

AKSU JOURNAL



of Social and
Management Sciences
(AJSMS)



Volume 2, No. 2 (September) 2019

Nigeria and the Challenge of Population Census: Rethinking a Modern System

Uwem Jonah Akpan,
Department of History & International Studies
University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.
uwemjakpan@gmail.com

&

Ekan David Akpan
Department of Public Administration
Akwa Ibom State University, Obio-Akpa Campus, Nigeria.
ekandu2002@yahoo.com

Abstract

Periodic population census was introduced in Nigeria by the British colonial authorities. Since then the outcome of all the respective census exercises in Nigeria has generated extensive controversy across some sections of the country. One of the reasons is that since census figures serve as a parameter for the distribution of the nation's socio-economic resources, the process has always been distorted and the figures inflated to favour certain sections of the country to enable them to dominate others. This study examines the challenges of population census in Nigeria since independence. It adopts a historical narrative methodology and gathered relevant data from the secondary sources. This paper posits that since the conventional method of census through enumeration is very expensive and has consistently not yielded acceptable outcome, the process should be modernised through the use of the quantum of biometric data base generated by banks, licensing offices, immigration, custom, examination bodies, telecommunication firms, national identity cards agency, school enrolment, voters cards etc., to aggregate and extrapolate the country's population. This will provide acceptable statistics without much controversy. Also the Nigerian polity should be restructured and balanced federalism adopted as the template of governance. This will engender the autonomy and viability of all the tiers of government and discourage the use of population as a variable for revenue.

Key words: Nigeria, population census, planning, development.

Introduction

The term "census" is a periodic official count of the population and endowed resources of a country for accurate and up-date-statistical information of a given political system. According to the United Nations, population census "is the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analysing, publishing and 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". Ekanem (1972) opines that for the need of accurate enumeration statistics in today's world, censuses are planned, financed and executed by nation-states to obtain profiles of their people including economic, demographic and social features as a basis for national administration and development. Population census is, perhaps, the most copious course of information about any nation. It reveals the basic demographic trends such as growth, internal distribution and alterations in age and sex structure of the population and contributes to knowledge of changes in occupational composition, standard of living, education, employment as well as group differentiation. The knowledge derived from census forms the basis for other forms of knowledge needed for drawing of samples for different types of surveys, either computation of birth rates, the making of actuarial tables and the analysis of economic development and business circles. Above all, census figures are essential for the evaluation of future trends and are thus indispensable to all of developing planning.

Given the above importance in development planning, the fact becomes obvious that in the absence of a reliable count in Nigeria since independence in 1960, a crucial input has been missing from the nation's development efforts. Nigeria's post-independence attempts to determine the numerical strength of her inhabitants has continuously failed to achieve the desired result because of the devious political mechanisms inherent in the polity. Parochial political imperatives have been used to distort the essence of census to the extent that the exercise is now viewed as a parameter of determining who gets what, who controls who and in fact who takes up the master's role and who plays the servant role (Onwuka, 2000)

The tendency has imbued in Nigerians mistrust and suspicion of one another. The numerical superiority of one section of the country over another is misinterpreted as an affront of domination and demotion to servitude and total marginalisation of others. Since census is the pivot upon which many political policies revolve, they stake virtually everything so as to mystify other sections of the country. Census, to this group of people, is nothing more than a calculus for resources and power-sharing among the states of the Federation.

A Brief History of Population Census in Nigeria

In Nigeria, early records of population data date back to 1866 when the first census was carried out in Lagos area. Censuses were later taken in 1869 and 1871 and decennially until 1931 (Ekanem, 1972). Census covering the whole country however, began in 1911, when the Northern and Southern Protectorates that made up Nigeria were not yet amalgamated. Subsequent censuses in the pre-independence period came up in 1921, 1931 and 1953. From Nigeria's independence in 1960 to date, the country has conducted censuses in 1962, 1963, 1973, 1991 and 2006 (Olorunfemi and Fashagba, 2014). Efforts at documenting the total population have often faced with many problems. Evidently, Nigeria's early censuses appeared not to have been adequately prepared for by government. For instance, the first two censuses conducted in 1921 and 1931, people were actually counted in few areas among Nigeria settlements. The majority of the people from most settlements were estimated from tax records. It is believed that the two censuses fell far short of the universal coverage and only in a few places were actual enumeration conducted. Apart from tax records, census enquiries were derived from ethnological and historical enquiries (Olorunfemi and Fashagba, 2014).

After World War II, the introduction of planned economic programmes made it imperative for the colonial administrators to have a more accurate knowledge of population in the country. However, to enable the Department of Statistics to handle the great quantity of data, it became necessary to conduct the next census at different times throughout the country. The census of Lagos was conducted in 1950-1951, that of the North in May to July 1952 and West and East in May to August 1953. The country's population was put at 30, 402, 0001, but lack of simultaneity in its

conduct considerably reduced its usefulness for extracting certain demographic information (Ekanem 1972). Out of the total population, the North was given 16,835,000 representing 55.4 percent of the total population. The East had 7, 215, 000 being 23.7 per cent of the total population, while the West had 6,085,000 showing 20.1 per cent of the total population. Lagos figure was put at 267,000 some 0.8 per cent. At the end, the North was bigger than the East, West and Lagos put together at 44.6 percent of the nation's population. The 1952/53 population census eventually assisted the North to consolidate its power and domination of the entire political system of Nigeria and was later shown in subsequent development in the country (Ojiako, 1981; Abia, 2008).

According to Ekanem (1972), data were collected on age, sex, occupations, tribes, literacy and religion. The age grouping adopted was as follows: under 2; 2-6; 7-14; 15-49; 50 and older. Such an age distribution, though then useful in the Nigerian situation, failed to conform to international standards and was not useful for demographic studies. The five occupational groupings adopted for males, agriculture/fishing, craftsmen, trading/clerical and others - were predetermined and concealed many important occupations. No information on migration was collected. Besides the timing and content, there was considerable suspicion about the motives for the census. Many Nigerians were reluctant to have their wives and children counted because they regarded the census as a plot to enable the tax-gatherers to collect heavier taxes. This was particularly true since in the past, in some parts of Nigeria, the more wives and children a man had, the wealthier he was deemed to be and the heavier the tax he paid. Others, more superstitious, believed that the census brought ill-luck, famine or other misfortune. Yet others regarded it as a means of spying on their property and mode of life, or providing names for military service.

Not only the process of the 1952/53 census but the results, attracted suspicion and controversy. The figures were contested mainly by Southern Nigerian politicians, particularly when it came to be used as an argument for giving Northern Nigeria 50 per cent representation in the federal legislature. It was freely alleged by Southern politicians that the British administrators had inflated the Northern population figures to

ensure that political power in the country remained with the Northern politicians, who were regarded as being more favourably disposed towards them (Ekanem, 1972).

The reluctance to allow census-taking gradually faded after 1952, when the regional governments were set up and people realised that parliamentary and Local Council representation, government amenities etc., were largely dependent on the recorded population. Some literate people became overzealous about the value of a census and were prepared to do anything, not only to enumerate all the people of their area but also if possible to engage in multiple counts. By October 1960, when Nigeria became independent, it had become evident that the information obtained from the 1952/53 censuses was out-of-date and in many cases unsatisfactory. Accordingly, a comprehensive programme was mounted for a census in May 1962 (Ekanem, 1972).

Post-Independence Population Census in Nigeria

The first post-independence exercise was conducted in 1962. The actual count took place between the 13th and 27th of May 1962. The restricted period overcame the lack of simultaneity which had been a major limitation of the 1952/53 census (Ekanem, 1972). As observed by Udoh (1964), this census differed in many respects from the earlier ones. For instance, a pre-census campaign was launched with the view of educating the people on its significance. Though it was entrusted to politicians, the census campaign was very successful. People not only ensured that they were not left out of the census but hundreds saw to it that they were counted at least twice. Moreover, the country at that time had become aware of the *raison d'etre* of census and had become more favourable to them. However, the great emphasis placed on the claim that the material development of an area as well as its number of allocated seats in Parliament would depend on its population was harmful in that it occasioned mass migration of people from their place of work to their villages. As a result of such "census migrations" the data for many districts was useless for the study of population movement, depopulation of rural areas, or the growth of urban centres.

Thus, it was the over-enthusiasm of the citizens with which 1962 population census in Nigeria had to contend. Because the census exercise was on the concurrent list, a Federal Census Office was created in 1961. While each Regional Ministry of Economic Planning had its own census office controlled by a Regional Census Officer, the Central Office co-ordinated federal and regional activities. Each Regional Census Office planned and organised the census in its own area, processed and analysed the figures and sent the results to the Central Office. In spite of all the publicity, training programmes and co-ordinated efforts of many Nigerians to make the census a success, the 1962 census figures were subjected to political influences and suspicions (Ekanem, 1972). The Federal Census Officer stated in his report that:

...the figures recorded throughout the greater part of Eastern Nigeria during the present census are false and have been inflated. The figures for the five divisions of Awka, Brass, Degema, Eket and Opobo, which have recorded increases of (100-120 percent), can certainly be rejected out of hand (Ekanem, 1972: 44).

About Western Nigeria, he also noted that: "...of the 62 census districts...provisional total figures are available for only five, due, in my view, to weakness in the census organisation in the region (Ekanem, 1972: 44). When the Northerners heard that the population of the South was slightly higher than their own, a supplementary count was made which resulted in an addition of nine million people to their figures. According to Olusanya (1989), the provisional results from the census given by the Federal Census Officer, Mr. J. Warren, indicated that populations of the North, East, West and Lagos increased respectively from 18.8 million to 22.5 million, 7.2 million to 12.2 million, 6 million to 10.2 million, 0.267 million to 0.675 million between 1952/53 and 1962, thus giving a total 1962 population of 45.7 million.

The share of the North in this total figure was a little less than 50 percent. It should be noted that in the 1921, 1931 and 1952/53 exercises, the North constituted respectively 57, 51 and 55 percent of the total population. In other words, the 1962 population of the South was a little more than that of

the North. It was probably because of this startling revelation that the North had a supplementary count earlier mentioned and came up with an additional figure of nine million, thus, bringing its total population to 31.5 million and its share of what would have been the new total (54.7 million) to about 57 percent. At the same time, the East was reported as having discovered what was numerically an unimportant village of 20,000 inhabitants which did not reflect in the 1953 records. These events led to violent disagreements, and it was widely feared that they might lead to civil disorder. Eventually, the 1962 census was cancelled in February 1963.

Harold Smith, a former colonial officer in Nigeria in his expose of the political gerrymandering of the British colonial masters said that:

The massive power of the North rested on the census figures produced by British officials in the early 1950s. All attempts to confirm these census figures have proved a failure and this has become the bitterly contested issue in Nigerian politics. After the census in 1962, it was found that the Northern region no longer has a numerical majority over the rest of the country combined. The NPC leaders found these results unacceptable and cancelled the results. The 1962 census returns were never officially published. In a fresh census in 1963, the NPC improved on its 1962 figures. If Southerners had thought that the new figures would end the Northern absolute majority they were to be bitterly disappointed (Abia, 2006: 327-328).

The 1963 Population Census

Following the call for the cancellation of May, 1962 census by the cross section of Nigerians, a fresh exercise was announced to hold on 5th to 8th of November 1963. Some of the measures adopted to ensure credibility included the following: first, the census officer must be a Nigerian and must have his own inspectors; second, the presence of United Nations

Thus, it was the over-enthusiasm of the citizens with which 1962 population census in Nigeria had to contend. Because the census exercise was on the concurrent list, a Federal Census Office was created in 1961. While each Regional Ministry of Economic Planning had its own census office controlled by a Regional Census Officer, the Central Office co-ordinated federal and regional activities. Each Regional Census Office planned and organised the census in its own area, processed and analysed the figures and sent the results, to the Central Office. In spite of all the publicity, training programmes and co-ordinated efforts of many Nigerians to make the census a success, the 1962 census figures were subjected to political influences and suspicions (Ekanem, 1972). The Federal Census Officer stated in his report that:

...the figures recorded throughout the greater part of Eastern Nigeria during the present census are false and have been inflated. The figures for the five divisions of Awka, Brass, Degema, Eket and Opobo, which have recorded increases of (100-120 percent), can certainly be rejected out of hand (Ekanem, 1972: 44).

About Western Nigeria, he also noted that: "...of the 62 census districts...provisional total figures are available for only five, due, in my view, to weakness in the census organisation in the region (Ekanem, 1972: 44). When the Northerners heard that the population of the South was slightly higher than their own, a supplementary count was made which resulted in an addition of nine million people to their figures. According to Olusanya (1989), the provisional results from the census given by the Federal Census Officer, Mr. J. Warren, indicated that populations of the North, East, West and Lagos increased respectively from 18.8 million to 22.5 million, 7.2 million to 12.2 million, 6 million to 10.2 million, 0.267 million to 0.675 million between 1952/53 and 1962, thus giving a total 1962 population of 45.7 million.

The share of the North in this total figure was a little less than 50 percent. It should be noted that in the 1921, 1931 and 1952/53 exercises, the North constituted respectively 57, 51 and 55 percent of the total population. In other words, the 1962 population of the South was a little more than that of

the North. It was probably because of this startling revelation that the North had a supplementary count earlier mentioned and came up with an additional figure of nine million, thus, bringing its total population to 31.5 million and its share of what would have been the new total (54.7 million) to about 57 percent. At the same time, the East was reported as having discovered what was numerically an unimportant village of 20,000 inhabitants which did not reflect in the 1953 records. These events led to violent disagreements, and it was widely feared that they might lead to civil disorder. Eventually, the 1962 census was cancelled in February 1963.

Harold Smith, a former colonial officer in Nigeria in his expose` of the political gerrymandering of the British colonial masters said that:

The massive power of the North rested on the census figures produced by British officials in the early 1950s. All attempts to confirm these census figures have proved a failure and this has become the bitterly contested issue in Nigerian politics. After the census in 1962, it was found that the Northern region no longer has a numerical majority over the rest of the country combined. The NPC leaders found these results unacceptable and cancelled the results. The 1962 census returns were never officially published. In a fresh census in 1963, the NPC improved on its 1962 figures. If Southerners had thought that the new figures would end the Northern absolute majority they were to be bitterly disappointed (Abia, 2006: 327-328).

The 1963 Population Census

Following the call for the cancellation of May, 1962 census by the cross section of Nigerians, a fresh exercise was announced to hold on 5th to 8th of November 1963. Some of the measures adopted to ensure credibility included the following: first, the census officer must be a Nigerian and must have his own inspectors; second, the presence of United Nations

Advisory Team; third, the counting should be by sight only (in previous censuses, this was not compulsory) (Dudley, 1968).

One of the most important measures was concerned with verification. In order to avoid inaccurate procedure and to ensure that the total of 200,000 enumerators in the regions produce accurate figures, mixed team of 6,000 inspectors were sent into each region by the other regions. The counting during the 1963 census was compressed into four days, because of allegations that people moved from place to place in the previous census and thus were counted twice or thrice. As before, houses were to be marked with an all-weather sticker once enumerated. Because of the controversy and because of strict pre-cautions, the situation was much more tensed than at the previous census. Regional Governments, now fully aware of the importance of the count had been mobilizing to ensure maximum attendance. According to Dudley (1966), the results of the November census were announced in an interim report of the Census Board on the 24th of February 1964 as follows:

S/N	Regions	
1	Northern Region	29, 77, 986
2	Eastern Region	12, 388, 646
3	Western Region	10, 278, 500
4	Mid-Western Region	2,533, 337
5	Lagos (Federal Capital)	675,337
	Total	55,653,821

Source: Dudley, 1966

The regional figures revealed that the Northern Nigeria had more than half of the federation's population. In a reaction, the Premier of the Eastern Region, Dr. Okpara, announced on the 28th of February 1964, that his "Government completely rejects the census figures". He declared that the census announcement had disclosed "inflation...of such astronomical proportions that the figures obtained, taken as a whole, are

worse than useless". Dr. Okpara rejected the possibility of further checks and called on the United Nations enumerators to assist in a new census. Dr. Okpara's criticisms were supported by the Mid-West Premier, Chief Dennis Osadebay (Leader of the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens), who similarly rejected the census figures, and by the Action Group (the former governing party in the Western Region). On the other hand the results were supported by the Government of the Western Region led by Chief Akintola who said that "it would be well-nigh impossible to improve on the 1963 census" and that "the figures obtained have been subjected to rigorous checks and were accepted after the most careful scrutiny".

The Premier of the Northern Region, Alhaji Bello, maintained that the preliminary figures had undergone certain tests, which had been carefully considered and agreed upon by the governments, and had been supervised in a strictly impartial way by the UN demographic experts before being fully released. He added that an analysis of the preliminary figures showed the percentage increase in the Northern Region over the 1952 census as the lowest of all the regions. (The percentage increase for the Northern Region over the 1952 figures was 70 per cent, compared with 71 per cent in the Eastern Region, 110 per cent in the West and Mid-West Region together, 153 per cent in Lagos and 77 percent national average (Ojiako, 1981).

It is worthy of note that final figure of the 1963 census were to be used as basis for Federal Parliamentary elections later in 1964. Accordingly, in July 1964 the National Electoral Commission announced far reaching changes in the numbers of federal members representing each administrative division based on the figures of the 1963 census. The main changes indicated that the North reduced from 174 to 167, the East reduced from 73 to 70 and the Mid-West from 15 to 14. The West increased from 47 to 57 and Lagos from 2 to 3. The whole country was delimited into 312 constituencies, and each constituency was based on population quota of 178,000 for the 30th of December general election (Dudley, 1968). The election was being contested in all seats by two main alliances of political parties, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) led by the Northern People's Congress, governing party of Northern Nigeria, which had more

than half of the country's population and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). Most important party in UPGA was the NCNC, governing party in the Eastern and Mid-Western Regions led by Dr. Michael Okpara. The second main partner was the Action Group. It is important to state that the nature and pattern of these alliances was influenced by the results of the 1963 population census (Dudley, 1968; Abia, 2008).

Abia (2008) notes that because of the fact that population census significantly determines who gets what, when and how, Nigerian politician all schemed to ensure that their region and ethnic groups have high census figures to enable them control the federal resources. This would enable them to appropriate a disproportionate share of these resources, since the Federal Government is responsible for raising the bulk of the country's revenues and for apportioning them. As far as the plan was concerned, Northern control of the Federal Government (as a result of the manipulation of censuses) had been beneficial to the North. A large proportion of development spending was concentrated in the region. The Kanji Dam, estimated at cost 136.3 Million, was located there; representing more than 10 percent of the Federal Government's total spending. Even though enough power could have been generated at less than one fifth of the cost of the dam by using natural gas. But the gas was located in the South. Almost all of the 59.4 Million Naira allocated for defence was spent in the North. Apart from the federal institutions such as the University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos, including their teaching hospitals, most of the 78.4 Million Naira allocated for health and education went to the North. In 1963/1964, the North received more than 50 percent of the federal disbursement for agricultural expansion of the 20 Million Naira allocated for this expansion; 8 Million Naira was disbursed that year. The shares of the various regions were as follows: North, 4.4 Million naira, East 2.2 Million Naira and West 1.4 Million Naira.

The 1973 Population Census

The 1973 population census was planned and executed with the expectation that it would be less controversial than the 1962/1963 counts. These hopes were anchored on some premises: first, Nigeria had been

under military rule, and members of the government were mainly top military officers who were used to unified command. The question of favouring one state or ethnic group to the advantage of another, therefore, hardly arose; second, political parties had gone with the First Republic in the military *coup d'etat* of 1966 and no election was in view. Third, the Civil War ended three years before and the country was per-occupied with reconstruction. Fourth, in May 1967, 12 States had been created out of the former four regions so that the North-South problem was presumably irrelevant. Also, during the census exercise, respondents' thumbs were marked with so-called indelible ink, thus, making it difficult for persons to be counted more than once (Olusanya, 1989).

The census was conducted in November 1973. The provisional figures indicated what appeared (to the uninitiated) to be a staggering total population of 79.76 million for Nigeria. All six Northern States, except Benue-Plateau, recorded growth rates around 4 percent per annum or more during the 1963-73 inter-censal period. In the South, Lagos, Mid-Western, East-Central and South-Eastern States recorded growth rates of 0.62 percent, 1.1 percent and 0.51 per cent respectively. The low or negative rates of growth in the three Southern states was puzzling and most probably due to gross inefficiency on the part of the enumerators considering the fact that neither enumerators nor the state officials would wilfully "deflate" their states' populations. A less plausible explanation might be in terms of "census migration" of indigenes of Northern states, especially Kano, North-Eastern and Kwara States, the only three that recorded unusual growth rates of 6.4 per cent-6.8 per cent; that is, they might have returned to their home areas for the purpose of census. This, certainly, could not have reduced the growth rates to negative since it would imply the reduction of the 1963 populations of South-Eastern and Western States by 66,000 and 568,000 respectively. The overall growth rates for Nigeria for the period (3.6 per cent) was not unusual in the African context (Olusanya, 1989).

The census results were declared acceptable by the Federal Military Government of General Yakubu Gowon in spite of loud protest as usual. The government also announced that a post-enumeration survey, as it was conventional in census-taking, would be carried out to rectify any

under military rule, and members of the government were mainly top military officers who were used to unified command. The question of favouring one state or ethnic group to the advantage of another, therefore, hardly arose; second, political parties had gone with the First Republic in the military *coup d'etat* of 1966 and no election was in view. Third, the Civil War ended three years before and the country was per-occupied with reconstruction. Fourth, in May 1967, 12 States had been created out of the former four regions so that the North-South problem was presumably irrelevant. Also, during the census exercise, respondents' thumbs were marked with so-called indelible ink, thus, making it difficult for persons to be counted more than once (Olusanya, 1989).

The census was conducted in November 1973. The provisional figures indicated what appeared (to the uninitiated) to be a staggering total population of 79.76 million for Nigeria. All six Northern States, except Benue-Plateau, recorded growth rates around 4 percent per annum or more during the 1963-73 inter-censal period. In the South, Lagos, Mid-Western, East-Central and South-Eastern States recorded growth rates of 0.62 percent, 1.1 percent and 0.51 per cent respectively. The low or negative rates of growth in the three Southern states was puzzling and most probably due to gross inefficiency on the part of the enumerators considering the fact that neither enumerators nor the state officials would wilfully "deflate" their states' populations. A less plausible explanation might be in terms of "census migration" of indigenes of Northern states, especially Kano, North-Eastern and Kwara States, the only three that recorded unusual growth rates of 6.4 per cent-6.8 per cent; that is, they might have returned to their home areas for the purpose of census. This, certainly, could not have reduced the growth rates to negative since it would imply the reduction of the 1963 populations of South-Eastern and Western States by 66,000 and 568,000 respectively. The overall growth rates for Nigeria for the period (3.6 per cent) was not unusual in the African context (Olusanya, 1989).

The census results were declared acceptable by the Federal Military Government of General Yakubu Gowon in spite of loud protest as usual. The government also announced that a post-enumeration survey, as it was conventional in census-taking, would be carried out to rectify any

errors in the provisional results. However, this had not been done before another military government, led by General Murtala Mohammed came into power in July 1975. The regime cancelled the census for no good reasons other than it was controversial, and directed that, for planning purposes, the government should continue to use the 1963 census figures which were then 12 years old. In this respect, Olusanya opines that:

The demographic implications of this government directive as well as the retention of the 1965-66 recommended growth rate of 2.5 *per annum* were two: the age composition of the population had remained the same in all states in spite of high rates of inter-state migration during the period; both the birth and death rate had not changed for 12 years. While the assumption implicit in the latter case was likely to have been valid for the birth rate because of its obduracy to change, it was untenable for the death rate which is easily influenced downwards by mere improvements in environmental sanitation. It follows, therefore, that the assumption of an unchanging growth was also unrealistic. It will be recalled that the Second National Plan gave two of the demographic characteristics of Nigeria at the time as declining morality and rising fertility which implied an increasing rate of growth inconsistent with the assumption of a 2.5 percent growth rate for 12 years (Olusanya, 1989: 236).

The 1991 National Population Census

In April 1988, the National Population Commission was inaugurated with a three year mandate to conduct a national population census with the hope of laying a solid basis for a new social economic and political order which the military administration headed by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida envisaged to build. The Political Bureau of 1985, had in its

recommendation, observed that the conduct of an acceptable national head count was one of the unresolved issues in the nation, which posed a great danger to national stability. It accordingly recommended that the Military Government must organise a national head count before handing over power to a civilian administration so that an enduring basis would be laid for the Third Republic (Abia, 2008).

According to Abia (2008), in an attempt by the NPC to win and retain the confidence of the people so as to ensure the acceptability of the census result, the following arrangements were made: (i) the acquisition of up-to-date maps leading to the demarcation of the entire country into 210,00 enumeration areas using topographical and cadastral maps, aerial photographs and spot satellite mosaics, to ensure complete coverage of the country, (ii) qualified professional staff were recruited and trained at every level of the Commission set-up, (iii) experts within and outside the country were consulted and their opinion sought on major aspects of the census exercise from time to time, (iv) intensive training conducted at various levels for all categories of census functionaries, (v) questionnaires and other forms were designed and tested during three pre-test exercises and trial census, (vi) a massive public enlightenment programme, (vii) special arrangements made for the enumeration of special populations such as women in *Pudah*, nomads etc., (viii) a three-day restriction of the movement of persons was imposed to avoid census immigration, (ix) a *defacto* method of enumeration was employed throughout the country to ensure that people had to be seen before they were counted.

The census figures, like the previous ones, again generated mutual suspicion, and the allegations and accusations equally increased. For example, there was allegation that long-roads of people from neighbouring West African countries, especially from Niger Republic were being transported into the Northern part of the country, there was mass census migration, women in *Pudah* had been counted without having actually been seen by the enumerators. The population of 88,514, 501 compared with a total of 55,620,268 in 1963 revealed that Northern part of the country had more than half of the federation's population, being therefore entitled to have more federal electoral constituencies than the South combined and consequently enjoying more resources from the centre.

errors in the provisional results. However, this had not been done before another military government, led by General Murtala Mohammed came into power in July 1975. The regime cancelled the census for no good reasons other than it was controversial, and directed that, for planning purposes, the government should continue to use the 1963 census figures which were then 12 years old. In this respect, Olusanya opines that:

The demographic implications of this government directive as well as the retention of the 1965-66 recommended growth rate of 2.5 *per annum* were two: the age composition of the population had remained the same in all states in spite of high rates of inter-state migration during the period; both the birth and death rate had not changed for 12 years. While the assumption implicit in the latter case was likely to have been valid for the birth rate because of its obduracy to change, it was untenable for the death rate which is easily influenced downwards by mere improvements in environmental sanitation. It follows, therefore, that the assumption of an unchanging growth was also unrealistic. It will be recalled that the Second National Plan gave two of the demographic characteristics of Nigeria at the time as declining morality and rising fertility which implied an increasing rate of growth inconsistent with the assumption of a 2.5 percent growth rate for 12 years (Olusanya, 1989: 236).

The 1991 National Population Census

In April 1988, the National Population Commission was inaugurated with a three year mandate to conduct a national population census with the hope of laying a solid basis for a new social economic and political order which the military administration headed by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida envisaged to build. The Political Bureau of 1985, had in its

recommendation, observed that the conduct of an acceptable national head count was one of the unresolved issues in the nation, which posed a great danger to national stability. It accordingly recommended that the Military Government must organise a national head count before handing over power to a civilian administration so that an enduring basis would be laid for the Third Republic (Abia, 2008).

According to Abia (2008), in an attempt by the NPC to win and retain the confidence of the people so as to ensure the acceptability of the census result, the following arrangements were made: (i) the acquisition of up-to-date maps leading to the demarcation of the entire country into 210,00 enumeration areas using topographical and cadastral maps, aerial photographs and spot satellite mosaics, to ensure complete coverage of the country, (ii) qualified professional staff were recruited and trained at every level of the Commission set-up, (iii) experts within and outside the country were consulted and their opinion sought on major aspects of the census exercise from time to time, (iv) intensive training conducted at various levels for all categories of census functionaries, (v) questionnaires and other forms were designed and tested during three pre-test exercises and trial census, (vi) a massive public enlightenment programme, (vii) special arrangements made for the enumeration of special populations such as women in *Pudah*, nomads etc., (viii) a three-day restriction of the movement of persons was imposed to avoid census immigration, (ix) a *defacto* method of enumeration was employed throughout the country to ensure that people had to be seen before they were counted.

The census figures, like the previous ones, again generated mutual suspicion, and the allegations and accusations equally increased. For example, there was allegation that long-roads of people from neighbouring West African countries, especially from Niger Republic were being transported into the Northern part of the country, there was mass census migration, women in *Pudah* had been counted without having actually been seen by the enumerators. The population of 88,514, 501 compared with a total of 55,620,268 in 1963 revealed that Northern part of the country had more than half of the federation's population, being therefore entitled to have more federal electoral constituencies than the South combined and consequently enjoying more resources from the centre.

The 2006 Population Census

The census would have been conducted since 2001, but it was shifted to 2002 and then postponed indefinitely. A total of 140,431,790 people were enumerated. One of the areas of contention in the exercise was the omission of data on religion and ethnicity. Some analysts were of the opinion that the omission was targeted at denying some ethnic and religious groups in the country who believe they are in the majority the benefit of their high population. But the authorities remained adamant till the end. The Chairman of the National Population Commission (NPC), Mr. Samaila Makama, insisted that the inclusion of data on ethnicity and religion in the census data could lead to a break-up of Nigeria. During the 2006 census, Nigerians in many parts of the country were under restrictive orders which requested them to stay at home to be counted. Even some think tanks and intelligentsia, especially from the Eastern part of the country spent the better part of the preceding week appealing to their people to travel back to their villages in the east to be counted. But the Governors, especially of Lagos and Ogun States, did appeal to all residents in their states to stay back and be counted in their cities of residence. Beyond the appeal was the subtle threat of the Ogun State government that residents of the state may be asked to produce proof that they were counted during the exercise before they can enjoy certain privileges (Abia, 2006; Olayinka and Fashagba, 2014).

In the census of 2006, Kano State, despite the fact that Jigawa State was carved out of it, recorded 9.4 million, while Lagos State occupied the second position with 9.1 million. In many states of the federation including Kano, Lagos, Kaduna and Oyo, the results were challenged in the Census Tribunal. The 9.1 million census result released by the National Population Commission for Lagos was seriously contested. In fact, the then Lagos State Governor, Senator Ahmed Tinubu said that he was prepared to conduct another head-count for the state. Records from various sources present substantial reason why one would disbelieve the result given by the NPC was an under count. Indeed, the figures of the many Northern states appeared inflated, perhaps to maintain the status quo socially, economically and politically. In terms of cost, the exercise gulped about 40 million Naira (Olayinka and Fashagba, 2014).

Challenges of Census Administration in Nigeria

Abia (2006), Olayinka and Fashagba (2014) have pointed out some of the challenges of census administration in Nigeria. They include: (i) excessive state influence and state loyalties. (ii) organisational and managerial issues (iii) weak technological base (iv) inadequate funding (v) extreme politicisation of the exercise (this relates to political allocation of seats, sharing of national wealth, creation of new states etc.).

Indeed, in many parts of Nigeria, during the census exercise, each state virtually conducted its own census without regard to the need of uniformity. This has been at variance with international best practices. On organisational and managerial issues, it should be noted that most censuses in Nigeria were poorly organised and were conducted by people who lacked requisite skills. The skilled manpower needed in the country for data collection, processing, analysing and evaluating were inadequate. Normally, data collected by the enumerators are usually filtered through adequate processing and thereafter compared with generated data from other sources. On the contrary, in Nigeria, the data are publicised without adequate processing. Perhaps, this explains why the 1973 census returned for the Northern states, figures that were too high and far more than their enumerated figure. The issue of weak technology is another crucial matter. In the 1960s, cartographic maps used in census exercise were obsolete because they were drawn with traditional method. In some cases the boundaries overlap, consequently, several settlements were not covered owing to misleading cartographical information. Besides, some important instruments used for data collection in the past censuses were structurally faulty. Also inadequate funding has been a major challenge since census requires huge amount of money for planning and execution. The 2006 census exercise gulped about 40 million Naira. This makes many developing countries to depend on foreign aid in financing their censuses. Political issues also led to the falsification of figures. Each section of the country makes effort to inflate the outcome since this is used in the allocation of political seats, creation of new states and local government areas and national revenue sharing.

The Nexus Between Population Census and National Development in Nigeria

As pointed earlier, there is a crucial nexus between population and effective planning. However, Nigeria does not have an accurate picture of the population. It only relies on contentious and reliable figures that are being bandied by some local and international sources. For instance, in the early part of 2018, the Director-General of the National Population Commission, Ghali Bello revealed that Nigeria's population was nearing 200 million, with a growth rate of 3.2 per cent. Thereafter, Eze Duruiheoma, another Chairman of the National Population Commission came up with another population projection of 198 million. He explained that Nigeria ranks as the seventh most populous nation in the world. According to him, the annual urban population growth rate was about 6.5 per cent (The Guardian, August 8, 2019).

In 2017, the National Bureau of Statistics estimated the nation's population at 193.3 million in 2017. However, in 2016, the World Bank estimated Nigeria's population to be 186 million. Also, the United Nations in 2017 put Nigeria's population at 180 million with a growth rate of 2.7 per cent. If the base population from which the estimates are made were correct, each of these figures would not be questionable. It should be added that in 2018, the United Nations Population Fund stated that Nigeria's population had risen to 201 million. It is on the basis of the frightening growth rate that the World Population prospect recently predicted that by 2050, Nigeria would become the third most populous country in the world with an estimated population of 410 million. By that time, Nigeria would have overtaken the United States. In other words, it would have more than doubled its population 32 years from now, becoming the third most populous country on earth by then, just behind India. This is doubly perilous especially as the oil-dependent economy, which has sustained the excessive procreation, is, however in tatters (The Punch, April 4, 2019 and The Guardian, May 10, 2019).

The former Minister of Health, Dr. Isaac Adewole, stated in 2018 that Nigeria has a birth rate of 3.2 percent. The consequence is that Africa's most populous country has grown to become the seventh largest country on earth. Only China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil and

Pakistan - in that order - have larger populations than Nigeria as of 2018. Currently, Nigeria is unable to support its population. While the population is growing alarmingly, the economy, as noted above, is declining sharply. According to the UN data, in 2014, the rebased economy had a GDP of 568 billion Dollars. With recession still hunting it, the economy diminished to 375.8 billion Dollars in 2017. Indeed, this was just 0.61 per cent of the global GDP. In contrast, Nigeria's population is 2.43 percent of the global population of 7.6 billion. Clearly, there is a gross mismatch between the economy and the rising population. A new report issued in July 2019 by Brookings Institution stated that 88 million of Nigerian people have fallen into extreme poverty, from 80 million a few months earlier. Thus, Nigeria remains the "poverty capital of the world". The NBS states that youth unemployment as at June 2019 stood at 52.65 per cent; 13.2 million children - the highest in the world - of school age are not receiving education. These distortions remain as fuel to prevailing enormous social tensions, particularly the Boko Haram Islamist insurgency, kidnapping/banditry, cultism, oil militancy and herdsmen terrorism. "The problems of poverty and attendant deficits in human development indices become more significant because the nation's population continues to grow (The Punch, April 4, 2019).

Over the years, the government has not taken population management seriously. To stave off disaster, government must deal with the problem scientifically. National development planning is normally a major pre-occupation of leaders even in global context. Those in authorities put these strategic plans on priority list on assuming office so that they can determine what needs to be done to cater for the needs of his people. It is impossible to provide for a people whose population figures are in the realm of speculation. Ironically, what obtains in Nigeria is near-total blindness to the importance of taking stock of how many people, for instance, have a claim to the fair share of the country's resources. Since 1963, Nigeria has premised its planning for development on mere guess work. It assumed generally that the population was over 100 million. The United Nations guess in 1987 that it was 87 million. The World Bank and the Nigerian Government projected 106.2 and 112.3 respectively (Guardian, 10th May 2019).

The last census was conducted in 2006 and was far from being a flawless

exercise. Many states, particularly Lagos, contested the figures credited to it by the NPC. Nigerians do not know exactly how many they are because population is politicised in the country because it is the basis for sharing the national revenue every month at the centre. The more populated a section of the country claims, the more resources are allocated to it. That has made accurate head-count almost impossible as figures are curiously doctored by people with vested interests. The result is that there is no reliable population figure on which to base development planning. This is a great challenge to national development especially on matters of human capital (Guardian, 10th May 2019).

Countries that have large population – such as China, India and the United States – are not bothered about the numbers because they engage in a consistent effort towards the development of the human capital. Nigeria should follow the example of these countries. This is why authorities at all levels and tiers of government should not forget robust investment in quality education. Without concomitant quality in education, the huge population will only trigger an unsafe society where sundry bandits, insurgents, abductors and even cyber-criminals will lead to huge defence budgets and curious security votes at all times (Guardian, 10th May 2019).

Rethinking Modern Methods

A 10-year interval remains the global best practice approved by the United Nations for the conduct of head count. Since its return to democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria has only conducted census in 2006, the next should have been in 2016. However, failure to undertake the strategic national exercise was attributed to some contending issues especially the preparations for the 2019 general elections. It should be noted that with two years down the line, the nation is definitely behind schedule and needs to start strategic and effective planning without any delay.

There are modern methods of gathering accurate population data which the National Population Commission should adopt in the next national head count. While census enumeration is the traditional method, it might be imprudent to subscribe to any census at this critical time for the mere fact that it would amount to a waste of time and resources. Rather than

embarking on another wasteful census that will likely end up in controversy, the NPC should work on the quantum of biometric data base that has been gathered by banks, licensing offices, immigration, custom, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), West African Examination Council (WAEC), telecommunication firms, national identity cards agency, school enrolments, birth and death registrations, voter cards and the various vital statistics should be aggregated and used to extrapolate the country's population (The Guardian, 8 August 2019).

Aggregating the data and extrapolating it will not present problem using advanced computer software. Nigeria needs statistical estimate of the population based on concrete data of available human beings. This will be a reliable national population census without an eye on politics of revenue and power sharing. Above all, Nigeria should stop the use of population as the basis for sharing resources. With federalism, sections of the country would be free to bloat their population if they want, and create as many local government councils as they wish. This should be within the context of subsidiarity – an organising principle that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority.

Conclusion

The number, size and dynamics of population together with its spatial distribution are imperative for planning purposes. In the developed parts of the world, censuses regularly take place to provide the raw data needed for various governmental planning. However, in most developing countries, particularly Nigeria, where ironically, the matter and distribution of population is equally, if not most essential, it has not been possible to have regular and reliable censuses (Olorunfemi and Fashagba, 2014).

The colonial policy of divide and rule encouraged ethnic sentiments among Nigerians. It seized every available opportunity to spread the myth and propaganda that Nigerians were separated from each other by great distance, different history and traditions. The encouragement of ethnicity and sentiments was reflected structurally by the administrative systems of indirect rule and regionalisation. The colonial administration

favoured the Northerners in their policies. The first such attempt was the manipulation of population census in view of the nexus between it and revenue allocation and population representation. This therefore resulted in the inflation of census figures in favour of the North on the basis that since the North was bigger geographically than the South, it should be assumed that it is more populated. The enormous preponderance of the North which has colonial imprint has become one of the factors that has undermined the viability of a balanced federation. The above background completely influenced all population censuses conducted in the country before independence by the British colonial authorities and the post independence (Abia, 2006, Akpan, 2017).

The controversy associated with national head counts can be linked to many factors, particularly the traditional enumeration method. Nigeria is at present facing severe security challenges. For instance, a reasonable part of the North-eastern section of the country has been ravaged by the Boko Haram insurgency. Other parts like Zamfara and Jigawa states are under security threat. Moreover, the heinous activities of some Fulani herdsmen pose serious threat to successful census exercise. This therefore calls for the introduction of possible digital modern methods of gathering accurate population data using the data base that has been gathered by banks, examination bodies, schools, immigration etc. This will be more cost effective and less controversial. Restructuring of the polity on the basis of balanced federalism where the respective tiers of government are granted autonomy to be viable will help to de-politicise the issues that relate to census. On that basis, census will be primarily viewed as a tool of socio-economic planning and development.

References

- Abia, V.B.E. (2008). *Understanding Nigerian Government and Politics*. Lagos: Gofaflesh Publications.
- Adamu, S.O. (1989). "Population and Planning in Nigeria". *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty-Years. Volume IV, Government and Public Policy*. Tamuno, T.N. and tанда, J.A. (Eds.). Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd.
- Aluko, S.A. (1965). "How Many Nigerians? An Analysis of Nigeria's Census Problems". *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 3,

No. 3.

Berselaar, D. (2004). *Establishing the Facts: P.A. Talbot and the 1921 Census of Nigeria*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Ekanem, I.I. (1972). *1963 Nigeria Census: a Critical Appraisal*. Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation.

Eyo, L. (2018). "Nigerian Literature and the English Language in the Task of Nation-Building: Revisiting Chinua Achebe's Vexed Issue of Leadership." *63 Inaugural Lecture of the University of Uyo*.

Forsyth, F. (1977). *The Making of an African legend. The Biafra Story*. England: Penguin Books.

Holy Bible (II Samuel 24), (Luke 21: 1-3) King James Version

Mimiko, F.M.O. (2006). *Census in Nigeria: The Politics and the Imperative of Depoliticisation for Sustainable Democracy*". *Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria*. Ojo, Emmanuel (Ed.). Ibadan: John Archers Limited.

Ojiako, J. (1981). *Nigeria: Yesterday, Today And...?*. Onitsha: Africana Educational Publishers (Nig.). Ltd.

Olusanya, P.O. (1989). "Population and Development Planning in Nigeria". *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty-Years. Volume IV, Government and Public Policy*.

Olurunfemi, J.F. and Fashagba, I. (2014). "Population Census Administration in Nigeria". *Understanding Government and Politics in Nigeria*. Ajayi, R. and Fashagba, J.O. (Eds.). Ilorin: Arrow Consult.

The Guardian, 10th May 2019.

The Punch, 4th April, 2019.

Udo, R.K. (1963). "Patterns of Population Distribution and Settlement in Eastern Nigeria". *Nigerian Geographical Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2.

...(1968). "Population and Politics in Nigeria". *The Population of Tropical Africa*. London: Princeton University Press.