

Population Census and its Impact on National Planning and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Census is an indispensable tool for economic transformation, growth and development. This is because through a country determines the actual population and the demographics in that population, thereby paving the way for proper planning. Nations that believe with the power and importance of population do not undermine population census. In Nigeria, census is supposed to be conducted in every 10 years. However, since the last census in 2006, there is yet to be another one even though three years had passed to the 10 years' interval for another census after the last one. Empirical evidence on what factors that are responsible for the delay in the conduct of the next census are required for informed policy recommendation and that is exactly what this paper has investigated.

Keywords:

Population Census,
National Planning
and Development

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Background to the Study

In response to ever growing number of human beings in different societies which has resulted to the complex nature of societies from simple nature (Spencer, 1904 in Rizer, 2011), counting and observing regular evaluation of the number of individuals in the society has become a necessary exercise by every government across the globe (Adele, 2009). Counting and observing the number of individuals in a giving society can be actualized through different methods such as population census, vital registration and even socio economic and health survey which relies heavily on probability logic (Bates, Woblewski and Pascale, 2012). Whichever one adopted by any nation, depending on the level of development, the sole interest is first, to have the knowledge of the size and structure of the population and, to inform socio economic and political planning in the nation in question (Ayodele, 2007). However, among other methods, population census holds more promising and reliable information on the social/economic status of the individuals and groups (Adiele, 2009).

Population Census according to United Nations (2008) is the total process of collecting, compiling and publishing demographic, economic and social data pertaining to a specified time or times to all persons in a country or de-limited territory. According to Mimiko (2006), census is the actual process of knowing the members of the society in terms of age, sex, education, occupation and economic activities. For Olusanya (1989), "census taking in every nation is the bedrock for understanding the population size and structure in order to execute a perfect economic planning". Ezeah, Iyanda and Nwangwu (2013), maintained that population census is such an avenue through which a country can access the knowledge and understanding of the rate, direction and composition of her population.

For centuries, governments have wanted to know how many people were under their rule (Weeks, 1999). From the archeological and historical documentations, there are evidences that As far as 5 B.C, the ancient cities and civilizations such as Egypt (Kemit), Babylonia, China, India, and Rome have witnessed population census as part of the government activity in ensuring comprehensive supervision and adequate planning (Shryock, Siegel, Associates, 1973).

Population census is one of the various means of ascertaining the demographic structures of a society and other socio-economic indicators of individual's status in the society (Ketende, Calderwood and McDonald 2011, Madans, 2011). According to Eze (2017), census holds a central place in a country's data provision for planning socioeconomic development. Information collected during the census is used to assess the current welfare needs of the population as well as project future needs to assist planners make realistic future development needs. Indeed, accurate data about a country's population is fundamental to rational policy making, planning and program implementation. Planners need population and development data to evaluate demographic trends, to assess the socioeconomic situation of women, men and youths and design population policies and programs.

The knowledge of the characteristics and trends of the population is also required to integrate population factors into development planning, to monitor and evaluate policies and programs and to help promote population awareness among decision makers in public and private sectors. Census data are specifically required in the area of health, education, and economic planning. It is also used significantly in the distribution of political positions state and local government creation and allocation of resources.

Considering the important of census data, Undelikwo and Enang (2018) observed that data is an indispensable tool for economic transformation, growth and development. Lack of reliable data can impede or limit the planning and development efforts of a country. According to Ajakaiye (2012) "the quality, frequency, timeliness and comprehensiveness of data are of paramount importance for effective development planning, plan implementation and plan outcome." Data is collected in Nigeria through census, sample surveys, and vital registration. Over the years, data collected through these various means have provided evidence and the basis for planning and decision-making.

In economic planning, especially the issue of manpower and labor force matters, census data, will bring us in the know of how many persons are in the country, how many are employed and how many are unemployed. For the short and long-term planning of employment opportunities, government and private sector functionaries need to have an insight of labor force characteristics which are easily provided by the census. It is in this recognition that the factors responsible for delays in the conduct of population census and its impact on national planning and development in Nigeria.

Population Census

The word 'Census' has been so much in the news in the last two years that it may be assumed that every Nigerian citizen knows what the concept means. A population census, in the words of the United Nations Organization (1970) 'is the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analysing and publishing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, at a specified to all persons in a country or in a well-delimited part of a country'. This definition implies that a census exercise is purely a statistical exercise. In other words, a census is a count, an enumeration and the publication, after careful checks, of the results of that exercise.

Population census is a source of data required not only by the developing countries but also by the developed ones. 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 particular time. It is a periodic and deliberate head-count of all residents in a country at a given time. Odewumi (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 at a specified 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 every ten (10) years.

National population census can also be seen as a country's statistical operation designed for a head count of the entire human population of in country and to collect information on its main demographic, and economic characteristics (Population & Societies, 2010). Osinaike, Aiyeola and Alao (2006) explain that census is a method used for accumulating statistical data about a population, which is acclaimed to be vital to democracy and development.

Census has been noted by Okeibunor (1997), to be one of the major sources of demographic data. In simple terms; Census means a periodic head-count of residents of a particular area. Kucypynky (1980) has also defined it as the process of collecting, compiling and publishing demographic, economic and social data pertaining to all individuals in a country or delineated area at a particular time. According to Arowo (1982) the conduct of census involves the obtaining of information on every inhabitant of a particular area at a particular time. The basic information obtained in census include; age, and sex, residential status, birth place, employment, educational status, tribe, religion and marital status amongst others. The population of a country has continued to generate interest, not only among scholars and administrators but also among has continued to generate interest, not only among scholars and administrators but also among foreign nations as regards how such data is generated, its authenticity and reliability.

National Planning

Dalton in Jhingan (2007) referred to the term in the widest sense as “the deliberate direction by persons in charge of large resources of economic activity towards chosen ends”. It has also been conceptualized as consisting “in the extension of the functions of public authorities to organization and utilization of economic resources...Planning implies and leads to centralization of the national economy” (Zweig in Jhingan, 2007). It is deductible from these that the responsibility for development planning rests squarely on the central government through its officials in order to achieve definite targets and objectives within a specific period of time. In like manner, Egonmwan and Ibodje (2001) posited that development planning entails “a consciously directed activity with pre-determined goals and predetermined means to achieve the set goals”. They averred further that “it provides the rallying point for social and political mobilization whereby the society is able to set development objectives and goals, map out strategies and programmes for the attainment of such goals and mobilize resources for their attainment”.

Development

Development is all encompassing and is referred to as one of the most ambiguous terms in social science discourse (Majekodunmi, 2012). It refers to advancement or growth, and includes economic growth and the development and delivery of social welfare, education, healthcare, the alleviation of inequality and poverty, as well as the provision of service-related infrastructure. Viewing development in general terms to include political, economic and social dimensions, Majekodunmicites Sen's concept of development which according to him, connotes 'capacity expansion,' (Majekodunmi, 2012; Sen, 1990).

Arguing that development requires an enhanced state capacity as well as institutional and governmental stability, Majekodunmi maintains that it is only within such framework that individual members of the society can find fulfillment in terms of the basic necessities of life. In addition, she cites Todaro (1989) who conceptualized development as a multidimensional process which involves major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, national institutions, acceleration of economic growth, reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty, and Rodney (1972) who sees development to imply both increase in output and changes in the technical and institutional arrangement by which it is produced, (Majekodunmi, 2012). The structural dimension of development is very important. When the structural dimension is neglected, especially when wrong structures are in place, all efforts to achieve the development agenda may end up in futility.

Important of Population Census

The following are identified as the important of population census in Nigeria

Providing Neutral and Robust Data: Through census, the official numbers of inhabitants in Nigeria are updated on the basis of the official number of inhabitants ascertained in the latest census. Population updates are compiled for every single municipality and villages and based mainly on the numbers reported on births and deaths as well as on arrivals and departures across municipal borders.

Basic data for Sample Surveys: For all kinds of statistics, census results are used as a frame for both sampling and extrapolation in sample surveys. Only updated census results make it possible to extrapolate results of sample surveys and to obtain data on the universe (Wagner, 2010). This applies to all sample surveys based on the population distribution and structure, irrespective of whether they are conducted by statistical offices, scientific or commercial institutions.

When examined from a statistical-methodological aspect, census results play a major role in two respects. First, the updated figures lead to an adjustment of the sample systems. For example, sample designs have to be revised to adapt them to changes regarding the regional distribution, the age and sex structure as well as further demographic or other variables. Second, future extrapolations and weightings will then have to be based on the new data. Such adjustments ensure the representativeness and reliability of future sample surveys.

Monitoring the Economic Development: The national accounting system of the Federal Statistical Office, which describes in quantitative terms the economic development in Nigeria for a past period, generally uses the entire range of official statistical data as a basis, Economic statistics are used most often, but population statistics play a major part, too. However, national accounts apply some specific definitions, for example, of the term “population”. According to the international concept of national accounts, the population comprises all persons – citizens or foreigners – who are resident in a country's economic territory, in this case the Federal Republic of Nigeria. People are considered as resident in the country if they have had their permanent residence in Nigeria for at 15 years.

Factors Responsible for Delays in the Conduct of Population Census in Nigeria

Several factors have been identified for delays in the conduct of population census in Nigeria disused below:

Inadequate funding is one among factor responsible for the delay in the conduct of population census in Nigeria. According to Ghaji, I. Bello, Director-General National Population Commission, the proposed 2018 Census will be based on Biometrics which involves the use of Electronic Data Capture and the huge cost of procuring the Electronic Data Capture (EDC) devices and other supporting IT superstructure and infrastructure for the census, the Commission plans to spend about N60b on ICT. Given the dwindling resources of government, raising this huge fund adequately and timely is a major challenge. According to Olaoye (2014), another problem is the release of budgeted funds. The policy of government was that releases of budgeted funds were to be on a quarterly basis but this policy had been observed more in the breach than in compliance, resulting in epileptic and haphazard releases of funds into the economy.

Related to the above is good time. According to Ghaji (2017) the proposed 2018 Census will be based on Biometrics which involves the use of Electronic Data Capture. Biometrics is the science and technology of uniquely identifying human subjects by means of measuring and analysing one or more intrinsic physical or behavioural traits. These human body characteristics may include finger prints, eye retinas and iris, voice patterns and hand measurements. According to Ghaji, the Commission will require about one million devices, one each for the enumerators to be engaged. These are not items to be procured off the shelf. They need to be configured to specifications before they are procured and deployed. This will require time and a lot of time and efforts. Therefore, the delays for federal government not releasing funds to the National Population Commission on time affects the conduct of census as when due.

Corruption in Nigerian political system has delay the conduct of population census. Corruption has been a pervasive social phenomenon. The disheartening thing about the whole scenario is that the purported development plans are to a large extent corruption avenues to some greedy Nigeria leaders. Every population census held in Nigeria before and after independence has ended in national controversy, strong allegations of population falsification and in fact no general consensus among the populace as to the size of the total population of Nigeria (Eniayejuni and Agoyi, 2011). This scenario clearly mirrors ethnic battle for dominance especially between the three dominant ethnic groups as it relates to census figures in Nigeria. The ethnic group with the highest population census figures uses it as a systemic institutional platform to exercise dominance over the ethnic over others.

Impact of Delays in the Conduct of Population Census on National Planning and Development in Nigeria

The population of the world and Nigeria in particular is increasing numerically and such the goal set by the World Food Summit in 1996 to halve the number of undernourished in the world between 1996 and 2015 has become a key focus of governments around the

world. The importance of combating hunger while achieving economic growth is one of the cornerstones of the MDGs, as reflected in Goal 1. A wide range of data is needed to monitor progress towards this goal, and the agricultural census can play a role in this regard.

On the food availability side, data from the agricultural census helps in understanding the structure of the food production industry and the constraints faced by farmers in increasing agricultural production, as well as suggesting strategies for increasing agricultural productivity. Cropping patterns can be studied along with information on the use of irrigation, farm machinery and improved varieties of seed to help develop programmes for increasing food production. This can also address food access issues. And the collection of community-level data can be especially useful in this area. For example, data on the presence of agricultural produce markets and other infrastructure in the community can help to assess the effectiveness of the food distribution system. However, the delayance in the conduct of population in Nigeria affects the national planning on the availability of information on farmers and community-level data resulting underdevelopment of the country.

The census assists in establishing the level of employment/unemployment for future planning and job creation by giving us the number of employed persons and type of work; distribution of unemployed persons and the number of persons in schools that will require employment in due course (Ezeoke, 2005). In Nigeria, where the problem of unemployment is so frightening, we need to know how many persons are in the labor force, how many are retiring and the number that is entering every year. For short and long term planning of employment opportunities, government and private sector functionaries need to have an insight of the labor force characteristics which is readily provided by the census (Umoh, 2001). For instance manufacturing and service firms make use of such information in selecting sites that meet their labor force needs (Weeks, 2012). Also census provides information on the number of persons engaged in particular economic pursuits, which information is necessary in economic planning as it shows the contribution of the citizens of the country and different sectors of the economy to her development.

Eze (2017), observed that census equally furnishes us with data on the number of people who can read and write (Literacy level) and level of education attained (Education status) by those who have been to schools which will boost our understanding of the quality of our manpower and help inform necessary policy options for manpower planning purposes. Generally information collected during a census is utilized in assessing the current welfare needs of the population and equally used in forecasting future needs; including manpower needs to guide future development needs and goals especially in areas of manpower resources to which this paper concentrates on. For instance, census information on the number of children as well as when they are due for school will guide planners on training and recruitment of needed teaching manpower.

A large number of countries have devoted time and effort to the systematic development and utilization of manpower and some like Nigeria have established manpower boards. The qualitative aspects of the labor force are highly significant to economic development. The base data for these activities comes from census results that emanates from census exercise. However, the delays for the conduct of population census affect planning and development in this area since national policies formulation and implementation cannot get extract figures on unemployment and ascertain the employment opportunities for them. According to Ajakaiye (2012) "the quality, frequency, timeliness and comprehensiveness of data are of paramount importance for effective development planning, plan implementation and plan outcome."

Census information is needed for making complex evidence based national decisions; in this millennium planning in developing countries required formulation of goals that is followed by a well thought out programme for execution is of the utmost importance. Planning a nation's economic and social development is complex involving the process of constructing, executing and checking interrelated sets of decisions. Shangodoyin and Lasisi (2011) findings revealed that the outcome of such series of tasks when prepared for a given period is normally called a Development Plan. Planning, according Shangodoyin and Lasisi has become a permanent part of major government decision making; the integration of the entire exercise necessitates the exercise of a highly organized and well-developed statistical system, without which a planned economy is unthinkable.

Such statistical system must make available (for planning and other purposes of government industry and business) a well integrated mass of accurate data at different degrees of aggregation, which can be used at each stage of the plan process (Adamu, 1978). However, planned decisions rely very heavily on high quality census data. National development requires a well organized census data allowing planners to work on the broad set of statistical indicators that are indispensable for the development and improvement of planning. In order to involve the statistical system in the planning and delivery of the designed and desired statistical data, there is need to link population census, national planning and national goals or development. It therefore means that the delays for the conduct of population census in Nigeria affect critical areas of planning and development in the country.

Conclusion

The importance of census data cannot be over emphasized as it is the bedrock of development planning and research on socio-economic and political issues. This is evidence in economically developed nations where consistency in census data encourages proper development planning. In the case of many developing nations where census issues are being taken for granted, socio economic and political planning always meet with failures because of lack of proper information about the existing population. The way each nation approaches the issue of her population, largely determine the extent of accuracy in the planning of her economic and political arrangements hence, delays in the conduct of population census poor result to poor economic and political planning.

Though delays in budget passage by the national assemble, lack of good time, corruption and inadequate funding related problems are blamed for the delayance of the conduct of population data in Nigeria. National development requires a well organized census data allowing planners to work on the broad set of statistical indicators that are indispensable for the development and improvement of planning. The delays for the conduct of population census in Nigeria affect critical areas of planning and development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the Foregoing, this study is recommending to the government officials who are saddled with the responsibility of conducting census, to observe the following for proper conduct of census exercise:

- i. The government should evolve a suitable population policy as an integral part of the national development effort. Such a policy should be influenced by factors such as the size of the population, the rate of growth, national and international migration, spatial distribution, and the structure and magnitude of usable natural resource.
- ii. Adequate funding should be released to the National Population Commission and on time so as to avoid delays in the conduct of population census and such that will give in more planning on health, education, housing, agriculture amongst others culminating to development of the country.
- iii. Ensure alignment/harmonisation with other national development policies and international development frameworks, such as the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals. Aligned policies are stronger than those that stand alone. With improved harmonisation, there is decreased risk of drastic shifts in priorities and funding levels with changes in administration, and more accountability imposed by international standards and practices.

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