

Virtues in the Nigerian 2006 Population and Housing Census for Records

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ABSTRACT

After the long interregnum, the 2006 population census was scheduled, planned and executed. The objective of the paper is to highlight major credibility attributes of the exercise for records; and to make recommendations for subsequent census exercises in the country. The state commissioners were interviewed, NPC website was visited and documents of the NPC were perused. Literatures on National Population Census were read and used. The structure, system, and organization perfectly resemble those of developed countries: The National Population Commission had its Cartographic Department strengthened; improved technology of high resolution satellite imagery was used; Enumeration Areas were demarcated and plotted to scales. Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) were implored and Geographic Information System was intended to be used to store the results. All organs of the government were implored to create awareness, plan logistics and carry out the exercise. The exercise was not without problems; but this is the first time those sophisticated techniques will be implored in Nigeria; and the nation will know the number, quality, type and design of houses in the country. From planning to execution, adequate awareness and preparation were made to avoid the usual riddles that characterized the previous exercises. NPC further researches into the technologies applied and massive applications of them for the subsequent exercises were suggested.

Key Words: 2006 Population Census, Model, Limitations, Virtues, Nigeria.

Introduction

Any census will aim at enumerating all the people within a specified geographical area. It must, of necessity be meticulously planned and conducted with the aid of comprehensive maps and human resources among others. There is de jure census which recognizes people according to their regular or local residences. Under this type of census, if an Ijebu man was enumerated in Kano, he would still be classified into his family at Ijebu. There is the other type that is de facto census. It allocates people to the place where they are enumerated. That is, usually where they spend the night of the days of their enumerations. Essentially, population distribution is determined by where people sleep (night time population), not where they work (day time population). Often, the mere fact that all people are expected to be counted does not mean that everybody must be interviewed. A father (or a mother as the head of the family) may

supply information about his entire household. In the past, this has been a problem area where the man might choose to inflate the number of wives and children he has possibly as an ego booster, (Omorotionmwan, 2006). According to him, this easily put a dent on the original aim of the census which is supposed to provide a true picture of the population at a given time.

Osinaike, *et al* (2006) explain, that a census is “a method used for accumulating statistical data about a population. And it has been acclaimed to be vital to democracy.” They went further to say that census data is also commonly used for research, business marketing, and planning purposes.” It is actually a tradition that has become part of the world system. It is thus a must at certain regular intervals for some developed countries of the world.

However, the objective of this peace is to look into what the census exercises had been in Nigeria, dwell into the circumstances, structure, arrangement, organization of the 2006 census and look into some of the credibility of it. Suggestions were made for improvement on the subsequent census in Nigeria or elsewhere. The research read extensively literature and documents about previous census exercises in Nigeria. Large numbers of documents of National Population Census (NPC) were perused. Her website was accessed. Radio and television programmes, jingles, news and other were listened to. Interviews were conducted with two State Census Commissioners. Four hundred (400) enumerators and supervisors were interviewed. All of them responded to questions on the structure, organization, planning, materials and logistics of the 2006 census exercise. There were some discussions/interviews with sixteen (16) local chiefs and monarchs across the country. Newspapers, magazines, journals, and hand bills gave large awareness and followed up issues on the census. They also reported on the comments, suggestions and complaints and others about the exercise. They were all read and served as good sources of materials used. The work is organized into five parts. Efforts were made to let the paper be devoid of journalistic styles. It serves as an adequate report on Census 2006 and draw out its virtues

History and Virtues of Census:

Hitherto the 17th century, census did not go beyond the rudimentary level of taking inventories of certain classes of people as means of controlling them for specific purposes. Notable among the targets were those who should be taxed, conscripted into military services or those who should be forced to work. After the 1863 fairly formal census, the Colonial Master conducted another one in 1911 and subsequently made the exercise a once in a decade affair as it is done in the United States of America. The first most comprehensive in Nigeria was in 1921. Omorotionmwan, (2006) observed that, the history of universal census has involved three types of development:

- gradual spread of the idea of nation-wide enumerations for general, scientific, and governmental purposes;
- major improvement of administrative machinery and accuracy of enumeration, including in-built legal safeguards that would guarantee the confidentiality of answers obtained from the process; and

- systematization of the sort of information obtained through census.

Even in the face of the wide-spread controversies that normally travail each census in the Third World Countries, there is no running away from the obvious fact that census still remain versatile source of information about a nation. Aside revealing the basic demographic characteristics – growth and development of cities and towns (settlements) changes in age and sex structure of the population, average life span and others – census enhances information on such issues as changes in occupational and industrial composition as well as such factors as the country’s standard of living, education, health, employment and others. This is not only within localities but regional and group differentiations. Census information made it possible to calculate birth and death rates and also help in rearranging political constituencies over space and time. They come handy in working out resources allocation formulae. Most importantly, the information there from provides a window into the future trends as well as enhances proper planning – national, regional or local, public and private.

But in spite of its obvious virtues, virtually every effort to count the people in the country since after independence has not been successful. The first elaborate attempt in 1952 was accompanied by so much acrimony that it had to be consigned “to the dust bin.” There were reports of over-counting and or undercounting, omission and others recorded from nooks and crannies of the country. In 1963, the nation came up with a whopping figure of 55.6 million people juxtaposed on the 1952 figure of 31.6 million. The annual growth rate was 5.8% which sounded rather ludicrous. Besides, the comparison of 1952 and 1963 figures in some specific areas showed that some Local Government Areas had grown at a rate of more than 13% per annum whereas some other areas indicated a dwarf kind of growth of less than 0.5%. The 1973 effort suffered the same fate as that of 1963. The result remained cancelled till today when it became too obvious that there were serious spiral inflation. The last attempt until now (2006) was the 1991 census. That is after a long interregnum. It was not without the usual rancour: Most Nigerians saw it as a fluke and it does not represent the figure of Nigerian population. The head-count was massively rigged as agreed by many, (Omorotionmwan, 2006).

But since the rigging was considered to be mild only, that is compared to the previous; its figure of 88.9 million people had to be tolerated. Therefore, the nation’s annual population growth rate has been put at 2.9%. Invariably, this amount to a population of about 126 million people by the year 2003. Considering the long history of very unreliable population figures for the nation and the significance of the population figures (in governments, politics, resources allocation and controls), there are pragmatic needs to have a successful census to ensure equitable growth and development of regions and the nation at large. Above all, it is a traditional system for any nation. Hence, government determination to have a head count and housing census in the year 2006. The government and the political party (People’s Democratic Party) also needed a plus. But, what are the structures, organization and modes of the exercise.

Structures Systems and Organization:

The Federal Government put in place a structure (Commission) and formidable Team headed by a Chairman with a Director each for its various Divisions. In each of the states, there was a State Commissioner with State Directors assisting too. All of the individuals and groups, from the Chairman to the Commissioners and down to the enumerators put in so much to ensure successful exercise. The President and Commander-in-Chief of the federation and the Presidency were not left out, and so also the ministers. Concerted efforts were made so that the exercise was not marked by irregularities that discredited the previous ones. Concerted efforts were also made to avoid a repeat of the 1991 situation where 212,000 Areas were demarcated and consequently became unacceptable because of claims that there had been under and over enumeration. The number of Enumeration Area Demarcation (EAD) was put at over 600,000 at the threshold of 250 to 500 populations for each area. Other logistics and efforts included but not limited to the following:

- The Cartographic Department was adequately strengthened for mapping and production of maps of the areas for enumeration as well as detailing the demographic areas of where people are living;
- Improved technology of high resolution Satellite Imagery were applied to eliminate the confusion generated in the previous exercise;
- Enumeration Areas (EA) were demarcated and plotted to scales as against mere sketches of the previous year(s);
- The two contending variables – ethnicity and religion – were not included in the questionnaire;
- The management of NPC spoke extensively at various fora to educate, inform, and create awareness about the census. For instance, at a review meeting (such as the National Advocacy and Rural Communication Review organized by National Orientation Agency) people were well informed not to bother traveling to their places of origin;
- Towards creating awareness, T-shirts, face caps and large number of various souvenirs were seen at every nooks and cranny of the country;
- There were various radio and television adverts, announcements, jingles and interludes that educated, informed, and kept the populace abreast of the importance, needs, modes, and procedures for the population and housing census;
- Enumerators were directed to count all forms of mentally derailed people (particularly mad people on the street) in their various places of abode at nights;

- Announcements and publications were made of the key Census questions namely: name, age, whether male or female, place of origin, disability, educational status, marital status, employment, type of housing and facilities available;
- The Commission, using every organ, mode and style possible, reached out to all segments of the society to address the issues of suspicions that used to result in acrimony and tension among the different groups of the nation;
- OMR/ICR/OCR machine readable forms with in-built security devices were used as census instrument to record information;
- To ensure figures are not manipulated, Satellite Imagery were used to determine the number of houses in a particular location and of course fair estimate of the total number of people per locality;
- Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) were used to detect multi-counting for delete;
- To facilitate transportation and logistics, even at very remote and difficult terrains such as riverine areas, 12 boats and 2 helicopters were acquired; about 1006 donkeys, camels and horses were engaged in Yobe and Borno States alone for the purpose of head count and housing census;
- Cars, speed boats, motor bikes, and others were hired in many places, while interpreters were engaged to interpreter between enumerators and respondents;
- Very difficult terrains such as in Gwoza Hill of north eastern Nigeria and Opobo villages in the Niger Delta were handled by local enumerators who were very familiar with mountain climbing and movement in water respectively;
- Geographical Information System (GIS) was used to store the result of the head count and housing census and the result was placed on internet to give unhindered access to the users;
- There were several levels of trainings, upgrading, updating of staff, enumerators, supervisors and other census officials through seminars, exhibitions, workshops, debates, discussions, and conferences locally and abroad;
- The Commission demanded for raw estimate of the population of all villages so that apart from the data collected by the enumerators, the one provided by the villagers could be used to cross-check the accuracy of the actual;
- Over 94% of the equipment required for the exercise arrived the country and were delivered from England two weeks before the exercise began;

- To ensure full patriotism and complete elimination of special interest, officials were posted across the country but outside their states of origin; and
- The Commission made adequate arrangement and put in place security arrangements for the safety of all field workers posted to various states.

The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation embarked on Census Advocacy Visit to a number of states of the federation to sensitize the people on the head count and housing census. There were bill boards all over major roads and streets of the nation announcing and intimating people about the census. One of such reads:

You are important to Nigeria

Make yourself available to be counted

Similarly, text messages through wireless Global System of Mobile Telecommunication (GSM) telephones abound on every GSM phone. One of them, on MTN services reads:

The Census Questionnaire provides for identification of

Your places of origin. Do not migrate.

Stay in your usual place of residence.

Be counted

Still another message, through another service provider dispatches this into the cell phones of the users all over the country:

Make this census a success by answering all
questions correctly

Another of the NPC public announcement reads:

Census 2006.

Let your name be in the National
Book of Records.

Census is a compilation of National
Records. Information about you and
your family must not be omitted from
such an important book of records;
submit yourself and your family for
the national head count.

Date: March 21 – 25, 2006.

Be counted.

Still another that was popular on the faces of all national News papers reads:

Census 2006 March 21 – 25
For our today and tomorrow
for the good of our today
The best of our tomorrow
For generation unborn
Plan with government
Be counted!
The Guardian Thursday March 16, 2006

Some states enforced the citizens living within their states to be counted within the state. One of their publications stressing the restriction orders reads:

It counts to be counted in Lagos
For every person who lives in Lagos and remains
in Lagos to be counted during the census, Lagos
improves her capacity to plan and provide for them all.
This is because resources will be allocated according
to population figures realized from the census.
So if you live in Lagos and go to your village
for the census, you are depriving Lagos of
resources she needs to ensure you live
comfortably here.
So stay in Lagos; and be counted.
It counts.

Over two months to the 21st of March, similar announcements, awareness campaigns, jingles were not uncommon on Federal and State radio and Television stations too. They all devoted over 25% of their daily airtime to issues of census. In the same vein, organizations, institutions, royal fathers, monarchs and individuals appealed to the commission's staff and enumerators and supervisors to regards the census as a fundamental opportunity to contribute to the nation's progress by helping to generate figures that will be useful for sustainable planning. The Christians and Islamic clerics and leaders also implored their followers to make themselves available for the National Population and Housing Census.

There were very high level of co-operations between the Federal and State Governments and their ministries, parastatals and agents and all voluntary organizations:

- The Federal Government declared the last four days of the exercise as public holidays and ordered partial restriction of movement of human beings;
- States also declared holidays and ordered restrictions of movement of goods and services to the period between 08:00 Hours and 16:00 Hours of the head count period;

- Some states opened some special telephone lines for purposes of any public complaints;
- Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), like most other organizations called on their members to make themselves available as officials of NPC and advised the latter (NPC) to demonstrate high level of seriousness and commitment especially in the deployment of logistics and welfare of field staff and enumerators;
- During the Presidential Stakeholders Forum on the State of Census 2006 Preparation, the President (Chief Olusegun Obasanjo) particularly implored Nigerians and stressed that the National Population and Housing Census must be a success if Nigerians should be taken seriously by the international communities and make inroads in its development drive;
- South-South Peoples Assembly (SSPA) shifted ground from its earlier position of boycotting the census on the grounds that the action would be counterproductive for the people of the regions;
- A week before the commencement, 75% of the ₦265 million which the European Union (EU) pledged to contribute to the Counterpart Funding (CF) with the Federal Government was released.
- Interestingly, provisions were made for the results of any contending region or state not to be released until the dispute were resolved either by National Boundary Commission (NBC), the Court or traditional rulers.

As early as Monday before the week of the census, 2,621 census supervisors from some northern states arrived Lagos for the exercise. In turn, 2,624 supervisors posted from Lagos to seven states in the north had arrived and over 2,000 reported in Enugu from other states. So also were the other postings across the nation.

Large number of community-based organizations, the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government functionaries (the Immigration, the Nigerian Police, the Military), the State and Local Governments, the multinationals (MTN, Globacom, and V-mobile, now Airtel, Shell Petroleum Development Company, Chevron/Texaco, Mobil, and others) were all involved. With their co-operations and supports better census results were obtained.

The European Union (EU) supported the headcount with about \$15million and both United Nations Population Fund and United States Agency for International Development pledged assistance. European Union Advocacy (EUA) was involved at very high level.

Therefore, from the foregoing, it is obvious that the structure, awareness and logistics were adequate and commensurate with those of developed world: A credible result was expected therefore.

Limitations and Constraints

There were massive preparations and logistics put in place by the government and the National Population Commission (NPC) in particular. The various levels of the team were formidable, well equipped, enlightened and educated. But the exercise was not without some challenges:

- The result was not seen to be precise as some Nigerians outside the country were not counted since the exercise recognized only those that were physically seen and documented;
- The Federal Government and the NPC appear biased on the issues of “ethnicity and religion” questions. The related questions were removed from the questionnaire despite the initial complaints about the questionnaire that the questions were too few and inadequate;
- Some communities mobilized resources, their sons and daughters towards influencing inflation of the figures;
- The exercise costs well over \$265 million (that is over ₦37 trillion) – it is fairly too costly;
- Many saw the census exercise as a political exercise rather than planning instrument;
- The physical head count of people in purdah remained a major challenge;
- In some states, stakeholders comprising members of the intelligentsia, civil servants, religious leaders and traditional rulers picked holes in the distribution of materials and logistics of Form 01 and allocation of Enumeration Areas (EA) to enumerators;
- Some other stakeholders in some states alleged that there were deliberate plots to undermine their “enormous population;”
- The restriction orders did not deter some Nigerians from migrating to their states of origin as their states had earlier call on them to report at home for the exercise;
- There were no finger prints for so many and people were counted in proxy at some other times;
- The awareness campaign and publicity given were too enormous and made all and sundry to a-liken it to politics;

- There were serious and great fears of insurrection;
- Untimely and inadequate deployment of staff and materials were noticed in some parts of the country, particularly at the beginning of the exercise;
- Enumerators welfare were not sufficiently taken care of whereas the welfare of human resources is critical to any successful census;
- The information/data gathered with the questionnaire were so few and grossly inadequate;
- Some supervisors that were posted to some southern states worked in fears as they initially raised the issue of possible hostility to them;
- Others in hundreds were stranded at the NPC offices of the states they were posted, and their allowances were not paid on time;
- The Local Council did not make adequate arrangement for accommodation and transport for the personnel as earlier scheduled.
- Over 5,000 leprosy patients at the Ondo State Government-owned Ago-Ireti Colony warned census officials to steer clear of their camp because they were not adequately informed and they were in doubt of how the exercise will eventually benefit them;
- That local enumerators were used for head counts and housing census at some difficult terrains was not quite suitable as they may want to favour their locality; and
- Lagos was a shadow of itself as the hitherto traffic jam gave way to smooth ride in most roads as many people seem to have traveled outside the state ahead of the census. This is in spite of the mobilization, campaign, rallies and carnivals. Those that migrated were mainly indigene of northern and eastern origins.

Limitation or no limitation, reasonable levels of success was realized. The level of achievement outwits the discredit that may be associated with the exercise.

The Virtues for Records:

What could be adjudged as the virtues of the year 2006 Population and Housing Census is that there was successful counting of all the people living in the country Nigeria at the particular period 21st to 27th March, 2005. Foundations are being laid for it to be conducted at regular intervals of ten years (though some countries conduct census at five years interval). For the first time in the conduct of census in Nigeria, the 2006 census employed such technology as the use of Geographical Positioning System (GPS) and Satellite Imageries to carve out Geo-referenced

Enumeration Area Maps (GEAM). Consequently for the first time, it would be possible to verify the exact location and position of buildings and persons as enumerated during the census. Also for the first time, OMR/ICR/OCR machine readable forms are being used as census instruments to record information. Apart from enhancing the speed of data processing, the use of machine readable forms is also a guarantee against alteration or additions to information obtained from the field, since processing of forms would not involve manual data entry and editing.

The number of houses on a street could be verified by virtue of the satellite imagery. The photographs of each of the Enumeration Area (EA) were posted via the internet during the exercise.

The Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) was also used for the first time. It detected multiple counting. The Geographic Information System (GIS) and the techniques were adopted to store the results and placed on Internets to ensure all interested persons are given unhindered access to the results. The initiatives and innovations confirmed the openness with which the nation and NPC in particular conducted the census.

Several local and international monitors and observers covered the exercise and thus enhanced the transparency of the processes. Various categories of census functionaries were cross-posted from their state of origin or stations of assignment.

The exercise revealed the number of persons in Nigeria; the number of males and females; the age of the population, the level of literacy, the level of employment/unemployment and types of occupation. Furthermore, the results revealed how many people are suffering from one disease or the other; the common ailments in the various age groups; where the health facilities were and whether they were adequate or within reach of the people; the level of disabilities and which age group is mostly affected. On employment, it can tell the number of employed persons and type of work; the distribution of unemployed persons; the number of person in schools that will require employment in due course and who earns what for doing what.

The exercise is called National Population and Housing Census. It can assist the governments to come up with effective housing policies, as well as improve availability of houses, facilities and amenities. It will be of necessity to take stock of the current housing conditions and amenities such as electricity and water supplies.

The method of counting was unique: only persons that were physically seen were counted in their houses, and the enumerators took fingerprint to ensure that a person was not counted more than once. All information given to enumerators were treated with utmost confidentiality and (as there was a law that was purported to punish any enumerator that breaches the confidentiality). It was an offence to refuse to be counted or to have been counted more than once or to have given false information to the enumerators or to have obstructed the enumerator in the discharge of his duties.

Essentially, the census was necessitated for the information collected during the exercise to be useful in assessing the current welfare needs of the population as well as to project future needs to assist planners to make realistic future development needs. It provides information on the people that are to benefit from the development and how their size and characteristics can be fully maximized for the development process, thereby making it possible for all tiers of government to guide the process of possible change (National Population Commission, 2006).

Undoubtedly therefore, one could infer that the 2006 census is unique and the results will be of great virtue to the government, researchers, planners, and policy makers locally and abroad. For instance, the Nigerian University Commission (2006) was committed to its success for:

- Purpose of development as universities are producers of high-level manpower, and play critical role in National development – thus head count on accurate census data play such significant role;
- Universities play leading roles in conducting population studies that will yield knowledge important for planning in fields such as health, education, housing, social security, employment and environmental preservation;
- Information that will provide needed data to formulate government population policies , which will seek to modify demographic trends so as to achieve economic and social objectives;
- Current and reliable data to achieve its mandate of orderly development of university education in Nigeria; and
- Information on the number of distribution of 18-23 years- olds, in particular, that is university age, to enable the Commission determine with a greater degree of accuracy, the gross and net enrolment ratios of universities, the number of universities required and the distribution of universities over the nations geographic territory.

It was a long awaited exercise; and the results will definitely serve all facets of the economy.

Discussion and Conclusion:

History has it that census in Nigeria had been riddled with controversies. These arose from mutual suspicion which had often resulted in acrimony and tension among different groups that make up the nation. The previous results were highly politicized for no good reasons. It was regrettable that Nigeria was yet to have a true figure of its population up till the March 2006 exercise was carried out. As such, the nation had found it very difficult to plan and ensure sustainable development. Whereas, it is embarrassing to any nation that aspires to greatness, stability, growth and sustainable development to be without an acceptable census figure.

2006 population and housing census was unique. It was a credible exercise the result of which will stand test of time. The preparations, logistics, human and materials resources, technological applications and others were adequate and sufficiently managed. The limitations/complaints were sometimes unfounded and should not significantly affect the results.

The machine readable form used enhanced the speed of data processing and it is a guarantee against alteration or addition to information obtained from the field. The processing of forms did not involve manual data entry and editing.

For the first time in the history of Nigeria, the nation knew the number, quality, type and design of houses within its cities and towns and even in the rural settings. The exercise was important in the effort and will definitely assist to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But the issue of federal character to which every Nigerian is addicted feeds largely on religion and ethnicity. Any attempt to suppress religion and ethnicity which does not first seek to abrogate the concept of federal character will only give birth to gross injustice and that will drive credibility gap into the entire processes of growth and development.

It is high time Nigerian desist from politicizing everything. Census should be seen as a planning instrument rather than political weapon. With the giant strides being made in all spheres of the nation's development, the census should be made a priority. It is of great value to any administration and to the future planning for any meaningful development. Conducting the census at any determined regular interval is therefore imperative to national development. This piece is suggesting adherence to ten years interval. Census is primarily a developmental process the result of which can lead a country to greatness. NPC's massive application of "new" technology such as Satellite Imagery, remote sensing techniques, machine readable forms and others should be further researched into and adopted for subsequent exercises. In addition, the nation should adopt all the good virtues of the 2006 Census. Other nations particularly in Africa are looking up to Nigeria as a giant of Africa. Like option A4 adopted for election processes and adjudged an excellent option all over the world, a model should evolve from this exercise. Such a model should in turn become a central tool for the nations of Africa and other nations elsewhere on the globe where solutions to census have not been found.

Adequate registration of births, deaths, migrations, immigrations and others will greatly enhance fair estimation and or "updating" of population and housing census figures. These should therefore be encouraged and supported. All Developing Nations should take a leaf from this.

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