

1. Introduction

The Republic of Maldives consists of 1,192 coral islands which form a chain of 820 km in length and 130 km in width, set in a territorial area of 859,000 sq. km. of the Indian Ocean. The total land area of the Maldives is approximately 300 square kilometers. Sri Lanka and India are the country's closest neighbors, lying 750 km and 600km north and north-east of Maldives, respectively. The islands of the Maldives are formed into 26 natural atolls, which for purposes of administration, are grouped into 20 administrative regions. The 26 natural atolls of the Maldives have been classified into 20 groups, each of which is referred to as an "administrative atoll".

Most of the islands are quite small and low-lying, with an average elevation of 1.6 m above mean sea-level. The islands are surrounded by shallow, crystal-clear lagoons enclosed by coral reefs. Out of the 1192 islands, 193 are inhabited and 91 islands have been developed as tourist resorts.

The Maldives has a tropical climate. With two monsoons in the year, it is warm and humid throughout. Daily temperatures vary little. The annual mean temperature is 28.3°C with temperatures ranging from 25.1°C to 31.5°C. The average relative humidity ranges from 78% to 85%.

Maldivian society is very consistent, with one language, one culture and one religion. The official language is Dhivehi, which is unique to the Maldives. However, English is spoken by a majority of the people, and is also widely used in business and commerce. The population of the Maldives, according to the national census of 2006 is 298,968 at the time of census. The population is spread over 193 inhabited islands. The most populous of the inhabited islands and the centre of commerce is the capital, Male'. The rest of the islands are largely uninhabited, except for 88 islands which have been developed exclusively as luxury resorts.

The people are generally enterprising and very hospitable. Approximately 71% of the population is under 35 years of age, and the national literacy rate currently stands at a very impressive 94%, and is the highest in the region.

2. Modern type censuses

A population census was taken for the first time in the year 1911. This was followed by decennial censuses in 1921 and 1931. Decennial census taking is carried most of the countries of the world till today. The practice was interrupted during World War II and was resumed again in 1946. For reasons not easily ascertainable, the next census was held in 1953, followed by another in 1957. Thereafter annual censuses were taken until 1972 and then in 1974, followed by the 1977 census. The Ministry of Home Affairs was responsible for census operation throughout.

For the first three decennial censuses, the office of the Superintendent of Census of Sri Lanka prepared the questionnaires, which were translated into Dhivehi in the office of the Maldivian Government Representative in Colombo, and forwarded to the Maldives for canvassing. In the 1911 census, the filled questionnaires were sent back to Colombo for tabulation of data, while in the next two censuses only abstracts of necessary information were sent, which was tabulated by the Maldivian Government Representative in Colombo. From 1946 onwards, the census data were tabulated in the Maldives itself.

In the censuses during the period 1969-74, particulars of individual members of a family were collected in separate rows of a household schedule. Information was collected on sex, age, literacy, education, marital status, occupation and activity status.

The enumeration in the outer islands was done by the island chiefs, and in Male' by selected secretaries and clerks of the Government departments. The island chiefs prepared tabulations of data for each island and the atoll chiefs did tabulations for the atolls. Compilation of data at national level was done in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Male'.

In all the past censuses, only the Maldivian citizens were enumerated on de jure basis and no information was collected on de facto resident at census time.

The first modern type census was conducted in 1977, with financial and technical assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which laid the foundation for a new era of census taking in the country. The enormity of the cost involved, and the experience of the 1977 census, as well as the rapid change in population characteristics led to the decision by the government that censuses at a regular interval of five years would be appropriate in the Maldives. The new quinquennial series began in 1985. Next census was in 1990, 1995 and then in 2000. However, the 2005 census was delayed to 2006 due to the Asian Tsunami in December 2004.

3. Census administration in 2006

3.1 Coverage & Data collection

The most important aspects of the coverage and data collected in the Population and Housing Census 2006 are:

- As in all past censuses, all Maldivian citizens were enumerated in the Population and Housing Census of Maldives 2006 living in the country as well as abroad.
- Foreign nationals who were in the country with work permit were counted in the listing operation but their individual information was not collected. Tourists on tourist visa were not counted in the census.
- Information were collected in the census regarding the types of materials used for the construction of walls and roofs of all houses in the country regardless if occupied or unoccupied, either by Maldivian or foreigners.
- Data were collected on the available source of water, latrine and electricity facilities in the houses only in respect of the living quarters that were occupied.
- As in the past four censuses, the enumeration of people in the census 2006 was carried out on de facto basis, i.e. where they were currently residing. Information was also collected of the Maldivians living abroad. Maldivians living abroad at the time of census for various reasons were collected at the place where they were residing before leaving the country.
- In addition to the general information on social and economic characteristics of the enumerated population, attempts were also made in the census 2006 to collect data on migration, education, economic activities, nuptiality, and data on the past and current fertility.

3.2 Organization

The President appointed an advisory committee to oversee and guide the Ministry in conducting the Population and Housing Census. The Minister of Planning and National Development was the Chairperson of the advisory committee.

The Statistics Section of Ministry of Planning and National Development was responsible for the census 2006. The technical, administrative and managerial tasks are shouldered by the Director of the Census and the Technical Committee comprising staff from the different ministries and departments of the government. Around 3200 enumerators, supervisors and officials were engaged in the data collection phase of the census 2006.

This was the first time that Maldives has given a strong emphasis to engendering the census 2006. Separate workshop were conducted to aware the enumerators, supervisors and all the officials who were involved in census operations. Different training sessions were conducted for the master trainers, publicity of the census campaign; posters were prepared and distributed to all the inhabited islands on engendering the census.

Training of enumerators and supervisors in atolls were conducted in three rounds for a period of seven days in each.

Coordinators were sent to each atoll during the census period. The coordinators role is to over sea the whole census operation within the atolls during the census period.

Data processing activities were handled by a team of twelve staff of from the Statistics Section and additional 20 persons recruited on temporary basis for the special operations, such as editing, coding and data entry.

United Nations Population Fund provided technical assistance of a consultant from country Support Team based in Kathmandu. The consultant's advice and guidance were received in finalizing the census data.

3.3 Island maps and household list

Island maps were prepared for the census 2006. All the inhabited and industrial island maps were collected from the island offices. Most of the maps were redrawn according to the census blocks and used for the fieldwork during the enumeration period. Male' map was updated from Male' Municipality and block maps and supervisor maps were prepared for the census 2006. These maps demarcated the roads and house compounds. The inhabited area of each island was divided into a number of clearly demarcated census blocks. Each block containing a certain number of houses was assigned to each team. Census blocks varied from a population of 250 to 380.

The enumerators carried out the housing census and recorded information in the questionnaire called the "house list". The listing of houses was done in an orderly manner commencing with the census house situated in the northeastern corner of each census block, and visiting all houses in the block by the shortest systematic route. The structures were identified by continuous serial number given to them in the same order as in the route followed by the enumerator. These numbers were different from the registration numbers already given by the local administration to the houses and affixed on their entrances. The serial numbers given for the census enumeration were used only for the purposes of census fieldwork and its control.

3.4 Enumeration of Population

During the enumeration of population and housing census of Maldives 2006, each enumerator visited every household in the assigned census block. Census enumeration team consists of two person, each team was assigned around 50-60 households to complete within the census period. By interviewing the head of the household or responsible member of the household, data were collected regarding each person in the household within the census reference period.

The enumeration of population was completed in 8 days, from 21-28 March 2006.

A slip of enumerations was provided to the travelers from island to islands or for island to other countries in order to avoid duplication. Another slip was given to people who work in the National Security Services and in the industrial islands where they have 2 usual places of residence. This was another measure to avoid duplication.

The supervision of the field work in Male' was carried out by 61 supervisors and 6 senior officials of the Statistics Section of the Ministry. The results proved to be quite satisfactory. In the atolls, the coordinators visited most of the islands in their respective atolls to supervise the fieldwork of the enumerators. The coordinators in the atolls collected the population figures for each island. These population figures were sent by fax to census center in Male', where daily progress checks were monitored.

3.5 Preliminary Figures

On the receipt of the population figures from Male' and all atolls, the Ministry of Planning and National Development released preliminary census figures, by sex for the whole country, Male' and each atoll on 6 April 2006. Minister of Planning and National Development inaugurated preliminary results of the census 2006. According to the preliminary estimates, the population was 294,842 of which 151,769 were males and 147,073 females. The population growth rate was 1.7 percent per annum between the intercensal period 2000 to 2006. Male' had a population of 104,403 of which 52,963 were males and 51,440 were females. Atolls had a population of 194,439 of which 98,806 were males and 95,633 were females.

3.6 Data Processing

It took four months to complete editing, coding and scanning the census data. A total of 20 computers were used for data entry and its verification. Intelligent Character Recognition (ICR-Smart Form) is a system to capture Digital information from the scanned images. ICR is one of the latest and advanced technologies in the field of data capturing. Advantage of ICR system is speed and accuracy using ICR the speed can be tremendously increased to 3-10 times faster than a normal data entry process.

The data entry system was set up by the assigned staff of the Statistics Section, coding and editing was done simultaneously. Consistency checks of the recorded information were made during the coding operation. If there were any mistakes or errors in the forms, the information was edited according to the given procedures. If there was a major error, first the forms were checked and corrections were made after discussing with the technical and subject matter persons. The data editing process also involved correcting the data. This required checking the raw data and removal of the errors. For the data editing, a program was developed so that it was possible to impute correction automatically. Validation procedures were built into the system and permit to edit the data.

3.7 Final Result of the Census 2006

The Minister of Planning and National Development Honorable Hamdun Hameed released the final result of the Population and Housing Census of Maldives 2006 on 28 January 2007.

The population was 298,968 (151,459 males and 147,509 females). The population of Male' (Capital) was 103,693 (51,992 males and 51,701 females). The atoll population was 195,275 (99,467 males and 95,808 females).

The result of the population and housing census has been published on CD-ROM and on the Internet in addition to the book. This publication contains 55 tables of which 36 tables are on population and 18 tables are on housing.