

# The Place of Population Census and National Planning on Nigeria's National Development

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**Abstract** - *The raison d'être of every government is to, through its actions and inactions (public policy), drive the state from a less favourable position to a more favourable state. Governments can only achieve this feat with a well conceived, well structured and robust plan. The plan of government must not be haphazard and must be all encompassing. Population census irrefutably is a cardinal cum fundamental issue of concern in Nigeria. This is consequent on the fact that population, in terms of its size and composition, has comprehensive significance for change development and the quality of life in society. There has been for some time an aspiration for an authentic census on which to base planning in Nigeria though it has not been feasible to actualize this goal. Majority of the glitches encountered in past exercises have been credited to some organizational flaws. From the first census that was conducted in Nigeria, census exercises have generated religious, political, ethnic and geo-political disputes and distrust which negatively influence cum alter nation building as well as sustainable development in the country. It is against this backdrop that this paper analysed population census and national planning in Nigeria using content analysis on data sourced from secondary sources of data generation. The paper shows that population census is a vital aspect of any nation, be developed or developing and its information is very critical for all planning decisions in any state. Thus, this paper recommends that government should have a robust rolling plan that will help in determining accurate population and demography of the country. Furthermore, it is recommended that the National Population Commission (NPC) should rise to the occasion by ensuring that census data in Nigeria is not only accurate but a credible tool in national transformation and development.*

**Keywords:** Population, Census, National Planning, Development, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Census is an imperative cum essential source of data for national development planning in any country (Okeibunor, 1997). Population census has been construed as an aggregation of all the processes and procedures involved in the collection, compilation and publishing of demographic, economic and social data of all individuals in a country or delineated area of a country at a particular time (Kucypynky, 1980). The expansion of human population across the globe alongside human civilization with its associated societal needs/problems has increased the importance of population. Consequent upon this, essential cardinal information such as tribe, gender, age, religion, place of birth, educational status, marital status, residential status, employment status etc. are elicited from population census exercises (Idike & Eme, 2015).

Data generated from this exercise are required for national planning in areas of budgeting for education, agriculture, health, housing welfare, technology and industrial advancement. Census is indeed a critical and important exercise as it serves to ascertain demographic concerns occasioned by changes in living conditions and trends, with the purpose of developing proper and suitable population policies; and guesstimating targets for human capital development and utilization that is in sync with the current economic realities (Adamu, 1989). Against this backdrop, the relevance of regular population census to governments at the grass roots (local government), state and central (federal government) as well as individuals need not be overemphasized. Unfortunately, ascertaining the actual number of people in Nigeria and their demographic characteristics required for national planning has remained topical to scholars and administrators as well as the global community with regards to how these data are generated, its genuineness and reliability (Idike & Eme, 2015).

Notably, population census in Nigeria have always been accustomed with controversies; peradventure, because of the misconceptions, mistrusts cum suspicion associated with it. Evidence abounds that in some parts of the country, the locals sometimes do not make themselves available for the population exercise for some reasons which include the fear that census is used for tax imposition. Furthermore, some other parts of the country, religion and culture constitutes a hindrance to an effective population census as the women are not permitted to be presented for the exercise. These facts and others, such as dearth of enumerators with requisite technical knowhow, lack of access to some hinterlands, poor transportation network and communication facilities have fraught census exercise in Nigeria in the past. But the 1991 and 2006 censuses showed an improvement in what used to be the normal in the country as observers have given credit to the number of capable technical enumerators for this improvement (Obasanjo, 2018).

Regrettably, the contemporary reality is that these strengthened technical enumerators have derailed from their foundational role of aiding in the improvement of census exercise having been found culpable in falsifying population figures, not minding the implication of such actions on national planning and development. The gross irregularities evidenced in the widespread gap between

population estimate for the country and the actual census result by about thirty million people in the 1991 population exercise is just one point to their culpability (Brass 1991 cited in Idike & Eme. 2015). Besides, the point that several states dispute the figures allotted to them, the reliability of the census figure was called in question. The case of Lagos state that was allotted a figure that showed about 30% decrease to the one they conducted internally is another instance. The implication is that the nation seems to be dependent on estimated figure for national planning despite the huge amount of resources expended in population census exercises (Ogunlade, 2000).

This trend is a backward step to the days of colonial administration that relied heavily on estimates of the Nigerian population until the first attempt at a nationwide census in 1952-53, moving up to the highly debated and rejected 1962 census which was later redone in 1963; to the 1973, 1991, and 2006 population census. Given that Nigeria had her last census in 2006, it implies that by the virtue of the fact that census is normally done every ten years, Nigeria has thus been long overdue for another population census exercise since 2016 (Fawehinmi, 2018). Distressingly, paucity of required and adequate funds was given as reason for rescheduling the exercise for 2018, which also did not hold for same reason. Though some scholars and political analysts have begged to differ on the reason adduced above, rather they argue that the exercise did not hold sake of the leadership of the country which was at that time occupied with the politics of a general election in 2019. To support their argument, they went further to posit that for lack of funds, the 2019 general election would similarly not hold as the budgeting for the election exercise was bigger than that of the population census. Besides, the Nigerian government were only required to provide 51 percent of the budget while international donors were to provide the remaining 49% of the funding (UNFPA 2002).

This position has left some concerned Nigerians wondering if reliable population data needed for national planning and development is expendable, especially giving the developmental challenges confronting the country currently. As a follow up to this assertion, this paper seeks to appraise population census and national planning in Nigeria as a prerequisite for national development.

## **Population Census**

Population and census have attracted a lot of discourse. But it will be appropriate to understand the concept extensively. In the view of Idike and Eme (2015), census is considered as the process of retrieving, assembling and publishing demographic, social and economic data concerning all persons in a given geography at a particular time. This means that census is a regular and intentional head-count of all residents in a geographical space at a given time. Thus, the process indicates a systematic approach at gathering information/data on members of a particular community or society. Census is a technique or method used for accumulating statistical data and commonly used for research, business marketing and planning purposes. It is widely recognized that censuses are very vital for planning in any society.

Put differently, Obasanho (2018) conceptualizes census as an exercise that gives the actual headcounts the people of a particular area at a given point in time as well a special programme and organizational plan. In terms of purview, she further argued that census is the broadest statistical work of a national scale which allows for acquiring information about population quantity and characteristics. Such characteristics include the settlement of people within the territory of the country, the population density and composition by gender, age, nationality and socio-economic structure, level of education among others.

Some authors have use the concept to encapsulate the number of persons as well as their housing characteristics. Against this backdrop, insee.fr (2016) refers population census to the counting of the homes and the people residing in a given area with the intention to finding out the main characteristics of the people and their houses such as age, gender, professions, activity, characteristics of the households, daily travel and modes of transport as well as size and type of housing.

Fundamentally, what is anticipated in any census exercise is a concise, processed and published data on the size, composition, and location of the population. However, the United Nations (1998) did not only conceive population census as the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analysing and publishing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, at a specified time, to all persons in a country or in a well delimited part of a country. It went further to define the essential features of censuses as individual enumeration, universality within a defined territory, simultaneity and defined periodicity, which it recommended be taken at least every 10 years (The United Nations, 2008; CES 2010).

While census has long origin dated back to the Babylonians in 3800 B. C. E., nearly 6000 years ago, records hint that it was taken every six or seven years and counted the number of people and livestock as well as quantities of butter, honey, milk, wool and vegetables. One of the earliest documented censuses was taken in 500-499 B. C. E. by the Persian Empire's military for issuing land grants and taxation purposes (Kuhrt, 1995).

In today's Nigeria, the first census was conducted in 1866 specifically for Lagos. The second census was conducted in 1871, but after these census exercises, census became a decennial exercise for Northern and Southern Provinces of Nigeria and by extension the contemporary Nigeria (Idike & Eme 2015). As a decennial exercise, population census has both principles and characteristics listed by the United Nations as:

- (i) Enumeration of individuals separately as well as the individuals 'characteristics
- (ii) The census exercise covers every person residing in a defined territory. Within this frame, the housing census include every type of building and living quarters;

(iii) Each person and each type of building and living quarters is enumerated with respect to a well-defined point of time; and

(iv) Census is taken at regular defined intervals, usually every 10 years (United Nations, 2008).

Obasanho (2018) listed the basic principles of population census as: (1) covering the entire population; (2). Simultaneously conducted across the width and breadth of the country, (3) uses the same program (questionnaire, rules, methods, documentation) across the whole country; (4) done within a very short period of time through direct interviews, filling in questionnaires according to the respondent answers; (5) conducted during the season of the year when the movement of people is the smallest; and (6) every person in the country responds to the same questions.

With the principles and characteristics serving as a guide in conducting population census, data generated guide the federal government in taking decisions on the social policies and infrastructures to be implemented; the urban policies for transport, housing, cultural and sports facilities, school infrastructures and the installation of facilities for young people and senior citizens. The data generated are also useful to the private stakeholders in projecting where to cite businesses (insee.fr, 2016).

Even in the socialist countries, censuses are of enormous importance as data generated from the exercise serve as the foundation for state administration and for planning the development of the national economy and culture. According to measureevaluation.org, in many countries of the world, data from population census are quintessential for the allotment of elected political seats in government. This is because the number of elected officials for each governmental administrative unit is determined by the size of a given locale. In some countries, the allocation of government resources is based on data generated from census exercise. As a result, size of the population determines, in part, the amount of money that is provided by government for development efforts.

For planners, data from census exercises provide information on the age and sex distribution, as well as household composition and size, which are vital in determining the needs of different segments of the population and as such influences planning decisions making. This same data also helps to identify segments of the population that require different types of services and provides insights into family formation and housing needs. In the areas of housing, it helps to determine housing needs of the people of a polity. By providing information on the educational skills of the work force and also insights into the labour force of a given locale, census data helps in employment planning. Generally, the information generated via population censuses are used to develop economic development strategies (www.measureevaluation.org).

### History of Population Census Exercises in Nigeria

The history of population census exercises in Nigeria is well documented. This may be as a result of its importance to national development planning. Therefore, interests are keen on the history of census population in Nigeria perhaps because of the history of the country itself given the fact that the entity called Nigeria today was a conglomerate of different natives with their unique peculiarities (Nduba, Moses & Ofodu, 2020). These different natives were however, colonized and administered as one entity in 1914 under Lord Lugard (Okeke, Nduba & Akam, 2019). This concise background has a lot of impact on the documented history of census population in Nigeria today. According to Ezeah, Iyanda and Nwangwu, (2013), the first documented census in the entity called Nigeria was conducted by the British in 1866. Subsequently there were others censuses in 1871, 1896, 1901, 1911, 1921. These censuses were conducted in the Southern protectorate.

However, in 1952/1953 another census was held. This census was regarded as the first modern, national and carefully planned census in Nigeria. The principle of simultaneity was not followed or adopted, as the census enumeration was staggered. The census of Northern Nigeria was conducted between May and July 1952 while that of the West and Mid-West were conducted in December 1952 and January 1953 respectively. Census in the East was conducted from May to August, 1953. Some argued that the disruption of the Second World War made people suspicious of the intention of the exercise and therefore many people did not submit themselves for enumeration. This meant that the exercise was characterized by gross under enumeration.

The census included the Northern Protectorate with a total population figure of 31.6 million persons (www.Nigeriacensus-history.com). The 1952 census of Nigeria indicated that the Hausa-Fulani had the largest share of the population, and so they dominated the first post-colonial government set up after independence in 1960. But the result of the census and its aftermath on governance did not go down well with the entire country. Two years after independence, precisely in 1962, another census was conducted with the northerners accounting for only 30 percent of the population (Library of Congress, 1999). The result was rejected because the North had lost its majority share of the country's population even though the North's population went up from 16.5 million in the last census in 1952 to 22.5 million, but it was a paltry increase of 30%, when compared with the 200% increase in population in some parts of the East and 70% in general. Again, upward increase of up to 70% was recorded for the West (Fawehinmi, 2018). A fresh census was conducted the next year (1963).

In the exact words of Fawehinmi (2018), this time, an additional 8.5 million people were discovered in the north bringing the total to 31 million for the north (a figure higher than the population of every other country in Africa at the time) and 56 million for Nigeria as a whole. Even though this figure was widely thought to be substantially overstated, skewed and biased, it was nonetheless given official recognition and acceptance (<http://business.highbeam.com>). Critics contend that the 1963 population census were arrived at by negotiation rather than enumeration. The official recognition and acceptance given to the result resulted

in massive northern dominance in governance and developmental project in the country. The outcome was an accelerated ethnic tension that culminated in the Nigerian civil war that lasted till 1970 (Weeks, 2008).

Even after the war, tension continued trailing the result of the population census that gave massive influence to the northern part of Nigeria. This gave rise to another census in 1973 which was not published on the ground of deliberate falsification of the census figures for political and/or ethnic advantages and thus rejected by the government. But in 1991 another census was conducted and 88.5 million people were recorded. This figure was however below the 110 million people that many population experts had projected (Okolo, 1999).

This lends credence to the argument that the 1963 population census figure was inflated. However, the 1991 census result led to a whole lot of accusations and counter accusations about falsification and inflation of figures. Even the reported sex ratio of 101.3 was contested as it was found to defy world standard and expectation (Okeibunor, 1995). To salvage this situation that has lingered more than a decade, another census was conducted in March, 2006 and the result was provisionally given as 140 million Nigerians. Though the 140million figure result was a bit higher than the 134 million people projection made by the United Nation, the total population is not the issue per se but its regional (North and South) distribution because of its sensitivity in terms of political and developmental conviviality as population census figure is crucial in determining who gets what, where, when and how in Nigeria. But the census shows a virtually unchanged division [North-53.3 per cent versus South 46.7 per cent in 1991; 53.6 vs 46.4 in 2006 (Ezeah, et al 2013)].

The table below represents the historical antecedents of population census in Nigeria.

<b>S/N</b>	<b>YEAR</b>	<b>REMARK</b>
1	1886	Under the British Rule before amalgamation
2	1871	Under the British Rule before amalgamation
3	1896	Under the British Rule before amalgamation
4	1901	Under the British Rule before amalgamation
5	1911	Under the British Rule before amalgamation
6	1921	Under the British Rule after amalgamation
7	1952-53	Under the British Rule after amalgamation
8	1962	Rejected and re-conducted next year
9	1963	Contested but officially received and used
10	1973	Not accepted by government
11	1991	Officially accepted but highly contested
12	2006	Officially endorsed though keenly contested
13	2016	Projected but did not hold

### **National Planning**

National plan is usually a short, medium or long term blueprint of government designed to aid it in her policy to drive the state from a less favourable position to a more favourable position. As noted earlier, the time frame may be short (1-3 years), medium (3-5years) or long term (up to and upwards of 10 years). Similarly, it may be specific plan or a general one. Specific in terms of target area for instance health, infrastructure, security, unemployment, foreign trade, agriculture etc., or all encompassing. National planning is formulated by government agencies in centrally planned economies and by collaboration between government, industry and trade unions in mixed economies. (Collins Dictionary of Economics 4<sup>th</sup> Edition).

National planning entails determinations of direction, control and method of accomplishment of overall national objective for sustainable development and continued existence of such a nation. National planning must be directed and controlled towards achievement of National objectives, it involves processes which ensures that national policies and strategies are realized and development concerns of all levels of government within such country are fully integrated into the overall national development thrust (Onah, 2010).

Nigeria, has had a relatively long experience in national planning beginning with the Colonial Development Plan. Medium-term development plans and national rolling plans were also developed and implemented with mixed results (Obajike, 2019). Other major strategic initiatives – such as the Structural Adjustment Programme; the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy; the Strategy for Attaining the Millennium Development Goals; the 7-point Agenda; and vision 20:2020 – were not seen to have been effectively implemented and this has negatively affected the developmental stride yearned for in the country.

### **POPULATION CENSUS, NATIONAL PLANNING AND NIGERIA’S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Scholars and reports have studied the links between national population census and national planning and the focus of their analysis is that national population census is generally geared towards realization of national planning objectives which had been



described as dimensions of national development. In view of the Afolayan cited in Ikedinma (2020), national population census constitutes a vital cum important component of the resource base and the development potential of any country. This assertion is evident in the sense that there is growing recognition of the complexity of the relationship between development and population. Similarly, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (Former President of Nigeria) in 2006 noted that census is indispensable to the nation's quest for sustainable development (Obasanjo, 2006). From the foregoing assertions of Scholars, it evident that population census is a vital aspect of any nation; be developed or developing.

More so, taking into cognizance, the account of the increasing realization that population is a factor for planning and development, the Nigerian government has over the years expended and exerted much in order to achieve a reliable census (Bamgbose, 2009). Similarly, Measure evaluation report (n.d) claimed that population census plays a major role in the allocation of elected political seats in government. The number of elected officials for each governmental administrative unit is determined by the population size of a given locale. For some countries, the information is also used in the allocation of government resources. The size of the population determines, in part, the amount of money that is provided by government for development efforts. The same report also emphasized the importance of national population census on national planning, according to the report, census information is used in just about all planning decisions. Population census provides information on the age and sex distribution, in addition to household composition and size, all of which are vital in determining the needs of different segments of the population. The census of housing allows planners to assess changes in the quality of housing and related facilities and plan for future housing needs. In view of this assertion, national population census in Nigeria can be utilized towards solving her social demographic problems.

Scholars have also pointed out that national population census is a prerequisite to national planning and development. In the view of Odimayo and Zawadi (2021), population census plays an essential role in giving detailed information on the population density. The information obtained from the census assists the government to distribute resources, for example, areas densely populated get, as a rule, more resources than areas that are scarcely populated. Providing social amenities. Census data gives an idea of what kind of social amenities should be provided to particular areas, for example, hospitals, housing, water, electricity and others. The same scholars maintained that population census helps in determining the number of unemployed citizens and the standard of living of the citizens in the country. It helps to reveal the level of manpower, that is, people who are working in a country. If it is high, the economic development of the country is assured. From the above assertions, it is evident that population census can foster employment, help in making provision for the needs of the citizens; in essence, if population census is fairly conducted in Nigeria, it will serve as a planning mechanism towards national development because when the accurate figures of unemployed people are given, when the quality of lives are being measures, it enables the government know the areas that need to be developed.

Having established that population census is a method used to generate and accumulate statistical data about a population (Oliseh, Emeh, Idam & Nwokolo, 2020), the scholars also maintained that population census is vital as statistical data generated from population census is critical to the development of the area in question. This criticality of the vital statistics is the reason it was established that population census is not a haphazard exercise but a process that is systematically organised. Its organised approach led to the establishing of the national population commission by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1988 with the mandate of conducting a reliable national population census for the country. In essence, National Population Commission is by the law mandated to collect, analyse and disseminate population/demographic data in the country, as well as monitoring the country's population policy as an instrument for strategic planning and sustainable development. This the systematically organised data generated during the census is a vital tool towards national planning on Nigeria as they will serve as people's oriented input in the process of decision making in a way that ascertains national development.

Reports have also showed that national population census, if properly utilized can be used to ensure a good national planning and development. This is evident in Fact sheet (2017) that the Federal Government of Nigeria included the following main goals in its national Policy on Population for Sustainable Development; achieve accelerated economic growth, eradicate poverty, protect the environment, and provide high-quality social services by as well as; achieve balance between population growth and available resources. From report, it is evident that the aim of national population census is geared towards having a good national planning that is developmental in nature. This can be used to foster development in Nigerian society.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Presently, there is an increased awareness of population issues and the need to integrate population elements into development planning has become urgent in Nigeria. It is time for Nigerian government to recognize the importance of population factors in national development. Against this backdrop, this paper put forward the following specific recommendations:

1. The government should adhere to 10 years' interval in conducting census exercise in Nigeria.
2. Government should review the laws as they affect headcount in the country to empower the National Population Commission (NPC) to conduct future credible census exercise.
3. The NPC should strengthen the vital registration of birth, death and migration, and others forms of data capturing that will greatly enhance fair estimation and updating of population and household data in Nigeria national development.

4. NPC should re-train their staff on massive application of new technologies such as Satellite imagery, remote sensing techniques, machine readable forms, and other ICT devices used in conducting census.

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