

Census 2011 to give true picture of Jamaica's population and housing

By Al Edwards
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The Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN) has begun preparations for Census 2011 and is looking to be even more precise with its data than it was during the last census in 2001.

Speaking at a special breakfast briefing held at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel on Wednesday, STATIN's Director-General Sonia Jackson said: "As stated in the Principles and Recommendations of the United Nations, the most important capital a society can have is human capital. Assessing the quantity and quality of this capital at small area, regional and national levels is an essential component of modern government."



The last census placed Jamaica's population at 2,607, 633. Since that time annual intercensal estimates of the total population have been done and at December 2009 the population of Jamaica was estimated at 2,698,800 comprising of 1,329,300 males and 1,369,500 females.

For Census 2011 STATIN has been approved a budget of J\$1.573 billion. It will engage 7,000 people of which 5,000 will be census details takers.

So what improvements are STATIN looking for Census 2011 over the last time it undertook a census?

Speaking with Sunday Finance, STATIN's Director-General said: "What we are looking for is an improved response rate. Back in 2001 we had between 85 to 90 per cent and this time around we would like to take it a little higher. The objective is 100 per cent but that's not always possible."

STATIN's Manager for Information & Marketing (Corporate Services Division), Heatha Miller is looking to engage the media in this upcoming census and get it to help get the word out that it is important that all Jamaicans participate. To that end she has come up with the theme, "Every one counts-You,Me, All a Wi!" She further added that the media is a trusted voice and that Jamaicans listen to the media.

"We recognise that we need to be in partnership with the media and it can assist us in sending out the message. Therefore we are asking the media, tell us some of the things we can do to broadcast the message. We are looking at an integrated communications campaign and will use the new social media network as well," said Miller.

Jackson stressed that the utmost confidentiality will be observed and that Jamaicans need not fear that their private details will be revealed. To do so would be a criminal offence.

This is a most important exercise for the country and it is vitally important that it is properly funded. STATIN has not courted the private sector for funding because it does not want it to appear that the exercise is compromised in any way by any individual interest. It has had the offer of support from one public sector agency but has not followed up largely because it is uncertain what that support would cover.

" The Government recognises the importance of the census and it has conveyed its commitment. The money that is needed for the census has to be in place early in the financial year. The budget of J\$1.3 billion covers not only data collection which is costly but data conversion and publications, "said Jackson.

The data collection exercise will begin in April of next year and most of the work is expected to be completed by the end of June, well before the hurricane season. After that comes data processing which will involve millions of pieces of paper. One for each household which is about a million households (800,000 last count) and then there is a form for each person of the population that will take between 6 to 9 months to process.

"We are hoping to get the first report out for March 2012 but the rest of the data will take some time to be analysed and processed," said Jackson