the 1996 population census in South Africa, conducted by the Central Statistical Service (CSS). The census was planned and conducted during a time of fundamental transformation towards democracy and development in the entire South African society, following the 1994 election. There was a corresponding transformation in the CSS towards meeting the new national statistical needs, after some resistance was overcome. As a result, far-reaching improvements were introduced in how the 1996 census was conceived and executed. We shall show how this process was initially fostered, and subsequently sustained, by changes in the interaction between users of statistics and the prime producer, the CSS: from neglect through conflict to co-operation. We note further how this interaction is helping to improve the functioning of the overall agency as much as the census in question.

2. The sequence of changes in the interplay between users and producer can usefully be analysed by distinguishing three periods. Of course there are no clear-cut boundaries between these periods. Each merges into the next one, because the institutional changes that were involved took time to initiate and implement. Nevertheless, the periods help to clarify the processes involved.

3. In the wider society, the policy of apartheid had been presented as enabling the separate development of racially defined groups. In practice it was designed to promote and sustain the interests of the white minority, and in its final stage also the Indian and so-called "Coloured" minorities, against the claims of the African majority. Legally speaking, apartheid came to an end with South Africa's first non-racial national election in 1994, followed by the adoption of a new constitution. However, interim arrangements and institutions had previously prevailed in some sectors, as the outgoing white-minority government negotiated the main transitional arrangements with the incoming mass democratic movement.

4. The broad sequence of developments was rather similar regarding official statistics. During the *apartheid period* the CSS had basically been shaped to serve White South Africa, and especially metropolitan business interests. The

statistical system had been geographically fragmented in line with apartheid policy, and the CSS accorded lesser attention to the African majority of the population resident in the segregated "townships" or rural areas during the conduct of population censuses.

5. Immediately after the 1994 elections, the new government did not attend in much detail to the CSS. But it did expand the user-based advisory committee for the forthcoming census to include representatives from organisations that had participated in the democratic mobilisation. However, the committee was not able to access the necessary information from the incumbent officials of the CSS, who blocked any material changes. The resulting tensions between users and the CSS impressed upon the new government the need for more decisive changes.

6. The *transformation period* of the CSS thus only began in earnest in mid-1995, a year after the new government took office, with the appointment of a new head for the CSS (the first author). With the help of expert reports, that had been commissioned previously by the responsible Minister in the new government, he quickly uncovered that preparations for the impending census, some nine months ahead, were poorly planned, behind schedule, and apartheid-ridden.

7. The census would be especially important in providing the baseline for longer-term development monitoring by the new government. A new division for demography was accordingly separated off within the CSS, and a new chief director (the second author) appointed. Both officers had previously been active on the expanded advisory committee. They entirely reconceived the census, and – with the active support and involvement of the advisory committee – secured a six month delay and an enhanced budget. Census fieldwork ran for a month from 10 October 1996, and the results were processed for the ensuing eighteen months.

8. A prominent feature of the venture was the active involvement of a wide range of users in all phases of the census production process, via task groups of the expanded census advisory committee or the creation of other partnerships with civil society.

9. The reconstruction of the entire CSS had to be undertaken simultaneously, to meet the deadlines for public sector transformation. The roll-out of this reconstruction, including the conclusion of the 1996 census, constitute the *consolidation period* into which the CSS is moving. It will be seen that how the positive producer-user experiences of the census are being carried forward with active users' advisory committees and widespread consultations with clients.

II. The apartheid period

10. During this period state and social institutions were assertively

shaped to support the racially-discriminatory ideology of apartheid. At enormous expense all ministries were quadruplicated along racial lines, and geographical and institutional segregation was imposed in residential areas and in the provision, for example, of schools and hospitals. Later on the government created so-called "independent states" in rural areas, intended to correspond to the main geographical location of the various African language groups: Transkei for Xhosa-speakers, and so on. Some language groupings refused to accept "independence", and remained as rural "homelands" within "White" South Africa, such as KwaZulu. Millions of rural people were forcibly removed and relocated within these boundaries, and their movement to the cities of "White" south Africa was legally restricted.

11. The national statistical function was correspondingly balkanised, with little statistical offices created in each of the four "states" that accepted independence. Given the lack of skills and resources, the quality of their data production was poor from the outset. (The main exception was Bophuthatswana, where the homelands authority sustained a relatively benign multi-racial context. An effective statistical office was created by the second author, latterly with the assistance of the third. It ran successful and well-reported population censuses in 1985 and 1991; and challenged the CSS by its vision of an integrated statistical system and its application of modern technology and staff training.)

12. In assiduous conformity with the legal fiction of the "independent states", the CSS of the time excised their figures from its published tables. It saw its task as catering for the population of the remaining "White" South Africa. Yet, because of the "non-independent homelands" within its borders, this area in reality was very heterogeneous – indeed, the majority of its population was African. But they were defined as "temporary sojourners", and regarded as objects of measurement and administrative policy rather than as citizens or potential users. The main internal users of the CSS's economic and demographic statistics were the white-controlled business sector and other government departments, in a mutually beneficial symbiosis. Anti-apartheid agencies within the country and abroad treated CSS outputs as propaganda, and largely ignored them.

13. This picture of the apartheid-period CSS may seem lurid. But it is substantiated by evidence in three notable aspects: most importantly, how its last census in 1991 was conducted and validated; in the composition of the staff and management of the agency itself, and of the advisory body, the Statistics Council, that represented user interests; and also the conception of the products and classifications of the CSS of the time. We shall consider these aspects in turn, as well as the conflicts with new users which they occasioned after 1994. In the subsequent section, the transformation period will be displayed under four corresponding headings.

a) *The last apartheid population census*

14. Until the post-1994 dispensation, the last population census to be conducted in a territorially integral South Africa was in 1970. Thereafter, the hiving off of parts of the statistical function to the "independent

states" meant that censuses were actually compilations. The 1991 census was the most extreme example. It was a pastiche of small-area detail, of variable quality, from the four "states" and "White" South Africa. The latter embodied a further mix of methodologies. In the formal suburbs and commercial farming areas, predominantly occupied by Whites and the other two minority groups, mapping was available and classical demarcation had been done cumulatively over the years. The counts from these areas were generally accepted as reasonably accurate.

15. But in many urban "townships", informal settlements and peasant-farmed rural areas, where the residents were overwhelmingly African, mapping was not uniformly available or else various areas were deemed inaccessible due to political unrest. In some cases household interviews were conducted but without prior demarcation – teams of enumerators "swept" the area without detailed administrative controls. In others, dwellings were counted on aerial photographs, and populations then imputed using household densities obtained from sample surveys.

16. Most of these areas as well as the "independent states" were excluded from the post-enumeration survey (PES), and this was conducted only after a delay of several months. As a result, the overall population totals could not be reached by applying the PES to the various counts. Instead, the totals were *modelled* for the four race groups, by applying fertility and mortality estimates as far back as the 1970 in the case of the African group; and then the counts were adjusted upwards accordingly, in some areas and age-categories by as much as 70%.

17. The 1991 census also reflected its apartheid provenance in non-geographical ways. Although the African majority of South Africans had one of the nine Bantu languages as their mother tongue, the questionnaires were only printed in English and Afrikaans, the official languages of "White" South Africa. Moreover, although perhaps half of household informants were not functionally literate, the questionnaires were formatted for self-administration rather than interview, with difficult and legalistic instructions. The design was not tested at all. Nor were the enumerators trained for the widespread ad-hoc translation and interviewing that inevitably ensued.

18. The disdain for the needs of the suppliers and potential users of the census data was extended to the products. The fact that the totals were the outcome of a model rather than the counts was covered in a technical report, but never clarified to the public. Most of the output was in the form of bulky printed tables – there were no substantial narrative or graphical summaries in accessible format. In African areas the place-names used were often those known in Afrikaans or English to Whites, rather than the names used by the African residents themselves.

b) The segregated composition of the CSS and the Statistical Council

19. This methodological neglect of the needs of the African majority of the population during the 1991 census was the predictable culmination of the application of apartheid policy in the civil service, including the CSS. With the main exception of the menial occupations, the staff of the CSS was almost exclusively White, and also overwhelmingly Afrikaans-speaking. Blacks who sought a career in official statistics were expected to pursue it in the statistical offices of the "independent states" or the elsewhere in the administrations of other black "homelands". The CSS management echelon was entirely White and male, and with a single exception Afrikaans-speaking.

20. The Statistics Council is the statutory body constituted to advise the responsible Minister and the CSS on statistical matters, including the conduct of the population census and the performance of the CSS. All the ten members of the Council at that time were White, and all but one of them Afrikaans-speaking. All were male. Three were academic statisticians, but the rest represented various economic institutions, reflecting the overwhelming concern of statistics in the work programme of the old CSS. Not surprisingly, there was little impulse to direct the CSS towards social issues such as poverty or gender.

c) The methodological bias of CSS products

21. The deformation in what counted as relevant statistics extended to the non-census products of the old CSS, often at quite a subtle methodological level. Three examples will suffice. Data for the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was only collected from the largest fourteen metropolitan areas, and mostly by fax or telephone. This was apposite for a government serving the interests of White residents and businesspeople, and their black employees or customers, in areas with the infrastructure necessary to sustain such sampling procedures. But it comprehensively excluded that half of the population, overwhelmingly African, living in small towns or rural areas.

22. Similarly, the quarterly survey of public sector employment did seek the breakdown by race group of departments' employees. But this was of little use to the new government, seeking to track improvements in civil-service representativity brought about by affirmative action, since the seniority of employment was not covered. It was thus impossible to check whether the rising proportion of black employees was still confined to subordinate strata. And the gender of employees was omitted altogether.

23. Other key development variables were also ignored by methodological default. The census of agriculture was conducted by self-administered postal questionnaires, effectively confining it to predominantly white, commercial farmers. So some two million households in the subsistence-agriculture sector were therefore only picked up, with little detail about land use and other central agricultural matters, in the annual household survey.

d) The resulting tensions of transition between new users and the old CSS

24. Taken together, the preceding subsections display how the homogeneous composition and corresponding framework of reference of the previous CSS management and the contemporary Statistics Council ensured that the design and conduct of the population census as well as the social and economic surveys of the CSS manifested a selective focus on needs and interests defined by the mainly male leadership of so-called "White" South Africa.

25. The head of the apartheid-period CSS remained in office for more than a year after the new government took office in 1994, and the next level of managers continued for various longer periods. Similarly, the Statistics Council was only replaced in 1996 by a more broadly representative interim Council, pending revisions to the Statistics Act. Within the CSS, then, as in the wider context, the closing phase of the apartheid period was characterised by the partial or temporary survival of the ingredients – legislation, institutions, personnel, spatial arrangements – which had been instrumental to the apartheid system. These elements of apartheid uneasily co-existed with the powerful processes of change.

26. Various important external developments soon impinged upon the CSS in this uneasy period. After 1994 the "independent states" and other homelands were re-incorporated into what used to be "White" South Africa, and nine new provincial governments created, exercising appreciable devolved responsibilities for health, education and welfare services as well as associated financial autonomy. The incumbents of the various racially or linguistically segregated administrations were lumped together under new leadership, and enjoined to rationalise. Several hundred previously segregated local authorities and their administrations were similarly re-aligned.

27. The result was a new hierarchy of users with pressing demands for up-to-date statistics integrated and organised according to new spatial definitions, and with quite different criteria of relevance. Further demands were being expressed by the departments of the new, democratically-elected national government in dire need of information for radical changes in planning as well as ongoing administration. In addition, information was sought by a range of organisations and sectors who were previously ignored by, or themselves ignored, the CSS – such as trade unions, non-governmental agencies (NGOs), and lobbies such as youth, women, and the disabled.

28. Given the negotiated nature of the transformation in South Africa, intense tension was occasioned during this interim period in the interplay between the new users and the old CSS as prime producer of official statistics, especially in the preparation for the 1996 census. The tensions heightened inter- and intra-organisational conflict but also helped to advance the process of its resolution. We identify five of the most important areas of conflicts.

29. Firstly, tackling the various dimensions of inequality was a clear priority for new managers in the public sector. Yet the old CSS was not sensitive, and therefore not responsive, to issues of poverty or gender, or new concerns such as disability. The new government had to secure the analyses it needed by engaging NGOs or academics to rework the CSS material along these lines.

30. Secondly, there was the need – given the new provincial structures and powers – for meaningful decentralisation of the statistics function. But as far as the old CSS was concerned, that the statistics function was a national function somehow also implied that it could not be decentralised. It had previously only sustained a number of regional outposts for following up economic questionnaires and sporadically supervising the annual household survey. Some heated confrontations resulted, between provincial users of statistics and the CSS.

31. A third area of tensions concerned the accessibility of statistical products. The unadorned tabulation reports of the old CSS were basically user-hostile. The new users wanted simplified formats for easy reference, and interpretative reports to assist decision-makers. Furthermore, transparent methodology reports should also be compiled to enable more technical users to assess the reliability of the data provided.

32. A fourth area concerned the empowerment of CSS staff to enhance their skills in their specific areas of performance. The CSS needed to adopt a systematic programme of further education and training for all its staff, including but not confined to the new black recruits, perhaps by involving tertiary institutions in the design and implementation of programmes. The training which CSS was offering at the time was perceived as being inadequate as it concentrated on coaching by rote for very specific practices, and neglected staff outside the head office. Users wanted staff at all sites to be able to handle the new demands.

33. A fifth area of contention concerned the preparations for the impending 1996 population census. The responsible Minister had extended the advisory committee with appointees from some non-governmental organisations, university departments, and other organisations that were alert to the development priorities of the new government. However, they had difficulty in securing documents or precise answers from the incumbent CSS management about planning, budgeting, and progress with preparations for the census.

34. In sum, during 1994-5 the existing management of the CSS was generally intransigent on these growing pressures for the re-organisation of statistical provision. Instead it sought to prevent outsiders from knowing what was actually going on inside the CSS. The heightened contestation impacted on the CSS externally as well as internally, in several ways.

35. Its previous accommodation to the apartheid system was perceived in government as having eroded its legitimacy as a producer of objective official statistics. Its continuing resistance to meaningful change attracted

unfavourable comment from the new, overwhelmingly black top civil servants and political representatives in national and provincial arenas.

36. In particular, the old CSS's refusal to undertake the degree of decentralisation required by the new provincial stratum of government led some provincial authorities to warn, in desperation, of preparing to make their own arrangements, which would have led to costly duplication and difficulties of standardisation.

37. In addition, the CSS's steadfast refusal to analyse and report upon its own data resulted in loss of confidence regarding the consistency, timeliness and reliability of its products, and gave the impression that the organisation did not care for its users. The economic statistics were increasingly often treated with disbelief in the business media.

38. Internally, the obduracy of the CSS top managers sent a counter-productive message to subordinates, so that problems with planning, productivity and deadlines were not seriously diagnosed or tackled. In turn, these deficiencies further eroded the perceived legitimacy of the organisation, creating a vicious circle.

III. The transformation period

39. At the same time as the old CSS was receiving unfavourable prominence in the media and in policy arenas in early-1995, the responsible Minister was receiving reports from two international enquiries he had commissioned into the preparations for the 1996 census: one from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the other from a group of international official statisticians under the auspices of the UNFPA. They reported that planning, budget and progress were "comprehensively deficient" and that advice to the contrary from the CSS management was misleading. This confirmed the reports from his new appointees on the advisory group. Matters had come to crisis point. The Minister advertised the post of head of the agency and in due course made the appointment of the new head. The new head in turn accorded the population census its due weight by separating off a new component for demography, and recruited a new chief director to drive the population census. Thus, impelled initially by the need to conduct the census in line with the development interests of the respondents and the statistical needs of users of all population groups in the re-integrated South Africa, the transformation period of the CSS began.

a) Users and other stakeholders in South Africa's first "democratic" census

40. The new CSS management had to move very rapidly after mid-1995 to reconceive the entire framework for the impending census. A six-month postponement, to October 1996, was the most that could be achieved, because of the government's pressing need for a development-monitoring baseline as soon as possible. A fresh zero-base budget was compiled and secured, which

doubled the funds available (to a modest level of US\$80m, approx \$2 per capita). With only fifteen months to work in, the entire operation was effectively started from scratch. A team of skilled senior officers, representative by race and gender, was transferred into the new demography component. The overall approach to the census was "democratic": every citizen and community of the new South Africa was to be treated by the CSS's census process with equal respect and methodological attention. This had many implications. We shall concentrate on those that illustrate the dramatic changes that were implied in the producer-user relationship.

41. It was noted previously that preparatory demarcation had been largely neglected in the 1991 census outside the cities and towns and the commercial, predominantly white-owned, farming areas. The plan of the previous management for 1996 was to demarcate the remaining areas – black "townships", informal settlements and former rural "homelands" that included approximately half of the population – by an office-based approach of drawing enumerator-area boundaries on maps or aerial photographs. This would have neglected the self-definition of communities on the ground, prejudicing controlled enumeration. It could also have proved literally fatal in those areas still divided geographically by party-political conflict.

42. The new management undertook to apply a uniform ground-based methodology in all areas: extending the formal demarcation available from the previous census to the other half of the populace by classical fieldwork, organised out of regional census offices in each of the nine provincial capitals. The number of demarcators was doubled to conclude this in the limited time. The support of the respective provincial governments was secured, which was especially important to reassure traditional leaders in deep rural areas. After establishing the socio-spatial partitioning on the ground, the thousand trained demarcators defined enumerator areas of 100-200 households, and captured them on maps if available, or else aerial photographs, or else – in areas where neither was available – by descriptions with sketch maps or lists of head-of-households.

43. The detailed input of users into this emergency activity was secured from the outset. The extended census advisory committee, which had not been able to impinge upon the practices of the previous management, became an active and willing resource in the new circumstances. Several members participated in the independent monitoring process set up by the CSS, by which academics or other experts were encouraged, and funded, to visit anywhere and view anything during demarcation, and alert the CSS of problems and report to the advisory committee.

44. Using volunteers from the extended advisory committee, a task team was constituted of people from government departments, parastatals, university departments, and the market researcher sector. This group worked step-by-step with CSS officers in totally re-designing the census questionnaire, in line with sound international practice as well as the range of local user needs.

45. Since the census would be the first non-discriminatory investigation of the entire population, it was decided to apply a long questionnaire format to

all 10 millions households – including items on housing, education, language, and employment; access to various services and fuels; migration data; and fertility and mortality indicators. The entire task group developed the instrument through several stages. These included behind-the-glass observation in facilities provided by the private sector, and a large pilot conducted for the CSS by a parastatal, with de-briefing of interviewers. A university translated the questionnaire into all eleven official languages, and an NGO checked the idiom.

46. In this way, prospective users of the statistical data directly shared crucial responsibilities with the producer. This interaction was sustained in later stages. For instance, the monitoring teams were retained to review any aspect of the enumeration. Similarly, training of the enumerators was executed in partnership with tertiary institutions nationwide. They supplied the first level of instructors, who were trained by head office. These conducted the training, at the eighty-odd sub-provincial census offices, of the two-thousand enumerators; who in turn helped with the recruitment and training of the hundred-thousand chief enumerators and enumerators.

47. The contribution of a statistical agency is not only realised in direct relation to users, but also in indirect relationships with organisations of civil society such as schools and churches, that represent the citizens who ultimately benefit from the application of data in planning. For instance, in the publicity campaign an NGO was retained to design an explanatory comic. This was printed in 4 million copies across all eleven languages, and distributed by the demarcators to schools for pupils to read and also to explain at home. In addition, the five largest church groupings supplied the CSS with lists of their ministers. Several million copies of a descriptive brochure, in the appropriate languages for each area, were posted to the ministers for distribution to their congregations. In these ways we sought to engage the awareness and support of prospective beneficiaries of the data, even if they were not to be the informants or users.

48. The international community is also a user of South African statistics, and its help was enlisted throughout the process. Following their early-warning reports, the Australian Bureau of Statistics assisted with planning, logistics, and questionnaire design; and the UNFPA provided a long-term specialist in censuses in Africa. Stats Sweden consultants advised on demarcation, information systems, and the processing operation – which was boldly decentralised as a start-up project for the CSS's nine new provincial offices, indicating the new CSS's commitment to decentralisation.

b) The revised composition of the CSS and the Statistical Council

49. At the same time as tackling the census at breakneck speed, the CSS had to meet the imperatives of post-apartheid public sector rationalisation: notably the design of a new structure; incorporation of the "independent state" statistical offices; and selection from among previous staff of those adequate to a new performance- and development-orientation, thereby creating

vacancies to advance representativity. The CSS assertively applied the enabling regulations. Out of some seven hundred existing employees, approximately two hundred were not absorbed because the respective functions had ceased; and a further hundred did not meet the new performance requirements. Carefully monitored recruitment to the resulting vacancies allowed the CSS quickly to reach the public service goals of at least 50% black and 30% female officers. By the end of the rationalisation, the top management echelon – previously entirely white and male – consisted of thirteen new appointments or promotions, among whom four are female and six black.

50. To adequately represent the interests of the full national range of statistical users, the previously white and male Statistics Council was in equally dire need of reconstitution. Nominations were publicly sought, and appointments made by the Minister to an interim Council – i.e. pending a planned revision to the Statistics Act – in which representativity by race, region, sector and gender was a consideration alongside professional expertise. The result is that the Council also met the 50% and 30% representativity goals. It subsequently resolved to improve provincial coverage, and co-opted nine further professional representatives nominated by provincial governments.

51. The Council has the statutory responsibility of reviewing the census. A task group appraised the process leading to the preliminary 1996 results, and a larger group including several non-Council experts will assess the final estimates, especially the undercount adjustment and vital statistics. In addition, one or two members of Council with relevant specialisations provide a user perspective on any selection committee for CSS management echelon posts.

c) The role of users in the re-engineering of CSS products

52. The active involvement of external users in what were previously purely internal CSS decisions, as pioneered in the latest census, has been carried across to economic statistics. The user committees of the hundred-odd surveys have been extended to ensure representation of black, small-business, and country-wide interests to offset the previous white, corporate and metropolitan bias. All the collections are being re-engineered sector by sector; and as each questionnaire is re-cast, with inputs from the user committee, the testing includes behind-the-glass and on-site observations of how respondents cope with the formulations.

53. The previously metropolitan CPI has been extended to cover small towns. Face-to-face gathering of prices from rural areas beyond the reach of telephone and fax is envisaged, should funds become available. Additional measures such as core inflation and a moving quarterly average are now published, following requests from analysts. Unexpected variations, which were previously merely tabulated, are now identified and explained for the media.

54. In the labour sector the previous seventeen disparate collections have been replaced, following Australian advice, with three complementary economy-wide enterprise-based surveys of different frequency and a quarterly household

panel survey, the better to meet the international user needs codified in the Special Data Definition Standard of the International Monetary Fund. Detailed breakdowns by gender and race are sought annually from the private as well as the public sector to help two key users, the Department of Labour and the Public Service Administration, monitor the impact of equity measures..

55. As with the census, in the new democratic context the CSS wants its economic products to be sensitive to the interests of beneficiaries who may not directly be users. Thus, even though there had not yet been an expressed user-need, the CSS found Swedish donor funds to survey subsistence agriculture, in which some two million African households engage; as a complement to its surveys of mainly "white" commercial farming. Following overdue reforms in the Department of Agriculture, that Department will pay the CSS to extend this work – a case, one might say, of the producer helping users catch up with their needs.

d) The benefits of transforming the user-producer relationship

56. The active engagement of the new CSS with both South African and international users, regarding the census as well as its other undertakings, has helped resolve many of the conflicts described in section 2.4 that were evident at the end of the apartheid period.

57. The extended membership and involvement of the user committees, coupled with the more relevant and accessible economic and demographic reporting, have gradually achieved legitimacy for CSS products in the eyes of the media and the new public-service and political users. Of course controversy does not disappear: for example, politicians are less ready than businesspeople to accept that low employment-creation figures may be as valid as the contemporaneous low inflation figures. But this seems to be a burden of the statistical office in any democracy.

58. Secondly, the extensive user consultation with provincial governments during the establishment of the new provincial offices, and the provincial skills- and employment-creation by the new CSS during the census, appear to have damped the moves towards renegade statistical units that were threatened in reaction to the unhelpfulness of the previous management.

59. Thirdly, users such as government departments are appreciative of easier access to CSS, and its readiness to be frank about shared problems: for example, co-operation with the Financial and Fiscal Commission about managing the response of provinces to the painful impact of changed democratic estimates on their fiscal allocations.

60. Indeed, work of strategic importance is being won by the CSS as a result of its openness and the technical proficiency of the new management: such as "user-pays" surveys for Departments including Labour, Safety and Security, Transport, and Agriculture.

61. Finally, the new climate has also had a helpful impact on the organisational culture. As better management and use of technology have helped shorten turn-around times and increase reliability, winning some public appreciation for the improvements, so staff have been motivated to do even better. The hope is that the vicious circle identified earlier is gradually becoming a virtuous one.

IV. Consolidation phase

62. Fundamentally realigning and restaffing of the CSS, at the same time as hastily conducting a population census under radically new conditions, have imposed enormous strain on the staff, especially the senior managers. A recent Statistics Sweden evaluation remarked that the CSS must have transformed faster than any other statistical agency in the world. This was a wisely mixed compliment. It pointed the need for consolidation of the advances in order that they be sustainable. This is the prime focus of the 1998-9 period.

63. The extent and speed of the changes have posed substantial problems with which the CSS is now grappling, not always with complete success. Regarding the census, for example, the decentralising of processing to the nine provinces was a good idea as far as spreading employment and skills-creation in a developing nation. It also helped to establish the presence of the CSS in the new provincial capitals. But the human-resource management across nine sites was a nightmare. Also, quality control of the data-capture undoubtedly suffered somewhat. As a result, when the nine data-sets arrived to be integrated at head office, a lot of unexpected extra editing was required.

64. At the same time, the very rapid recruitment of an appreciable proportion of new staff into the new CSS structure, and the resulting cultural diversity, have meant that value-integration has become a stiff challenge for organisational development. In particular, uniform training across the provincial offices will be difficult and expensive. Finally, with limited budget the new demands placed upon the economic series are proving difficult to resolve. However, in these respects too a lively interaction with users has proved to be a resource.

65. With regard to the 1996 census, the focus of the user-producer liaison has shifted to the definition of products. In 1991 these were confined to book-length printed tables and a difficult, and not widely disseminated, methodological report of the modelling that replaced the count of the totals. The 1996 census is presenting its outputs across a range of media, less print than electronic: CD-ROM, floppy disks, and Internet files. A radical advance is in the foundation of geographic information systems (GIS) that will be provided for most major products. The census enumerator areas have been rapidly revamped in the field and digitised, with the help of subcontractors, at the behest of the independent electoral commission. It needs the GIS for the delimitation of voter districts. This user-funded enhancement will be made available to other users. To offset the fact that most products have to be sold for the first time to enhance CSS revenue, several products will be disseminated free to the public: an accessible narrative report for the first

time, a compact graphics-and-tables digest, and Internet files disaggregated to specified levels. The marketing strategy shaping the range of products and their pricing have been guided by international advice, and steered by a sub-committee of the users' census advisory committee.

66. The Statistics Council has been finalising a policy Green Paper for public discussion, that will occur mainly via the Internet, towards revising the Statistics Act. The Council hosted a large workshop of core users from a range of public and private institutions, with legal experts from the statistical agencies of Canada, Sweden and Australia. The new legislation will give the Council the independent "power to embarrass" any statistical producers, not only the CSS, and to commission reviews of statistical activities in any domains.

67. In the economic series, not only the products but also the work-processes, and the way in which they draw upon technology, are being re-engineered. In this regard the user-producer relationship has acquired an extra dimension. Officials in many of the newest local authorities, themselves users of the CSS's data on local government finances, are being trained by a set of donor-funded CSS officials to become better first-stage producers, i.e. in improving the information which they need to fill into the CSS schedules.

68. For the first time the CSS has installed a dedicated component to facilitate implementation of its mission through strategy formulation, activity- and financial-planning, goal-setting, and evaluation. This has in turn required the introduction of performance management systems for the staff, the installation of appropriate databases, and a multi-faceted organisation-wide training strategy, not only at head-office but for the many new appointees in the provinces.

69. This new component has driven innovations to increase the responsiveness of functions to *internal* users. For example, corporate services are now regulated at the policy level, following a Canadian idea, by committees which have joint chairpersons: senior internal users alongside the head of information services, of human resources, and of finance. Similarly, measures are being introduced to recognise the employees as users of management services as well as producers of their assigned outputs: via better internal communications, a staff questionnaire, and so on. And in half a dozen task teams, interdepartmental teams of junior and senior staff are formulating strategic projects for implementation through the management.

70. Finally, a new component called Research and Development (R&D) has both the demographic and economic professional components as its internal users, in a series of projects designed to enhance the legitimacy of the CSS by continuously improving the quality of its products: through emphasising data quality, evaluation programmes, and defined standards. R&D is also responsible for the increasing variety of narrative or thematic publications, digesting CSS data to make it more accessible and relevant to external users, notably the new policy makers in the three levels of government recognised by the new constitution.

V. Conclusion

71. The CSS in South Africa has advanced through a radical disjuncture of structure, function and management style, in a period of tumultuous social change in the wider society. Moving through the apartheid, transformation, and consolidation periods of this process, this paper has traced how the user-producer relationship – primarily but not exclusively in regard to the population census – has altered: from being selective and neglected, through having to be a vehicle of opposition to an outdated and recalcitrant management, to co-participation by external and internal users in the shaping of some of the new CSS's most central enterprises and products. It has been an arduous but worthwhile lesson, that users must become an integral resource to a national statistical office in achieving the delivery of the timely, relevant and accessible data products to which they are entitled.

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