

Mpala, Ke Botlhokwa



## Statement by UNFPA Head of Office

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### On the occasion of the 2022 Population and Housing Census Dissemination Conference

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## Salutations\*

Distinguished guests, good morning.

It gives me pleasure to be here with you this morning on the occasion of the 2022 Population and Housing Census results Dissemination Conference. When the Government of Botswana commissioned the first fully digitized census, one of the key selling points was the prospect of reducing lead times to the availability of results. Indeed, the first preliminary report was released about three weeks following the end of the enumeration phase. Congratulations to Statistics Botswana and the Government of Botswana, for this was no easy feat.

Colleagues and distinguished guests, as the United Nations Population Fund, also known as UNFPA, one of our core mandates is to strengthen national capacity to ensure high-quality population censuses that meet international standards. In the context of the United Nations Secretary General emphasis on the importance of achieving the SDGs, particularly Goal 17 (Data for Sustainable Development). As the UN system in Botswana and under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator we have supported the first Digitised Census for generation of accurate and relevant data for sustainable development.

It is notable that the 2020 round of censuses, which runs from 2015 to 2024, was conducted in the context of new commitments, notably the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs aspires to identify and redress inequalities between and within countries across a wide range of development indicators. The SDGs agenda has also placed the highest priority on ensuring that “no one is left behind”, calling on national statistical systems to disaggregate national indicators and monitor inequalities as a matter of human rights. It is worth noting that the census plays a key element in national data ecosystems and is actually a source of population denominators for about 96 of the SDG indicators.

Esteemed participants, at the start of 2020, when preparations for the census were in full swing, none of us would have imagined or estimated the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic would have on countries. This impact was felt by many national statistics offices, which caused many governments to postpone or delay their population census, as a precaution to mitigate the risk of infection during census activities. Notwithstanding, it is indeed pleasing to note that Statistics Botswana demonstrated resilience, and is one of the seventy-four (74) countries that implemented the census during the COVID-19 pandemic. This attests to the value that the Government of Botswana places on the generation of evidence and the use of empirical information for decision and policy making.

While we have waited in anticipation for the dissemination of the census results, I am encouraged to know that Statistics Botswana, together with partners, convened to identify areas for further refinement as well as identify best practices for future scale up. I know this because, as UNFPA, we supported and participated in a series of reflective dialogues that brought together over 265 personnel who were directly involved in the planning and coordination of the many stages of the census. Noting that errors can happen at all phases of the census operation. This platform gave us an opportunity to have honest conversations and deliberations on what went well, what did not go so well, and why. And this was vital not only because it had a direct correlation to the quality of the census data being disseminated here today, but most importantly, it will allow us to prepare better for the next round of censuses.

Esteemed participants, reality is there are important data needs brought about by various development agendas, including the National Development Plan, Africa Union 2063, and SDG Agenda 2030, among others. These are quite high and can never be met through the census alone. Hence, there is a need for strategic investments for Botswana to remain at the forefront of population data dynamics. For this, I am pleased to note Statistics Botswana and indeed the Government being at the forefront of initiatives like the Power of Data, with Botswana being one of the three countries to launch the initiative globally. And with the continued support of UNFPA, UNDP, the World Bank and UNICEF Botswana will be supported to focus on harnessing the potential of data to drive economic growth, improve governance and enhance citizens' well - being. Other strategic investments for Botswana include:

**a) Strengthening of information management systems across sectors.** At this very moment, somewhere in this country, administrative data is being collected across different sectors in a system that is most probably paper-based. This data often goes underutilized, and often the highest level of data processing attained is data collation. It is recommended that Statistics Botswana consider making strategic investments in the National Statistics System (NSS) to augment the capacities of various sectors and harness the power of administrative data.

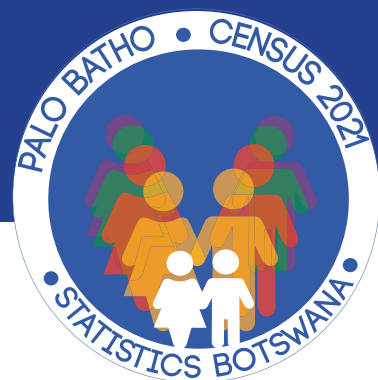
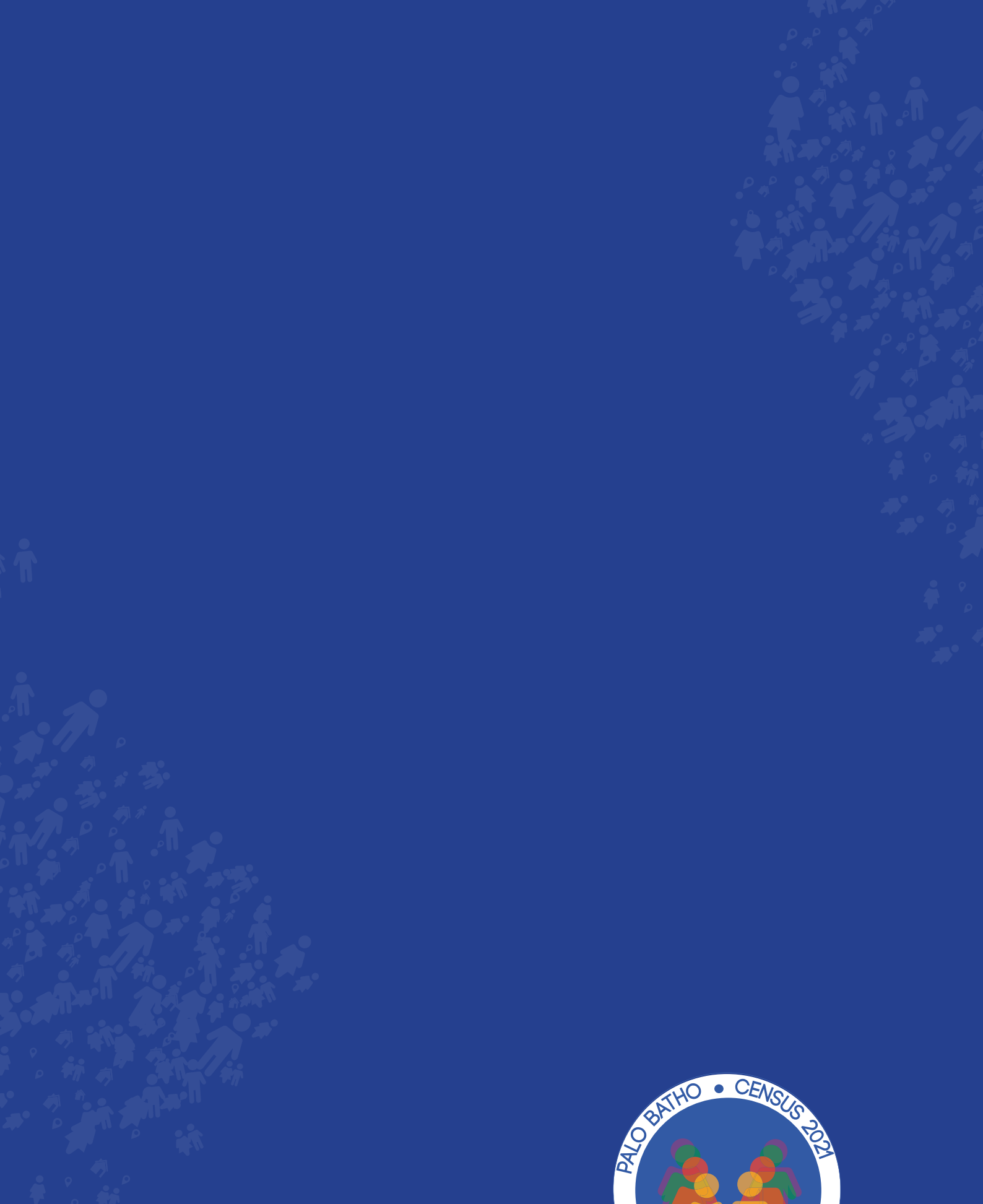
**b) Big data.** I know I am speaking to the converted when I say that advances in computing and data science now make it possible for societies to process and analyze 'big data' in real time. And new insights gained from such analytics have a place in complementing official statistics and survey data, producing high-quality information that is more detailed, timely, and relevant.

Distinguished guests and colleagues, I wish to speak a little about data for tracking sexual and reproductive health and rights in Botswana. We know that the world has surpassed the halfway mark in the implementation of the SDG agenda, yet only eight of the 17 SRH SDG indicators have baselines established. Traditionally, these data would have come from the Demographic and Health Survey. As UNFPA, we acknowledge that a demographic survey was completed in 2017. But we also note that some of the key components of a demographic health survey were not included in the 2017 survey, thus limiting the opportunity to provide the latest data on SRHR and other SDG indicators. And for this fact, we wish to implore the Government of Botswana to consider integrating health modules into upcoming surveys, such as the Quarterly Continuous Multi-Topic Survey.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate UNFPAs commitment to work with the Government of Botswana, development partners, private sector UN agencies and the public to support the generation, analysis, dissemination and use of statistical products. Beyond the current conference, may I appeal to Statistics Botswana to continue in their spirit of making data accessible to our research partners, in recognition of the wide ranging use of census data beyond a few selected thematic analytical reports. Once again, sincere congratulations Statistics Botswana, and indeed the government of Botswana on this key milestone! This is indeed consistent with the Transformation and Reset Agendas that have been identified as the accelerators to achievement of the National Vision 2036.

**Thank you for your attention!**

**Pula!**



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