

The Role of Census in the Socioeconomic Development of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Since Nigeria attained political independence in 1960, all efforts at conducting population census have met with serious problems. Consequently, planning for socio-economic development of the nation has been adversely affected by the inadequacy, obsolescence and unreliability of available demographic data. Past national development plans have failed partly because of lack of demographic data for planning. Hence, there is the need for an accurate, reliable and acceptable population census for the country. This concern has become of even greater significance in the face of the dynamism of modern day socioeconomic planning both at the macro and micro levels. Thus, this paper assessed the conduct of past population censuses in the country, identified the challenges of conducting an acceptable reliable census in the country and proffered solutions for the challenges. The aim is to x-ray the importance of population census on national development and as a clarion call on Nigerian government for a successful census that will generate acceptable demographic data for planning to ensure even development of every sector of the country. The paper relied on secondary, primary data and content analysis of the data so provided.

Keywords: *Census; Development; Demographic; Unreliability; Dynamism*

Introduction

Census is an indispensable tool for economic and transformational growth and development of any given nation. The need for an accurate, reliable and acceptable population census in Nigeria cannot be over stressed. This concern even greater significance face of the dynamism of modern day socio economic planning both at the macro and micro levels. In Nigeria, planning for socioeconomic development has been adversely affected by the inadequacy, obsolescence and unreliability of available demographic data. Past national development planning's in Nigeria have failed simply because of lack of accurate demographic data for planning. Demographic data derived from population census are useful to every government for planning and distribution of national resources.

The urgency of Nigeria's development needs has generated concern not only in Nigeria alone but world over. Nigeria presently ranked as the capital of poverty of the world, thus, efforts at self reliant/growth must proceed at a very rapid pace if the welfare of Nigerians is to be improved upon

(Neiraland2019). However, the basic ingredients for planning and development, that is, population and housing data, including the actual number of the population and its composition according to age, sex among others remain largely unknown. Available estimates of the total population in the country, in each state and in each local government areas are mainly guesses.

Planning for development without the most fundamental tools or fact i.e. the number and characteristics of the people whose welfare is to be improved upon and those among this number who must work in all sectors of the economy, to bring about the much needed development is tantamount to groping in the dark.

Successive Nigerian governments during pre-colonial and the post colonial periods understood the importance of an accurate census as the basic tool for development planning. Consequently, census of parts and the whole of Nigeria have been conducted since 1866. However, since Nigeria attained political independence in 1960, all efforts at conducting a national census have been met with serious challenges, among the several reasons for unsuccessful attempts at census taking is inadequate education about the census and general ignorance regarding population census in general and the use of census data in particular.

Population Census

The word census has been in the Nigeria domain for some time now. Population census as opined by the United Nation Organization (1970) as the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analyzing, publicizing or disseminating demographic, economic and social data at a specified period to all persons in a country or in a well delineated part of a country. Going by this, census is simply a statistical exercise. Similarly, a census is a count or an enumeration and publication made after careful check of the enumeration.

Population census is a source of data, required not only for the developing countries but also the developed of the world. The term census refers to the process of retrieving, compiling and publishing demographic, economic and social data pertaining to all persons in a country at a given time (Odewum, 2000), while referring to the 1970 United Nations draft recommendation on census, defined the term “census” as the process of compiling and publishing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining to and at a specific time to all persons in a country. Population census is a terminology restricted to complete enumeration of human population legally conducted at regular intervals, often time once every ten (10) years. This term is used mostly in connection with national population and housing census. Other common censuses include traditional culture, business supplies, agricultural, and traffic censuses (United Nations 2008).

The idea of population census is that, everybody is counted, ‘but the fact remains that everybody cannot be counted; that is, a complete and accurate population census in any part of the world is impossible. However, inspite of this inherent difficulty, population census is necessary. Afolayan (1982) once pointed out that Population constitutes a vital component of the resource base and the development potential of any country. This is because according to Fred (1988) ‘there is growing recognition of the complexity of the relationship between development and population’. Former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2006 in like manner stressed and noted that census is indispensable to the nations quest for sustainable development’ (Obasanjo,2006). From the foregoing therefore, population census becomes a vital aspect of any nation, developed or developing. On the account of the increasing realization that population is a factor for planning

and development, the Nigerian Government has over the years expanded and exerted much effort in order to achieve a reliable census (Bamgbose, 2009).

According to Eze (2017), census holds the central place in a country's data provision for socioeconomic development, information collected during the census is used to assess the current welfare needs of the population as well as project for the future needs to assist planners make realistic development needs. The United Nation defines the essential features of population census as individual enumeration, universality within a defined territory, simultaneity and defined periodicity" and recommends that population census be taken at least once every ten years (United Nations, 2008).

Trends of Nigerian Population Census

Under the census ordinance of 1863, the first census recorded in Nigeria took place in 1866 and covered only the Lagos area. The next census was in 1871 and marked the beginning of decennial census in Nigeria. Nigeria being a British colony followed the British tradition of taking census in years ending with '1'. Other census of the Lagos colony and its surrounding areas followed in 1881, 1891, and 1901. These early attempts to conduct the census of the population of Lagos colony were mainly unsuccessful. In 1906 Lagos was merged with the then protectorate of Sothern Nigeria. Consequently, the census of 1911 covered the whole of the then Southern Nigeria. It was organized from the Government House Zungeru to fulfill the desire of Great Britain to have an idea of the population of her empire. Unfortunately insurrections in the North and hostility in the south marred the census exercise (Ugwu 1993).

It was the 1921 census that covered the whole country following the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914. Three years after the amalgamation a census ordinance was passed on October 25, 1917 under which the 1921 census was conducted. Dr. P. Amaury Talbet conducted the census in Southern Nigeria. It was conducted in two parts: one for the towns called the township census, and the other for the rest of the country called the provincial census. It was hindered by several difficulties, two of which were the intervention of world war which led to shortage of European assistants and the antagonism of natives. It yielded rather inaccurate results. Meek who conducted the census of Northern Nigeria in 1921 also pointed out the inaccuracy in the figures.

The last census in the country was held in 2006 during the time of former president Olusegun Obasanjo. This was over 16years after the last census was held. The population was announced to have grown by more than over 50% to 160million. Thus, showing implausibly, each Nigerian state managed to maintain its exact share of the population across two censuses 16years apart. But like the ones before it was met with criticisms from different quarters, leaving the questions about when the country would get its census right. In what would appear to be a paunchy verdict on the entire past census in the country, a former chairman of the NPC, Chief Festus Odimegwu, had maintained that no census has been credible in Nigeria since 1863. He noted:

No census in Nigeria had been credible; even the one conducted in 2006 is not credible. I have the records and evidence produced by scholars and professors of repute. This is not my report. If the Current laws are not amended, the planned 2016 census will not succeed (Bamgbose,2009).

Though that position appeared to have led to his exit as NPC boss in 2013, political observers have maintained that his view still rankles and that the self-same question on when the country will get things right with census must begin to agitate the minds of well-meaning Nigerians. From the foregoing, it is obvious that the result Nigerian census had been controversial. In the case of 1963

census the result was accepted more as a compromise, the effect of this is the failure of most of the well thought out development plans in Nigeria especially after independence.

The Challenges of Population Census in Nigeria

The British government that colonized Nigeria thought it necessary to introduce population census in Nigeria but attitudinal dispositions of many Nigerians and polarization of population censuses have been resulting into a series of undercounts and unnecessary data falsification. From the inception therefore, censuses in Nigeria have been experiencing crises. A number of disagreements have risen over the conduct of population censuses which have been treating Nigerian unity. The political bureau appointed by the Babangida administration was aware of the problematic nature of Nigeria's population census when it remarked that:

An overview of the Nigerian political experience since Independence in 1960 shows clearly that among the many issues that have created great anxiety and brought the country to the brink of collapse has been the attempt at obtaining an accurate count of the country's population. The potency of the issue as a source of confusion and a national discord is underscored by the fact that attempts made by civilians (1962-1963) and the military (1973) were greeted with the same degree of cynicism, suspicion and controversies and had to be cancelled (political bureau report, 1987).

Thus while the bureau report actually described the situation with Nigerians census from 1960, the problem goes beyond 1960. Beginning with 1789 population census which was the first census in Nigeria and other population censuses that followed such as those of 1815, 1855, 1861, 1866 and 1868, 1871, 1881, and 1891 were restricted to Lagos. Such head counts were not extended to other parts of the country. Many methods were used for enumeration: besides, enumerators in 1881 were paid by the headcount that is, according to the number of people each of them recorded (Ugwu, 1993).

The main factor militating against a successful and acceptable census in the country has been identified as over solicitation. It is a general opinion that too many things are tied to population. For example, revenue allocation, legislative representation, location of industries and the provision of other social amenities have so far been based on population which resulted in officials and indigenes inflating figures in favor of their place of origin. Other problems include selfish sectional interest, dishonesty on the part of census, its basic elements, its execution and its position as the cornerstone for social and economic planning for overall development of a country. The result of such general ignorance is that citizens who are to be counted in a census have been suspicious of enumerators, and in some cases have been uncooperative or openly hostile. Wrong assumptions about the use to which census data are put are mainly responsible for some spurious information given to enumerators or attempts by some to be counted several times.

Importance of Census in Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria

Many academies have written books on the unfortunate history of census in Nigeria. From the census taken in 1963, a year after the founding of the colony of Lagos, Nigeria has so far recorded many censuses but none of them could be considered as being accurate or reliable. Whereas part of the pre-independence censuses were marred by problems such as inaccessibility, lack of communication and transportation facilities, as well as uncooperative attitudes of the people which led to under-enumeration. The post-independence on the other hand were plagued by political influence, which resulted in the over-enumeration of the population. Despite the failure of past censuses, the government had continued to undertake census due to the gain the country stands to

gain the country stands to gain from such gigantic task. Census is the main source of population statistics in many countries of the world. It is also seen as a social photograph of certain conditions expressible in a population of a country at a given moment. According to the United Nations recommendation census could determine the following;

- a. Total population, sex age and status.
- b. Place of birth, citizenship or nationality
- c. Mother tongue, literacy and educational qualifications.
- d. Economic characteristics.
- e. Urban or rural domicile.
- f. Household or family structure.
- g. Fertility pattern.

Also census, statistics are the basic data required for planning administrative and research strategies. The greatest asset of any nation is her population in that it is in the population that works to develop the wealth of the nation. There is no government that can claim to adequately cater for its population unless it has a clear idea not only of the size but also of the characteristics of the population, hence the commitment to having a reliable population census by nations of the world. There are two ways in which population components derived from the process of conducting a census can proceed to the planning process. First they are useful in the distribution of goods and services and secondly for the supply of the required man-power to administer them. Therefore, population data are needed by the government to plan for the services to be provided for the people. These services include education, health, housing, employment, transportation etc.

In Nigeria, during the first republic (1960-1966) census figure was used as a basis for revenue allocation for various regions. The use of census figure has therefore created a lot of controversy then and even now, which at times ended in litigation in courts. An example is the 1963 census that was contested in the law court by the eastern region. However, the Supreme Court entered judgment in favor of the federal government (Ugwu, 1993).

Another important benefit that can be derived from a reliable census is the ability to produce an accurate population based on sex, age, marriage, family, occupation etc. Sex and age composition and the size of the family have more standing effect upon housing, education and medical facilities and many other features of the cultural land space. From the census figure, government would be able to study the age structure in relation to economic and social activities, military services, political propensities, social attitudes and mobility. In fact, it comprises all aspects of an individual on communal life. Sex composition is also important information that can be derived from census enumeration. The study of the number of males and females are only possible in Countries where census data are reliable. The above are the major benefits that can be derived from census. It is certain that no country in the world with serious intentions to plan for its citizens can afford to toy with census. It is in realization of this, that the federal government of Nigeria is making preparation and budgeting for another census in Nigeria in 2021.

Political Hindrance to Accurate Census in Nigeria

Census is an integral part of development in any nation. From 1866 to 1991, census in Nigeria has been marred by restrictions, tempering with figures for gerrymandering deliberate falsification of census figures, disruption caused by political instability, ethnic clashes and death skilled personnel and technical know-how for data collection and management. Census data has been criticized for

being inaccurate due to issues such as undercounting, double-counting and inaccurate enumeration. This has led to a lack of trust in the census data and makes it difficult to use for planning and development purposes. Akah (2020), challenged the polarization of census. Demographic data usually come from main sources. Population census: specialized surveys (on health topics for instance); registration systems for vital event including births and deaths, and government administrative records. Census data provides the bedrock for other sources of data.

The quality and reliability of nation demographic information is partly a reflection of the quality of census. Akani (2020) observed that all censuses in Nigeria were conducted in an environment fraught with political interference because there was an incentive to inflate population figures. All previous attempts at conducting population and housing census in Nigeria have been beset with challenges. These have ranged from staffing and logistical shortages to undue political interference and manipulation. Controversies and disputes have followed (Akani, 2020).

Population figures are the basis of distributing of resources to sub-national government. A consequence of an inaccurate census is that planning and programs to use these resources isn't based on evidence (Obasanjo, 2006). All previous censuses in Nigeria were conducted in an environment fraught with political interference. This was because there was an incentive to inflate population figures. As people became aware of the importance of population size for political representation in the federal system, the importance of population census became more problematic. There was also competition with the states and among communities to inflate their population so as to get more resources from government.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, censuses have been controversial, from the 1866 census conducted by the British to the 2006 census conducted by Nigerians; all the censuses ended in controversy. However, it should be noted that Nigeria surely cannot plan if she does not know how many people live and earn in Nigeria and in every state of the federation. It is an established fact that without a national census, there can be no national plan and without a national plan, no nation can develop in real sense. For a country which population data remained largely inaccurate, with different figures being bandied as the population of the country, there is, indeed, the need for a thorough census that will not only put to rest the controversies regarding the country's population but also avail the different government agencies the much-needed development data for planning.

This is the whole essence of census, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), as it is critical for development. According to the agency "the information generated by a population census numbers of people, their distribution, their living conditions and other key data is critical for development. Without accurate data, policymakers will not know where to invest in schools, hospitals and roads as those most in need remain invisible.

The planning for the next census must add less critical issues. One of the need to strengthen the scientific structure of the National Population Commission (NPC). It needs technical committee and research centers at times and diaspora. The good news is that enumeration areas and maps are being geo-referenced and digitalized to make them more accurate (Akani, 2020).

Quality needs to be assured and verified transparently at every stage of the census process. One option is to stagger the census across geo-political zones within specified frame. Another is to do sample census. The government must be open to the best option that can give the most accurate

information and value for money. The post enumeration survey must also be well planned. This is the scientific exercise conducted on a sample of census figures and compute growth rates.

Champion at national and sub-national levels could help check against political and economic maneuvering of the census. They could include population experts, traditional and religious leaders and society organizations. There should be government and community anticipation in conducting the census, international and local members should be involved at every stage to ensure transparency, accountability and quality of censuses in Nigeria.

Recommendations

To reduce possible controversy; religious and ethnic identification should be excluded from the census forms, and verification of state results would be handled by supervisors from outside the state. Some analysts believe that the effort to carry out a reliable census with perceived legitimacy might become an unexpectedly positive exercise, reinforcing a sense of shared nationhood and providing a model for the attempt to overcome regional and ethnic differences is paramount in achieving an accurate. The recruitment of competent and capable hands in the conduct is important. Government should make it mandatory everybody to be counted during census irrespective of their location, profession and religion. The rule of an enumerator to see and count must strictly be respected by the geopolitical zones. Counting in proxy must not be allowed and be seen as a crime against the state

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