

**LIBERIA**

**Abel Z. Massalee**

**AUGUST 1979**



## L I B E R I A

I. DATA SOURCES1) Introduction

Liberia, a small West African State, with an area of about 38 000 square miles was declared an Independent Sovereign State in 1847, 26 years after its founding. The founders of this State were the freed slaves of African origin who were re-patriated from the United States of America. Since that time this group, including those from Central Africa who were en route to America but were later set free and placed on the shores of Liberia, continued to handle the affairs of the government until the Unification and Integration Policy was instituted during the reign of the late President William V.S. Tubman, 1945-1971, which brought more aborigines into the ruling machinery of the country.

The country is located within the fertility zone of West Africa bordered by the Republic of Sierra Leone in the West, Ivory Coast in the East, the Republic of Guinea in the North and the Atlantic Ocean in the South. The birth rate of the zone is estimated to be between 40-50 live births per 1 000 population, while the death rate ranges between 17-27 per 1 000 [10].

Liberia, like many other developing countries, lacks long-standing statistical records particularly on population, size and structure. However, prior to the first National Census of Population in 1962, limited head counts were carried out in several major towns and cities between 1956 and 1958. These included the 1956 census of the capital, Monrovia, which gave an estimated population of 41 391, and that in 1958 of Greenville, the Administrative Headquarters of Sinoe County, which gave an estimated population of 3 628 persons. The prime objective of these limited censuses was to acquaint the public with the idea of census taking and to train prospective census personnel. Besides knowing the total counts, no further analysis and publication was made of the information gathered. Therefore, no historical comparison can be made of the information with subsequent population statistics.

Long before the limited head counts of cities and towns, Liberia's population was assumed to be 2.5 million, figure which was used by historians, politicians and researchers up to the time of the first National Census in 1962. The 1962 census count put the total population at the much lower figure of 1.02 million. Eight years later the population was estimated to be around 1.5 million. The esti-

mate was based on the Population Growth Sample Survey which was conducted between 1969 and 1971. Following the survey came the second National Census of Population and the first Census of Housing. This was in 1974, 12 years after the first National Census. The total population was put at 1.5 million, the same total estimated for 1970 from the Survey. The Survey estimate was considered to be on the high side, arising from the sampling procedure.

## 2) 1962 Population Census

The first truly scientific source of demographic data was the first national census of population in 1962. This was the first major undertaking of the newly established Bureau of Statistics and Economic Research, for that matter the first major commitment of the Government of Liberia to a statistical development programme as an indispensable basis for sound socio-economic development planning. The result of that census continued to serve as a benchmark for subsequent population studies of Liberia.

The 1962 Population Census was conducted in accordance with the principles and recommendations laid down by the United Nations including all six essential features of (a) full government sponsorship, (b) universality, (c) simultaneity, (d) defined territory, (e) individual enumeration and (f) compilation and publication of data. Modern census techniques were applied in all stages of the programme with good results.

The enumeration, which was conducted in April 1962, was 100 percent enumeration with a household questionnaire containing 16 items. These covered almost all the basic items (with a few adaptations to local conditions) recommended by the United Nations.

## 3) Population Growth Survey

### a) Presentation

In 1969 the Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, initiated the Liberian Population Growth Survey, with technical and financial assistance from the United Nations Agency for International Development. The prime objectives were to provide the Government of Liberia with more accurate and current estimates of births and deaths. A secondary, but equally important goal was to present yearly data on fertility and mortality patterns, migration, age and sex distribution, marital status, literacy and school attendance. The results of this continuous survey were released in several annual publications which were widely distributed. The first and second sets of series were released for the mid-year population 1970 and 1971. The series included: (a) Series P 1 and 2 (population patterns), (b) Series N 1 and 2 (patterns of natality), (c) Series D 1 and 2 (patterns of mortality), (d) Series M 1 and 2 (patterns of migration) and (e) Series S 1 and 2 (demographic patterns in Liberia). The survey was suspended in May 1973 in order to make room for the National Population and Housing Census which was scheduled for February 1974.

b) General Survey Design

The Liberian population growth survey was based on a statistical sampling technique where the sample unit is a single household. Sample estimates were generated for: (a) the country as a whole (b) rural areas and (c) urban areas. The sample consisted of 100 randomly selected villages located in 50 clans. Every household in a sample village was included in the enumeration. In the urban areas, 100 sample "blocks" made up of approximately 200 persons each were selected. Every household within these blocks was enumerated. A dual method was used to collect the data. The first is an agent who makes regular monthly visits to each household in his assigned area and reports the demographic changes which have occurred during the past months. The second source is staff supervisor who independently calls on each of these same households every six months. The two reports were compared and all the differences were verified. All estimates were computed using the Chadraskar-Deming formula :

$$N = C + N1 + N2 \frac{(N1) \times (N2)}{C}$$

c) Coverage

The survey included approximately 70 000 people or roughly 5 percent of the 1968 current estimated population of Liberia. Included in the survey were persons residing in single or multiple dwelling units such as huts, houses, apartments and non-detached houses. Persons who normally reside in these units but who were temporarily absent were also included as household members. Excluded were hospital patients, military and police personnel in barracks, inmates in lodging houses, schools, and other institutions, and non-Liberians in concession compounds, missions, and embassies.

4) 1974 Census of Population and Housing

Under the United Nations African Population Census Programme, Liberia was fortunate in obtaining technical and financial assistance from the United Nations' Fund for Population Activities in order to conduct the census.

The experience gained during the 1962 census coupled with that of the demographic survey were utilised to a great extent in the planning and execution of the second population census of Liberia which was conducted in February 1974. The objectives of the 1974 census remained virtually the same as in 1962. However, the institutional framework for implementing the census mandate was somewhat more developed than in 1962.

The major purposes of the 1974 Census of Population and Housing were stated as follows:

- 1) to determine the current size and distribution of the population
- 2) to document the present status of the population on the basis of selected socio-economic indicators
- 3) to give an overview of living and housing conditions in the country
- 4) to indicate any demographic changes that have occurred since the 1962 census
- 5) to evaluate any qualitative socio-economic changes in the population that have occurred since the 1962 census.

Since one of the major purposes of the 1974 Census was to compare the results with the 1962 Census, the census was conducted on a de jure basis, the primary enumeration unit being the household. The questionnaire, definitions and concepts were essentially the same as in the 1962 census, with the addition of questions on fertility, mortality and migration.

The census also included questions on housing and living conditions as proposed by the Ministry of Housing which in effect made the 1974 exercise a census of population and housing.

Because of the length of the questionnaire (26 items) a systematic sampling technique was employed for the collection of information on housing. While all the basic questions were asked of all households, only one household in five was required to answer questions on housing.

#### Items of Inquiry in the 1974 Census of Population and Housing

Because of the sampling scheme introduced for the housing questions, two forms were adopted; a short form which included items on population to be completed for four out of every five households, and a long form which included both questions on population and housing was completed for one of every five households.

Questions on population included : (1) name, (2) relationship with the head of household, (3) sex, (4) completed age, (5) marital status, (6) county of birth, or origin of birth, if outside Liberia, (7) length of residence, (8) citizenship, (9) tribal affiliation (10) literacy status, (11) school attendance, (12) highest grade completed in school, (13) number of children ever born, (14) children born in past 12 months, (15) economic activity, (16) usual occupation, (17) economic sector, and (18) work status.

Questions on literacy, school attendance and highest grade completed in school were only asked of all persons 5 years of age and over, while questions on fertility were asked of all women 10 years of age and over, and that of economic activity was asked of all persons 10 years of age and over.

Questions on housing included: (1) type of housing unit, (2) tenure of housing unit (owned or rented), (3) construction materials of outer walls, (4) size of structure in terms of rooms and number of occupants, (5) modern amenities, (6) death in housing unit during the past 12 months, (7) availability of radio in housing unit, and (8) the monthly income of the head of household.

Questions concerning structure size and number of occupants were framed to indicate the number of households in the dwelling unit, the number of rooms in the particular household, the number of persons in the same household and persons in the household under 14 years old. "Modern amenities" comprise inside piped water, electricity and inside flush toilet.

## 5. Other Censuses and Surveys

### a) On-going Demographic Survey

In pursuance of the recommendations of the African Census Programme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and fulfilling the urgent governmental needs of development planning, a proposal for technical and financial assistance for a continuous demographic survey at national level was submitted to the United Nations in 1974. The proposal was approved but the survey only became operational in mid-1977 after the appointment of the Survey Director.

The first two rounds of the survey which were completed in early 1979 are now being processed and should be available before the end of the year. The basic items of inquiry in the two rounds included, among others, births, deaths, in and out migration, and the characteristics of the household composition - relationship, sex, age, marital status, tribal affiliation, religion, literacy, occupation, industry, disability and work status.

### b) Agriculture

Between the years of 1960 and 1975 several agricultural surveys and a census were carried out. Most of the surveys, however, were intended to collect information useful in establishing data collection methods. It was in 1971 that the first National Census of Agriculture was conducted. The activities of this census extended through 1974. The main objective of this census was to take an inventory of the agricultural characteristics of the country. Data on crops and livestock production in Liberia were however observed to be extremely limited.

A rice survey was carried out in 1975 to assess the level of production of this staple crop, for which self-sufficiency was a goal. The survey showed a year-to-year fluctuation of production levels. For example, while the total production of rice for 1974 was estimated at about 250 000 metric tons, this figure went down by about 20 000 metric tons in 1975, the reason being heavy rain fall which prevented more land clearing. The survey however indicated a trend of steady increase in production from 1960 to 1967, and a more rapid rate of increase in production from 1967 to 1975.

c) Household expenditure survey

In 1976, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs carried out a household expenditure survey in both urban and selected rural areas of Liberia to provide information concerning the pattern of household expenditure and other socio-economic characteristics of the Liberian population. Perhaps the major information was the provision of weights for the revision of the consumer price index and the calculation of consumer price indices for the various county towns.

The data collection phase of this survey terminated on June 30, 1978 and processing of returns is under way.

II. CRITICAL STUDY OF THE 1962 AND 1974 CENSUSES

Liberia is no exception to the rule that attempts to improve data quality are made in successive censuses. The 1962 census being the first national census confined itself to the collection of data on population characteristics. As well as improving population data quality, the 1974 census expanded its scope by introducing a new questionnaire on housing on a 20 percent sample of households.

The 1962 census of population was basically a count of persons. A standard set of questions was put to every household after preliminary trials of methods and procedures. A similar procedure was followed in the 1974 Census of Population and Housing. The two censuses were conducted on a de jure basis, except that individuals of no fixed address were enumerated where they happened to be on census day. The age and sex distribution of the two censuses is given below in Table 46 indicating population change over the years.

1) Foreigners

For classification, the question of citizenship in the 1962 census was based on an affirmative answer to the question : "Is this person a Citizen of Liberia?" No specific definition of citizenship was provided. However, the 1974 census treated the question on citizenship rather more elaborately: citizenship in the 1974 census referred to the current status and not to the status at the time of the person's birth. A person born in another country who became a naturalised



Table 46  
LIBERIA - POPULATION BY AGE GROUP AND SEX :  
1962 AND 1974 CENSUSES

AGE GROUP	1962 CENSUS			1974 CENSUS		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
All Ages	1 016 443	503 588	512 855	1 503 368	759 109	744 259
Percentage	100.0	49.5	50.5	100.0	50.0	49.5
Under 5 Years	165 382	81 625	83 757	227 725	115 252	112 473
5 - 9 "	133 762	68 809	64 927	223 927	114 597	109 330
10 - 14 "	78 595	43 483	35 112	163 338	87 537	75 801
15 - 19 "	83 297	39 248	44 049	159 046	75 571	83 475
20 - 24 "	84 358	34 757	49 601	121 519	54 473	67 046
25 - 29 "	95 292	40 220	55 072	120 655	53 717	66 938
30 - 34 "	81 991	36 750	45 241	140 746	47 107	57 639
35 - 39 "	69 438	34 459	34 979	93 290	47 344	45 946
40 - 44 "	58 611	31 367	27 244	66 973	36 109	30 864
45 - 49 "	44 262	24 715	19 547	57 034	31 689	25 345
50 - 54 "	34 293	19 746	14 547	46 211	26 076	20 135
55 - 59 "	22 777	13 296	9 481	29 517	17 775	11 742
60 - 64 "	23 881	13 130	10 751	33 835	19 118	14 717
65 - 69 "	16 106	8 808	7 298	21 107	12 101	9 006
70 - 74 "	9 321	4 963	4 358	14 394	8 855	5 539
75 years and over	15 077	8 212	6 865	20 051	11 788	8 263

citizen of Liberia was recorded as a Liberian. A person born in another country or born to an alien family and having lived in Liberia most of his or her life but not having obtained Liberian citizenship was recorded as non-Liberian. In both censuses, citizens living abroad permanently were excluded. However, Government officials working abroad were included in the total population. The number of foreigners living in Liberia was quite insignificant relative to the total population: 2.5 percent in 1962 and 3.7 percent in 1974.

2) Scope

The two censuses were national for they covered all places of abode in the territorial limit of Liberia. Nomads are non-existent in Liberia. The predominantly rural population is urbanising gradually. In 1962 about 80 percent of the population lived in rural areas and 20 percent in urban areas.

The definition of rural and urban remained the same in both censuses. A rural locality is defined as one having fewer than 2 000 inhabitants, unless it possesses amenities such as schools, hospitals, electricity and water supplies: in this case it is classified as urban, as are all localities with a population of 2 000 or more. In 1974 the rural population was estimated at 71 percent and the urban population 29 percent. The rural and urban population rates for the years 1962, 1971 and 1974 are indicated below.

Table 47

LIBERIA - PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION BY AREAS  
1962, 1971, 1974

Area of residence	1962	1971 *	1974
TOTAL	100	100	100
Rural	80.2	72.4	70.9
Urban	19.8	27.6	29.1

\*Survey estimate

3) Quality of data

In all censuses the problem of motivation of respondents is a difficult one, particularly in a society where the illiteracy rate is high. Liberia's illiteracy rate in 1962 was about 91 percent of the population aged 10 years and over. This situation had considerably improved by 1974, but 79 percent still remained illiterate. In both censuses and other national surveys, vigorous publicity campaigns have always been instituted long before the time of interview. In the 1974 census councils were established at all levels of administration for the purpose of educating the population about the census and appealing to them to cooperate with the census officers.

-----

The topography of the country and the remoteness of some areas have always affected the collection of data. This, coupled with the lack of proper geographic planning, has always rendered impossible the use of the census enumeration areas as frames for survey purposes.

#### 4) Control surveys

In both the 1962 and 1974 censuses some evaluation surveys were carried out to determine the level of coverage. In 1962 the results of the post-enumeration survey, which was conducted five months after the census and employing the tradition method of PES indicated that the net error was relatively insignificant (less than 5 percent). However, the 1974 post enumeration survey, conducted immediately after the census (less than one month) and employing a new method based on the dual records system, showed that the Liberian census was underestimated by eleven percent at the national level.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, the need for reliable population statistics has become paramount in many developing countries as a basic tool in the planning process. It is in this light that the collection and analysis of population statistics on a scientific basis was initiated in Liberia in 1962. At that time the total population of Liberia was given as 1 016 443, with 503 588 males and 512 855 females.

Between 1969 and 1971 a growth survey was instituted as an attempt to estimate the growth of the population and to provide needed population information for planning purposes. During this period the population was estimated to be 1.4 to 1.6 million with a growth rate between 2.9 and 3.5 percent per annum.

The population of Liberia as recorded in the 1974 population and housing census was 1.5 million. Comparing this result with the 1962 census count and the findings of the 1969-1971 population growth estimates, the growth rate stood at around 3.3 percent as of 1974. This would mean that a population estimate for February 1, 1975 would be around 1.55 million. The current demographic survey project should permit a continuous updating of population characteristics. However, in the absence of the results, and knowing that population characteristics do not change significantly over a short period, it can be said that the fertility rate is still on the rise with a crude birth rate of 50 live births per 1 000 population, that the average age continues to fall with 41 percent of the total population below the age of 15, and that the dependency ratio is around 80 per 100 potential workers.

There is however an urgent need to improve the collection and analysis of population data in Liberia. This need was re-echoed in the recommendations adopted at the close of the seminar on the Results of the 1974 Population and Housing Census held on September 7 - 9, 1977. It was stated among other things that the continuity of the experience of the census work should be maintained, and that all census activities should be looked into and organised in an integrated manner and not in isolation.

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1.- "Annual Report of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs", 31 December, 1978, Monrovia
- 2.- "Annual Report of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs", 3 January, 1973, Monrovia
- 3.- "1962 Census of Population, Summary Report for Liberia PC-B", 30 July, 1964, Office of National Planning, Monrovia
- 4.- "1974 Census of Population and Housing", December 1975, Population Bulletin N° 1, Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, Monrovia
- 5.- "1974 Census of Population and Housing", September 1976, Population Bulletin N° 2, Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, Monrovia
- 6.- "Demographic Annual of the Population Growth 1970-1971 - series P 1, P 2", Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, Monrovia
- 7.- MASSALEE (A.Z.) "The Population of Liberia", 1974, CICRED, series, 56 p.
- 8.- "1974 Population and Housing Census Final Population Results for Liberia and Major Political Divisions PC - 1", 1977, Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, Monrovia
- 9.- "Report of the seminar on the results of the 1974 Population and Housing Census of Liberia, September 1977", to be published.
- 10.- "World Population Statistics in Brief", 1975, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington

**Groupe de Démographie Africaine**

IDP\_INED\_INSEE\_MINCOOP\_ORSTOM

**POPULATION SIZE  
IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES :  
AN EVALUATION**

Volume I

Paris  
1986



## **Le groupe de Démographie africaine IDP - INED - INSEE - MINCOOP-ORSTOM**

est un organisme de liaison non officiel entre les statisticiens, démographes et autres techniciens qui s'intéressent aux questions de population dans les pays d'Afrique.

Il effectue des travaux de synthèse ou méthodologiques à partir des données recueillies ou des techniques mises en oeuvre dans ces pays ; il rend compte des travaux qui y sont réalisés dans le domaine de la démographie et d'une manière générale s'efforce d'informer les personnes intéressées par toute question ayant trait à la démographie africaine.

### **PUBLICATIONS DU GROUPE**

- « Démographie africaine », bulletin de liaison :
  - n° 0 2<sup>ème</sup> trimestre 1971 à n° 28 septembre-décembre 1978 (poursuite de cette publication à Yaoundé - IFORD)
  - numéros spéciaux 1 à 13.
- « Études et documents », prolongement des numéros spéciaux du bulletin de liaison.
- « Afrique Noire, Madagascar, Comores - Démographie comparée » tomes I et II - INSEE, INED, DGRST, Paris 1967.
- « Les enquêtes démographiques à passages répétés » Application à l'Afrique d'expression française et à Madagascar - Méthodologie - ORSTOM, INSEE, INED, Paris 1971.
- « Sources et analyse des données démographiques » - Application à l'Afrique d'expression française et à Madagascar - INED, INSEE, MINCOOP, ORSTOM, - Paris 1973-1977.
  - 1<sup>ère</sup> partie : Sources des données
  - 2<sup>ème</sup> partie : Ajustement de données imparfaites
  - 3<sup>ème</sup> partie : Analyse des données (tomes I et II).
- « Le traitement informatique des enquêtes statistiques » - Groupe de démographie africaine, INSEE - Paris 1978.
- « Le recensement des nomades mauritaniens » - Yves PACCOU - Paris, 1979.
- « Recensements africains - 1<sup>re</sup> partie : Monographies méthodologiques » - Paris, novembre 1980 et février 1981.
- « Recensements africains - 2<sup>e</sup> partie : Synthèse méthodologique » - Paris, octobre 1981.
- « Les structures par sexe et âge en Afrique » - Gilles ROGER, Dominique WALTISPERGER et Christine CORBILLE-GUITTON - Paris, 1981.
- « L'évaluation des effectifs de la population des pays africains », tome I, Paris, janvier 1982.
- « L'évaluation des effectifs de la population des pays africains », tome II, Paris, octobre 1984.
- "Contribution à l'analyse des données démographiques imparfaites des pays africains" - Rémy CLAIRIN - Paris, octobre 1985