Enhancing the Use of Population Data for Development Planning
Lessons Learned from 2 Districts in Indonesia
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A. Background

In 2009, the government of Indonesia issued Law No. 52 regarding ‘Population and Family Development’ which stipulates that population should become the center of all development policies and programs. This law also stipulates that, in line with the decentralization law enacted in 2001, provincial and district governments have the authority to develop population policies in their respective areas, but within the frameworks of sustainable development and population-centred development. Based on these frameworks, local governments are expected to have the capabilities of integrating population factors into development planning; designing evidence-based population policies and programs; and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of such policies and programs. However, perceptions regarding the concept of population-centred development and the importance of population data for development planning differ among district governments. Efforts are needed to strengthen the capacity of district governments in the above issues.

B. Objective

The aim of this paper is to identify the use of population data in the process of planning and policy-making at district level. This paper also discusses issues and challenges from the perspectives of both data providers and policymakers.

C. Methodology

This study uses qualitative approach. Data were collected in 2012 using in-depth interviews with government agencies officers and parliament members. Two districts were selected as the study areas, namely Wonogiri in Central Java and East Kutai in East Kalimantan. The 2010 Population Census revealed that Wonogiri’s population growth rate was the lowest in Indonesia, while East Kutai was among the highest.

D. The National Development Planning System

The National Development Planning System adopts “performance-based” approach which focuses on outcomes and impacts. This implies that district governments should have the capacities to formulate plans with clear goals and translating the goals into measurable objectives and targets. This system emphasizes the importance of data in formulating goals and objectives. The use of accurate and reliable data for development planning at all administrative levels has also been stressed in law regarding regional autonomy.

The Indonesian government has developed systems for obtaining population data through censuses, demographic and thematic surveys, as well as vital registrations. Accordingly, district governments have been collecting population data from various sources. In spite of
this, the use of data is not yet optimal and efforts are needed for the data to be effectively used in the process of planning and policy-making.

E. Results and Discussions

The study areas have translated laws related to development planning and the use of data for planning into district regulations, however there are barriers in implementing these regulations. This study identifies several issues and challenges in the utilization of population data for planning, i.e.:

1) Dissemination and accessibility.

   The two study areas publish census and vital registration reports annually, but some of the informants were not aware of data that are available in those reports or experienced difficulties in accessing the data. This was partly due to the absence of effective data dissemination system. A great deal of data that has been collected is not easily accessed. For instance, only summary report and some basic tables of census data are available through internet, printed completed report must be obtained/purchased at district statistics office. Limited access to data hinder the process of analysis which will have impacts on the policies and plans.

2) Data quality and reliability.

   Districts of the study areas have a couple sets of data with different values for the same parameters. In the two districts, the number of population from vital registration is higher than that of population census. This is due to data collection errors, where reports on death and mobility are not as good as birth reports. Since population size is a key parameter for development planning as well as for local political system, the differences stir debates among policymakers. Other issues regarding data quality and reliability include the length of time between data collection and report dissemination, data inconsistency and irregular updating.

3) Policymakers’ commitment and capacity to use population data in planning and policy-making.

   Levels of commitment and capacity to use population data differ among policymakers. Differences in concepts, definitions and collection methods hinder the understanding of population data. Another barrier is that census or survey results are not always in user-friendly formats. These influence the use of population data. Lack of communication between data producers and data users also impede the understanding of population data. As an effort to improve dialogue among all related parties, the two districts established “Data and Information Working Group” chaired by the District Planning Board. As their first agenda, the working group in both districts have hold a meeting to identify and discuss steps to increase the use of population data in planning and policy-making.

F. Recommendations

The case studies highlight that efforts to enhance the use of population data for development planning should include:

1) Increase policymakers’ capacity and commitment to use population data in planning process. Capacity building can be carried out in collaboration with Population Study Center at local universities;
2) Improving data quality and reliability;
3) Strengthening dialogue between data providers and policymakers to enhance understanding of each other’s needs and interests.
4) Developing effective systems of data dissemination and access provision to policymakers. Key data should be published regularly through channels that are accessible by policymakers and should be presented in user-friendly formats.