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SESSION 1: RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST

**LOST AND FORGOTTEN? OFFICIAL COLONIAL STATISTICS
EXPERIENCE IN CONSTRUCTING HISTORICAL STATISTICS FOR SURINAME**

Report submitted by the United Nations Population Fund *

INTRODUCTION

1. Unlike the developed countries which tend to have a long tradition of preparing and publishing official statistics, developing countries started the collection and publication of official statistics, with varying degrees of coverage, quality and timeliness, only about or after national independence. As a result, for most developing countries statistical series of variables of interest to students of population and sustainable development are non-existent. Yet, to fully understand the long term population dynamics, and the interrelationship of population with economic, social, cultural and environmental variables long term statistical series are needed.

*/ Prepared by Mr. Alphonse L. MacDonald, Chief of the European Liaison Office. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations and its Agencies.

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2. A number of present day developing countries have been under the domination of colonizing powers for a long period. The colonizing agents have prepared reports which contain a wealth of quantitative information on several aspects of countries, their inhabitants and environment, with varying regularity. This information was needed to enable them to carry out their

policies more effectively and efficiently, and in cases where the colonizing agent was a private company, to inform the share-holders on the conditions of the colony and to render accounts. These data have in general been ignored by statisticians, but have been used occasionally by historians and other social scientists. Only a few Latin American, Asian and African countries have series of colonial statistics which have their origin before 1950. Yet many of the reports prepared by the Colonial administrations contain quantitative information which could be used to construct series of statistics on various variables of interest to population and sustainable development. However, the nature of the reports requires that the statistician carefully analyzes the data and converts them into statistics.

3. A case generally unknown to historical statisticians is that of the colonies of the Netherlands. Due to a provision in the Constitution of 1848 of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the King (=Government) was required to inform parliament, the States General, annually about the administration of the colonies, their situation and prevailing conditions. In 1950, for all practical purposes, the colonial empire of the Netherlands ceased to exist. Hence, theoretically there are Colonial Reports over a period of about one hundred years. It should therefore be possible to construct series of colonial statistics for the ex-Dutch possessions: Indonesia, Suriname, and the Netherlands Antilles. Yet, no colonial statistical series have been published by the Netherlands authorities nor by the Governments of the, now, independent countries.

TOPICS TO BE COVERED IN THIS REPORT

4. In this report the experience in constructing the historical statistical series on **population** and related data, *in casu* **migration** and **health** for **Suriname** is reported. Issues to be discussed are:

1. availability of the reports,
2. origin, coverage, completeness and quality of the data,
3. concepts, continuity and change caused by changing conditions in the country, and
4. use of international standards and classifications.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COLONIAL REPORTS

5. The first Colonial Report was apparently presented to the States General at the sessions of the 1851 - 1852 parliamentary year. The report consisted mainly of a narrative part, which contained numerical information and an annex, with tabular information about the budget of the Colony. Over the years the annex, became a **statistical appendix** to the report with a large number of tables covering a wide range of subjects of apparent relevance to the Government and the members of parliament.

6. Although the structure of the narrative part and the statistical annex of the report very early become standardized, there is a wide variety in the tabular details that are presented. This could be explained by the reasons why information was presented. It can be assumed that information is presented on issues that the Government wished to convey to parliament to justify its policies, or that information is provided because it was requested by parliament.

7. The reports were published regularly from 1851 to 1950, except for the years 1940- 1945, when the Government of the Netherlands was exiled in London, England. The reports covering these years were published *post hoc after the war*. The reports were reports **from** the Government **to** Parliament, and there is no indication that these reports were available to the public. During the 19-th century some information was not included in the reports but was made available for review by members of parliaments at the secretariat during the sessions. However, this same information was made public, both in Suriname and in the Netherlands, through the **Almanacs** or **Yearbooks** which were published with, but sometimes, without the authorization of the Government.

8. Over the period of a hundred years, the title of the reports has changed. From 1849 to 1923 the reports are known as "**Koloniaal Verslag**" (Colonial Report), from 1924 to 1930 the reports were called "Verslag van bestuur en staat van Nederlandsch-Indië, Suriname en Curaçao van" (Report on the administration and conditions of the Netherlands Indies, Suriname and Curaçao for [year]", and from 1931 to 1950 the title was "Surinaams(ch) Verslag" (Report on Suriname). Since 1931 the report is issued in two parts: a text and a statistical annex. Since that year, in the statistical annex the titles of the tables and the major categories are in Dutch and English.

AVAILABILITY OF THE REPORTS

9. While historical statisticians in developed countries normally have access to the statistical series, they very often also still have access to the raw data on which these series are based. For the historical statisticians interested in developing countries the situation is completely different. There are no statistical series and the data that can be used to construct them are contained in official records which are scattered in different archives. The case of Suriname is no exception. Because of the nature of the reports, official Government reports to Parliament, only limited numbers of the reports were produced and the distribution was very restricted. In line with colonial policy, these reports were and are not available in Suriname. Up to now the author has failed to locate a full set of the reports in libraries in one location. To obtain a **full set** of the reports, covering the hundred years, the researcher has to consult libraries in the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States of America.

ORIGIN, COVERAGE, COMPLETENESS AND QUALITY OF THE DATA

10. As mentioned earlier (para 4), here the case of population, migration and health data will be considered. Population size, composition and growth have been some of the main and basic subjects covered in all of the reports. Given the low population density of Suriname, and the need for labour to work on the plantations this is hardly surprising. Also, during most of the reporting period population size and positive population growth were considered desirable. At the beginning of the reporting period (1849), the bulk of the population under the control of the Colonial government consisted of African slaves and their descendants, a small group of Europeans, and the off-spring of alliances between these two groups. Additionally, outside the control of the government there was a modest group of the descendants of the maroons or run-away slaves who lived in neo-tribal arrangements, and a small group of the remnants of the original inhabitants of the country, the Amer-Indians, belonging to the Carib and Arawak language groups.

11. Like all American countries Suriname is a land of migrants, even when disregarding the involuntary migrations of African slaves. Several efforts were undertaken to supplement the local population in anticipation of, and after the abolition of slavery in 1863. The Colonial authorities sponsored a number of immigration flows, from Europe (the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal especially Madeira), Asia (China, British India, that is, the Indian sub-continent and Indonesia) and the Caribbean (mainly Barbados). Till relatively recently, immigration has been an important component of the population growth of the country. Government sponsored immigration ceased to operate in 1949. Immigration of individuals or small groups (Syrians, Lebanese, Vietnamese) without official sponsorship has always occurred, but has been and still is only modest in magnitude.

12. Aspects of public health and disease are important factors that influence morbidity and mortality patterns, and hence, in the absence of voluntary fertility control, determine, together with migration, the rate of growth of a population. A number of pathogens were imported from Europe, Africa and Asia, but the impact of immigration on the disease profile and the rate of growth of the Surinamese population has yet to be studied.

13. For the population and migration data as presented in the Colonial Reports, it is possible to indicate the origin, coverage, completeness and quality of the data. The origin of the health data is only partially known, but indications of their coverage, completeness and quality can be given.

14. To fully understand the situation in which the data are generated, three sub-periods have to be distinguished in the reporting period:

1. 1849 - 1963 The pre-abolition of slavery period, during which the main distinction for the population under Government control was that between the **Free** and the **Not Free** population.
2. 1863 - 1873 The period of **State Supervision** for the freed slaves. Although slavery was abolished in 1863 during a ten year

period the freed slaves were bound by a number of regulations to ensure peace and order and the functioning of the plantations. The main distinctions for the population under Government control were **Immigrants** and the **Non-immigrants**. In the reports of this period no distinction was made between the different ethnic and national groups of migrants. The majority of the migrants were Chinese, with Portuguese (Madeirans), British Indian and West-Indian minorities. The Non-immigrants were subdivided in **Population under State Supervision** and **Population not under State Supervision**.

3. 1873 - 1949 The period after the State Supervision, in which relatively large groups of immigrants, mainly from the Indian sub-continent and Indonesia entered the country. Although the immigrants of Government sponsored programmes came to Suriname for a limited period, the Colonial authorities provided incentives (land, some commodities, initial basic education in the "native" language till 1929, and simplified procedures to obtain Dutch citizenship from 1927) to those who wished to settle in the Colony and to relinquished their right to free return to their country of origin. A considerable number of migrants decided to accept the offer and settled in Suriname.

During this period the main distinction made in the reports among the population under Government control is based on nationality of origin, and later on ethnic group and occasionally on race.

15. The origin of population data depends on the period and on the category of the population under consideration. For the free population a number of registers were kept by the colonial administration and the churches. Churches have kept birth and death registers, and since 1826 a civil registration system for the free population was created, and all birth and death registers of churches were transferred to the archives of the Civil Registry. Additionally, strict control was kept of departures and arrivals in the colony. Moreover, the main settlement, Paramaribo, was divided into wards, and each ward supervisor, was supposed every year to carry out an administrative census of the free population and the slaves in their possession. However, effective 1855 these administrative enumerations were not longer carried out yearly, but every five years. At the military forts and outposts the responsibility for the registration of population information of the (free) population rested with the military commanders. In the outlying districts and divisions, the population information was collated by the District Commissioners or division supervisors.

16. The slaves, not being persons in the legal sense, were not included under the provisions of the civil registration provisions. The owners had the responsibility to keep a record of their slaves, and the mutations among them, births and deaths. The slave registers were used by the civil

registration officials and the other relevant colonial officials to establish population size of the slave population.

17. After the abolition of slavery the freed slaves were supposed to enter the civil registration system, but during the period of State Supervision plantation records were still kept to keep track of the ex-slave population and the migrants.

18. In general, registration of population movements of the immigrants population was the responsibility of a Commissioner for Immigration, and the plantation administration. Once immigrants had fulfilled their legal obligations and decided to remain in Suriname they had to register and declare births and deaths at the civil registry.

19. Up to 1921 two methods were used to obtain the yearly population figures. Method A consisted of adding the number of births and arrivals to, and deducting the number deaths and departures from the population of the previous year to obtain the end of current year population. Method B consisted of the results of the administrative enumerations of the ward supervisors for Paramaribo and the records provided by the district officials for the outlying areas. These two procedures resulted in slightly different results. It appears that the population enumerated by the ward supervisors at Paramaribo and the population declared to district officials in 1849 formed the base year population for the two procedures up to 1921.

20. The differences between the two procedures increased over time. In 1921 a Dutch expert in population registration is sent to Suriname to establish a new registration system. As a first step towards the establishment of the new system, an administrative census is held and on the basis of that information the yearly population estimates are prepared, using method A.

21. Throughout the period the population figures for the country also contained an estimate of the size of the population outside Government control, the Amer-Indians and the Maroons or Bushnegroes. These estimates were not based on scientific procedures and were, and still are, highly impressionistic.

22. Although the procedures for the registration of the population were highly complex, the coverage of the procedures especially for the period under consideration appears to be relatively good for the population under Government control. The colonial administration had two good reasons for having good records of the population present in the colony: taxation and security. While in earlier periods of Surinamese history registration of the slave population may have been less precise, in the 19-th century, especially at the beginning of the reporting period registration of the slave population is much improved. The reasons being, the prohibition of import of new slaves, and the prospects of compensation to the owners in case of abolition of slavery. Registration of the immigrant population is also relatively

good, mainly because of the financial implications of the immigration process. Immigrants had the right to a free passage to their home country at the end of their period of service and plantation owners had to contribute to the cost of the immigration process and employment of immigrant labourers.

23. During the latter part of the reporting period, when immigration is less important, the colonial administration makes extra-ordinary efforts to ensure compliance with the provisions of the civil registration system. There were severe penalties for non-compliance, and police enforcement of these provisions is rather strict. Also, up to 1950 the population that lived under Government control was relatively stable and immobile, due to lack of a well developed road system. The network of police stations provided sufficient coverage for the control of population movements.

24. While the procedures for registering the population and migration data are well known, less is known about the way the data on health were recorded and processed. For a considerable portion of the reporting period, a large part of the population has been without the benefit of the formal medical services. During the slave period the slave population was treated by their own "medical" personnel, most, if not all of which had no modern medical training. Even for the free population the level of medical service was far from satisfactory. Initially Government provided medical services only for its military personnel and the civil servants. On paper, special arrangements existed for the immigrant population. They were supposed to have access to adequate medical services at the plantations, but this was in many cases inadequate or non-existent. During the latter part of the reporting period, the period after the First World War medical coverage is extended to a large part of the poorer segments of the population, as a public health and social welfare measure.

CONCEPTS, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

25. Population and population related data by their nature are dynamic in character. Concepts and definitions tend to reflect this dynamic character. The Colonial Reports, not being scientific reports, do not provide definitions of the concepts used. Of particular interest is the situation of the "**population**" concepts. In some of the tables on health, reference is made to the "**de facto**" population, while in others reference is made to the "**de jure**" population. However, the data presented in the population part of the report and the statistical annexes only present the enumerated end of year population. No indication is given as how the de jure and the de facto populations are, or could be derived from the enumerated end of year population.

26. Population characteristics used in the reports and the statistical annexes, especially in the twentieth century, provide population breakdown by "nationality" or by "race". Because of the origin of the immigrants, initially "nationality" reflected their status as of foreign origin. However, when immigrants decide to stay in the country after their period of

service is completed, the concept nationality shifts to refer to an ethnic group, or in the parlance of the early twentieth century, a race. Occasionally, especially in the section on health, data are presented in categories which do not represent clearly defined concepts, but are a mixture of nationality, ethnic group and colour of skin. Some such categories are not reflective of the social structure and conventions of the country, but have been imported from abroad.

27. In a multi-ethnic and multi-nationality society the classification by nationality and/or ethnic group poses special problems, because the legal definitions may not be consistent with the prevailing social conventions and customs of the country.

28. For the period 1913 to 1949 a complete listing of the tables presented for population, immigration and health is analysed. For the tables on population and migration there is a clear distinction between the periods 1913 - 1930 and 1931 - 1949. No such distinction is discernable for the tables on health.

29. On **population**, for the period 1913 - 1949 a total of 33 tables were presented in the reports, of which 29 and 15 for the periods 1913 - 1930 and 1931 - 1949 respectively. It appears that the tables are reflective of the need to provide basic population information in a meaningful way to the administration, as well as responses to *ad hoc* requirements. From 1931 onwards a standard set of 15 tables is presented, which apparently, fully satisfied the requirements of the administration. There are 5 tables which seem to have been basic tables through out the 1913 - 1949 period:

1. Development of the population during (year);
2. Marriages by nationalities of spouses and number of legitimised children by residence;
3. Life and still births by sex and legitimacy status;
4. Births and deaths during the last 10 years; and
5. Population by Districts, sex and nationalities.

Two of these tables can be used to construct statistical information for the full hundred years: the development of the population during the calendar year and the population by district and sex.

30. On **immigration**, for the period 1913 - 1949 a total of 10 tables were presented in the reports, of which 10 and 2 for the periods 1913 - 1930 and 1931 - 1949 respectively. As organised immigration in Suriname was a temporal affair, it is not surprising that only a limited number of tables were required for the period 1931 - 1949. Again, it appears that the tables presented in the reports are a mixture of tables needed for administrative purposes, and tables which respond to needs that emerged only incidentally. There is only one table that was produced for the full period, 1913 - 1949:

Immigrants arriving in Suriname since 1 January 1853 till 31 December (current year), by country of origin and period or year of arrival. Although not produced for the full period, the table on Number of British Indian and Indonesian migrants returned to their countries, 1878 - (current year) is produced for a sufficient number of years to allow the reconstruction of the full series of returnee migrants.

31. On **health**, for the period 1913 - 1949 a total of 55 tables were presented in the reports, of which 20 and 39 for the periods 1913 - 1930 and 1931 - 1949 respectively. No clear consistent pattern of reporting on public health and disease incidence emerges from the tables. In terms of issues, the tables (although in different format) seem to indicate a long term concern with leprosy and mental illness. The information presented during the 37 years would allow for the construction of series of incidence (and maybe other characteristics) of these illness. The data are however, insufficient to cover the full hundred years.

32. The quality of the population data appears to be good, although some adjustment will need to be made to correct apparent mis-prints and to transform the end of year data in mid-year population data. Detailed corrections and explanatory notes are provided in the different tables of the reports, which will enable the necessary adjustments.

33. The tables on immigration are of less quality than those on population. There are several imperfections which may cause the unsuspecting and the inexperienced analyst to draw wrong conclusions on the nature of immigration to Suriname. In the first place the table is incomplete as only some of the organised migration flows are being reported on. Secondly, the point of departure of the immigrants is reported and not their nationality, although the tables give a different impressions. Thirdly there is no consistency in the data as to whether number immigrants departed from port of origin or those arrived in the country are reported on. These imperfections can be remedied, but will require additional cross reference and archival research. Some information required to make the correction may no longer be available.

34. For the health data little information is available to assess their quality. Additional research is need to do so. Initial analysis indicates a very uneven quality of information and presentation during the period 1913 - 1949, and no clear improvements are discernible. In the period 1913 - 1930 causes of death are presented disaggregated by sex, while this is discontinued in the more recent period.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

35. In general the statistical tables studied in this report do not provide clear information to ascertain whether international standards and classification have been used. The only exception being, the reference since 1932 that the causes of deaths are classified according to the "international nomenclature". No further reference is given, but one can assume that the International Classifications of Diseases (1929 version) is meant.

CONCLUSIONS

36. The preliminary analysis of the population, immigration and health statistics as presented in the Colonial Reports for Suriname for the period 1848 - 1949 suggest that it would be possible to construct relatively reliable and meaningful statistical series for a number of population related variables. In addition to series on population size, composition and migration flows, it would be possible to develop series on nuptiality and fertility patterns. To a limited extent it will be possible to construct series for morbidity and mortality and causes of death.

37. To construct the statistical series, additional research will be needed to validate the existing information and to supplement missing data. This research will not be restricted to statistical information only, but will also have to cover the political, administrative, cultural and social conditions of the country to establish to correct context to understand the statistical information. The experience of constructing the statistical series for some of the population variables on the bases of data contained in the Colonial Reports have been rewarding and positive.
