

Proffering an Apposite Technique of Census Enumeration in Nigeria: the Need for Grassroots Consultations

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Abstract

Ever since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has employed and switched between two major methods of census enumeration namely - de jure and de facto, for its census exercises to minimize errors and obtain more dependable data for planning and development. The aftermath of each exercise has been marked by allegations based on manipulations by the various sectors. In-depth interviews were conducted to solicit information from societal members about census issues in Nigeria. They include census officials, researchers, academicians and policy makers. What do stakeholders put forward? What measures should be put in place by government to have its citizens become committed at ensuring reliable census results? These and similar issues are what the paper explores. The interviews conducted with the stakeholders reveal that grassroots consultations with various ethnic nationalities in the country may provide the needed solution to the census problem. In line with the findings, the paper proposes that if Nigeria must have a reliable, dependable and an accurate population count, consultations at the grassroots – as proposed by the stakeholders interviewed - may be an acceptable method of determining which way to go about census enumeration in Nigeria.

Key Words: Apposite, Census, Consultations De facto, De jure, Grassroots, Nigeria,

Introduction

The United Nations (UN), 1969:2) defines census as the ‘total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analysing and publishing 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’. Osinaike et al., (2006), in Aderogba and Komolafe (2012:19) on their part, explain census as;

a method used for accumulating statistical data about a population. And it has been acclaimed to be vital to democracy.... 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.

These definitions imply that census information is processed for data used for planning purposes that result in the development of a country. In that regard, census data should serve as a means of correcting developmental imbalances through the identification of areas that are deficient in growth for target and focus. This purpose of redressing unevenness is one of the main reasons for conducting census in any given country. There are specified procedures expected to be adopted in the conduct of a reliable census. Lemmens (2011: 260) categorized the methods used in carrying out a population and housing census according to United Nations (2008) as follows:

- Group Assembly method - In this method, heads of households are requested to come together at a certain venue, where they are asked to submit authorized persons pre-specified information on members of their household.
- Self-Response Method - here questionnaires are posted to persons or households who are expected to fill them in and submit them to the nearest census office.
- Direct Interview/Canvasser method – also called a de facto method – entails interviewing every individual physically present in the country face to face during the exercise. This is the most reliable but also the most expensive method because it requires a period of at least two weeks. Enumerators must be appointed at the ratio of 1 to every 500 of the population.
- Virtual Method - In a virtual census, the main portion of the data necessary to compile census is taken from existing registers, the backbone being the population register. Furthermore, samples are taken using the self-response method. Conducting a virtual census is feasible in countries with a well-established tradition in collecting demographic figures and other statistics. In such countries, a virtual census can be a cheap but a reliable alternative to the expensive de facto census

The first two methods, though not time-consuming and requiring no expensive resources, have been found to have some deficiencies. One basic deficiency is that when both methods are used, it becomes difficult to verify the information provided (Lemmens, 2011). While the group assembly ends up giving limited information, the self-response method necessitates that a population has the basic literacy level to cope with the filling of the forms (Daugherty and Kammeyer, 1995). With regard to the self-response method, so-called developing countries such as Nigeria do not fulfill this basic requirement because of high illiteracy levels.

Depending on a country's interest, censuses use different methods but the most widely used methods, according to United Nations Population and Vital Statistics Report (nd), are conventional/traditional, based on administrative/population registers, or a combination of methods that may include a sample survey. Most countries adopt either the de facto approach – where all persons who are physically present in the country or area at the reference date, whether or not they are usual and/or legal residents, are enumerated or the de jure method in which all usual residents, whether or not they are present at the time of the enumeration and/or legal residents, are included in the census form.

Both methods had been used interchangeably for past census enumerations in Nigeria and none had been accepted as providing the needed and accurate census counts. In the use of both methods, accusations of over bloated figures (inclusion of non-existing individuals or counting of animals had been alleged) and deliberate attempts of undercount of some sections of the country (Odeniyi, 2007; Bamgbose, 2009; Mbeke-Ekanem, 2006) to continuously give a particular section of the country an upper hand had been alleged. Others have postulated that the geometric increase found in the Northern region as against the arithmetic progression in the South contradicts the Demographic patterns found globally (Odunfa, 2007) where the rain forest

regions have a more dense population than the arid North. Others still feel that there is justification for the imbalance in population size between the North and the South based on the migratory activities of the Igbos (Nwaonwu, 2011). It should also be noted that cultural practices had been found to also affect data collection in African settings (Adeyemi, 2005, 2001; Honey, 2000). However the argument goes, allegations of over count continue to trail census results and this has made planning for development unrealizable and unrealistic. To fill this yawning gap, the paper interviewed some concerned stakeholders on the way to resolve this recurring problem which the paper hopes will provide the needed solution.

Literature Review

According to Bamgbose (2009), census enumeration dates as far back as 3000 BC. It was practiced in ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Persia, Babylonia, Greece, Rome, Japan and China. Although some of these censuses were taken for military recruitment and collection of taxes, their intents did not differ markedly from the present period. In Nigeria, the colonial masters used census to determine taxable adults (Aderogba & Komolafe, 2012) and this, coupled with the traditional belief that children should not be counted (Adeyemi, 2005, 2001; Honey, 2000), inevitably brought about mistrust and reluctance on the part of the citizenry on census process. In view of the mistrust and reluctance, it became difficult to convince the citizenry of the importance of census enumeration in Nigeria. When this problem was overcome, another problem reared its ugly head, namely using census figures to determine allocation of seats in regional/states and federal houses of assembly as well as allocating financial resources (Bamgbose, 2009). For this reason, efforts by both civilian and military administrations to conduct a credible census had been greeted with the ‘same degree of cynicism, suspicion and controversies’ (Political Bureau Report, (1987) in Bamgbose, (2009): 314).

History of census counts in Nigeria dates back to 1866 but this covered only Lagos. Subsequent counts in 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 also covered only Lagos and its immediate environs. By 1911, the census extended to southern Nigeria as a result of its merger with the Lagos colony in 1906. The 1921 census was regarded as the first census that, in theory, covered the whole territory that is referred to as Nigeria. The 1931 census was disrupted by locust swam in the North and tax riots in the south-east (Okolo, 1999) and this census was described as being 75 percent too low and estimates was put at 20 million for the north as opposed to the 11 million actually declared (Hill, 1977).

In spite of the aforementioned attempts at census enumeration, the 1952-53 census was regarded as the first attempt at a nationwide census in Nigeria. This census was considered an undercount for the following reasons: ‘apprehension that the census was related to tax collection; political tension at the time in eastern Nigeria; logistical difficulties in reaching many remote areas; and inadequate training of enumerators in some areas’. Notwithstanding its difficulties, the 1952-53 census has generally been seen as less problematic than any of its successors (The Library of Congress Country Studies and CIA World Factbook, 1991). Serious contestations arose with respect to the censuses of 1953 and 1962 which led to the rejection of the latter (Osadebay, 1978; Jerven, nd).

So, Nigeria, in its fifty-three years of existence as an independent nation has conducted five censuses – 1962, 1963, 1973, 1991 and 2006. The first attempt in mid-1962 was cancelled after much controversy on allegations of over-count in many areas. A second attempt in 1963, which was officially accepted, also was laden with charges of inaccuracy and manipulation for regional and local political purposes (Bamgbose, 2009). The official 1963 figure of 55.6 million declared as total national population was believed to be inconsistent with the census of a decade earlier

because it implied a virtually impossible annual growth rate of 5.8 percent (The Library of Congress Country Studies and CIA World Factbook, 1991). The 1973 census results were outrightly rejected because of past problems of over count and manipulations for political purposes (Bamgbose, 2009).

There were also accusations, from different quarters after the conduct of those of 1991 and 2006, of bloated figures in particular areas of the country. A spokesperson from the southern part described the figures released as "outrageously doctored figures." (Vesperini, 2007) but Ohaneze Nidigbo saw it as a deliberate attempt to reduce the Igbos to a minority group (Yin, 2007) while Tinubu quoted the figures as false (Inter Press Service, 2007). The exercise carried out in 1963 was spared any kind of accusation, and therefore the figures that emanated from it were used for a very long period of time for planning and projections. However, different major ethnic groups in the northern and southern parts of the country were suspicious of each other. This indicates that one cannot point out any census conducted in Nigeria after independence that enjoyed 100 percent acceptance among the citizenry.

The problems are hinged on the use of figures for allocation of federal revenue to states, provision of amenities and representation in both regional and federal seats (Bamgbose, 2009). So each state or region probably strives to maintain its already leading position through several forms of machinations. Some had argued, for instance, that the semi-arid North cannot be said to be more populous than the savannah and forest areas of the South (odunfa, 2007). Others still submit that the southerners occupy most of the northern areas, through migration, for their business enterprise and in the process deplete the population of the south (Nwonwu, 2011). These arguments, however reasonable they might be, do not justify the lack of credible census counts in Nigeria.

Two major methods are generally adopted or used for census enumeration. These are the ‘de facto’ and ‘de jure’ methods. Nigeria, in its census counts, had experimented with the two methods switching between them as the case may be, but the problem of acceptance of the outcome remains unchanged.

To obtain figures that might solve the problem of already existing distrust among the groups, succeeding governments had removed the variables of religion and ethnicity in the 1991 and 2006 census forms with the optimism that the figures will get the desired approval. This also faced opposition and mistrust. Faced with the challenge of satisfying those who rejected one of the census results, former President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 – 2007) qualified those rejecting the figures as ‘confusionists’ who after seeing that the count did not break the country sought to foment trouble (The Nation, 2009). Be that as it may, one is quick to say that the adoption of either of the two methods of census enumeration has not contributed appreciably to the resolution of Nigeria’s census controversy. This has necessitated soliciting the views of concerned stakeholders for a better method of conducting census in Nigeria.

Past Censuses: How the Methods Fared

To have a healthy understanding of the discourse on census counts in Nigeria, it is necessary to discuss briefly how the methods adopted in the past censuses contributed to the controversies that emanated during the exercises. Inception of modern census counts in Nigeria dates back to 1911. Since then, there have been several counts conducted at ten-year intervals. These were not considered as censuses but rather ‘a combination of individual enumerations in some municipalities, and estimates were based on tax records for the rest of the country’ (Hollos, 1992). The only officially accepted counts were done in 1952 and 1953 at different times and in different parts of the country.

Even then, they were surrounded with controversies with different regions accusing one another of over-counts. Several authors have provided explanations for these disagreements. The reason they gave was that there was political maneuvering by the ethnic groups resulting in inflation of figures (Ahonsi, 1988; Arikpo, 1988; Duru, 1968; Udo, 1968). In the 1953 count the group count method was used - wherein the name of the head of the household who supplied the particulars of other members was recorded. This practice, according to Hollos (1992), was still used in the 1963 head counts with de facto and de jure being used as was deemed appropriate. The problem that characterized that exercise was best captured by Ogunlesi (1968:120) in the following indentation:

No doubt the same person was enumerated in several places during the four-day period; in Village A, because his father was born there (therefore he is a member of that family), in Village B, because his mother was born there (and therefore he is also a member of that family), in Village C, because that is where he lives and works from Monday to Saturday (or during planting season), and in Town D, because he has built a modern house there (his ancestors came originally from there, and that is where he hopes to be buried).

Through the adoption of the de facto and de jure methods, the impression created is that the results of 1963 census were accurate. Yet, Ogunlesi's analysis above shows that double counting was the order of the day. The 1991 census took these flaws into consideration and did its best to prevent double counting by completing the whole exercise within a day through the adoption of the de facto approach. It entailed counting and recording data of people wherever they were found at the time of census. Some had described that census as the 'most accurate population count in Nigeria' (Imnakoya, 2006). In support of this view, the then Chairman of the National Population Commission (NPC) in his report to the then President wrote:

Although not everyone either in the country or outside accepted the census results of 1991, over the years by and large there was general consensus that the 1991 results were a fair representation of the national and regional population (Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, 2009: B6).

However, some people see it as a fluke that did not represent the true population of the country (Aderogba and Komolafe, 2012), other people felt it was massively rigged (Omorotionmwan, 2006). Yet another group of people have described it as the most controversial and maligned exercise (Salaudeen, 2004). Despite these negative reactions, the 1991 census came to replace the 1963 census and was used for planning and projections. In order to refine the approach adopted in 1991, the 2006 census officials adopted certain measures - initially approved a 3-day exercise. However, the period was later extended to seven days. It also adopted the de facto approach used in 1991. Of more relevance is the introduction of modern methods of conducting a census. According to Obasanjo (2006),

the 2006 census employed the use of Geographical Positioning System (GPS) and Satellite imageries to carve out geo referenced Enumeration Area maps, OMR/ICR/OCR machine readable forms to record information, Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) to read fingerprints and thereby detect multiple counting and as well as Geographic Information System (GIS) used to store the 2006 census result.

The inclusion of the above did not change the impression of Nigerians of distrusting the outcome (Omorotionmwan, 2006; Salaudeen, 2004). This shows that for Nigeria to have reliable figures that will aid development planning, a strategy that evolves from the citizens may make the desired impact. The views of stakeholders, planners and researchers who had witnessed the previous flaws in the past censuses are solicited in this regard but, before discussing their views, the next section takes a theoretical stance to explain the discourse.

Theoretical Background

In providing explanation as to the best way to tackle census problem in Nigeria, it is best to discuss the learning modes and forms of consciousness by Heron (1992) and experiential

learning by Kolb and Fry (1975). Heron (1992) developed four steps needed for learning to take place successfully. These four steps he called: practical mode (rehearsing, practicing), Conceptual mode (discriminating and uniquely integrated conceptual structure), Imaginal mode (a variety of indigenous/exogenous perceptual inputs imaginatively developed) and Experiential mode (emotional, confidence, fulfillment and indigenously based positive arousal).

These modes, according to Heron, is a holistic learning process that involves an up-hierarchy - experiential, imaginal, conceptual and practical - each succeeding one being grounded in the preceding one. Thus, the practical mode is grounded on the conceptual mode which in turn is grounded on the imaginal that gets its base from the experiential. So, when these four modes are construed as a cycle, the experiential mode becomes the wellspring of the cyclic interaction (Heron, 1992, 1999).

These modes are what Kolb and Fry (1975) identified as four models which they represented in the experiential learning circle involving: concrete experience; observation and experience; forming abstract concepts and testing in new situation. They argue that the learning cycle can begin at any one of the four points - and that it should really be approached as a continuous spiral. However, it is suggested that the learning process often begins with a person carrying out a particular action and then seeing the effect of the action in this situation.

Following this, the second step is to understand these effects in the particular instance so that if the same action was taken in the same circumstances it would be possible to anticipate what would follow from the action. In this pattern the third step would be to understand the general principle under which the particular instance falls. What is especially noteworthy is the use of

concrete, 'here-and-now' experience to test ideas; and use of feedback to change practices and theories (Kolb 1984: 21-22).

The significance of the views of these theorists here is that the crucial requirement for each learner is to establish a relationship with their total learning situation which is intimate, resonant and positive (in the feeling mode). It is only when this is firmly established that it is considered that the learner will be free to tap fully into the other three modes of the learning model - imaginal, thinking and practical (<http://www.jwelford.demon.co.uk/brainwaremap/holist.html>) .

Although this model is developed to enhance learning at an individual level, the model is applied in resolving the problem faced in census enumeration in Nigeria. At the experiential level are found the emotional and the indigenously conceived methods which need to be subjected to further scrutiny. This progresses to the imaginal stage where the interaction of the exogenous and indigenous ideas takes place. This interaction results in the choice of a more appropriate method which culminates in the conceptual mode. The practical mode tries out the final outcome and sees how suitable it fits into the system. This model is adopted because any method that incorporates locally designed approach to census enumeration is most likely to have the desired outcome.

Data and Methods

In trying to resolve this problem of seemingly unending census controversies in Nigeria, the opinions of some stakeholders spanning demographers, researchers, academicians, policy makers, NPC staff and other concerned individuals were sought as to the best way to obtain figures that will aid development planning since census figures had been consistently politicized over the years. This was done using in-depth interview approach to elicit information from

respondents. Altogether, 35 respondents comprising 20 males and 15 females with ages ranging from 35 – 63 years were interviewed. The constitution of those interviewed are 20 researchers including Demographers (12 males and 8 females) in institutions of higher learning; 10 NPC staff (7 males and 3 females) and 5 policy makers (3 males and 2 females). Policy makers are top government officials in law making positions. These respondents are resident in Lagos State and purposively selected based on their experiences and their willingness to participate in the discussion. Questions posed range from their opinions on what they think about census enumeration in Nigeria, the census controversy to what can be done to resolve the ever present distrust in census outcomes and their responses are presented in the next section.

Results

Respondents were asked to express their opinions on what they think about census enumeration in Nigeria; how it had fared in the past especially after the country's independence and what better option the country can adopt to have a more reliable census figures. From their responses, all agree that census enumeration is very vital in any nation's development and planning; that for any country to advance, knowledge of its population age structure is a necessity as it will determine the area of focus – whether more schools and infrastructures are to be constructed to take care of the teeming young population or focusing on health related needs among others. For Nigeria, which is a developing country, reliable census figures, according to them, will go a long way in providing the information needed for development at both the local, state and national levels. But they are quick to add that with its politicization in Nigeria, getting reliable figures may be a hard nut to crack. In the interim, they proffered other ways of getting information for planning. Prominent among the ones mentioned are: Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS), strengthening registration of births and deaths by localities, data from Federal Office of

Statistics (FOS), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), universities, research institutes, school registration and tax returns.

In addition, relying on projections and estimates from the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), ICF and Macro, Agricultural Development Bank (ADB), African Union (AU) were also suggested. The use of voters' registration, constituency delimitation exercise, data from police, immigration and hospitals could serve as supplementary sources to other forms of information.

As one source put it:

Census becomes an inevitable source of data because successive governments, over the years, have failed to strengthen the registration of births and deaths in the various Local Governments of the Federation. The machineries are already in place. In each of the 774 Local Governments, there are already established offices of the National Population Commission (NPC) and what is required is funding to enable NPC workers employed, (and being paid from government coffers obviously) at the various localities, to kick start the exercise. News of births and deaths are not hidden and since these workers are part of their localities, getting the needed information will not be difficult. As they go from place to place seeking information, members of the localities gradually become aware of their importance and with time complying with the exercise will not be a problem.

To support this view another respondent has this to say:

How can government expect societal members to respond to the call for registration of births and deaths in a culture where the discussions of such events are a taboo? Besides, majority of Nigerians still in the rural areas and are mostly illiterate. So, they do not appreciate the importance of these data to their lives. Government should, in the interim, empower their workers to scout for such information until the exercise becomes internalized by the people. I believe that if Nigerians are properly conscientized, implementation will be a matter of time.

Still, on this issue, another stated:

Where are Ojo Maduekwe's bicycles? Are they not supposed to be more useful in the rural areas where there is hardly any good road? This is what NPC workers at the rural level should have been empowered with (and a motorbike for each locality to complement). It is totally unacceptable that government expects the citizenry to walk down to these offices to report incidences of births and deaths where the latter are unconventional and abhorred. Births may attract little resistance but deaths are sure to bring stiff opposition. Besides, poverty is rife and some will have to walk kilometers to be able to effect the registration (if they so wish) and that on its own will make registration of births and deaths an illusion. In addition, how do they expect the workers to fund the collection of the data from their own pockets? It shows that government is not truly committed to the exercise.

For another respondent:

In a country where government loses billions and even trillions of foreign currencies annually to fraudulent individuals, making registration of births and deaths plausible is seen as a herculean task. Yet we create impression to the outside world that we want to tackle underdevelopment. Even the NPC officials are not committed to the cause with the ways they squander the meager allocation to the sector. It hardly trickles down to the people at the state levels and whatever gets to the states barely reaches the localities.

On whether the other sources of data listed would not be politicized as well, most of them agreed but cautioned that such sources should not be made aware of its purpose as, they believe, that if they see the importance, they may likely capitalize on it for self-enrichment.

One respondent encapsulated it in these words:

Nigerians exploit every opportunity as a means of enrichment. Even where they are not favourably disposed to such, they are either coerced to comply or forced to leave through blackmail and threats. This is why information from these sources should be privately and silently utilized. In addition, if records from schools, hospitals and other government parastatals are properly documented, they will provide indexes to development in an area. Take the case of the sentinel surveys where information collected from these surveys are used to determine the HIV/AIDS prevalence. That is not to say that census enumeration will not be conducted as at when due but when those that manipulate the figures for their private gains realize that it no longer serves the purpose, they will soft pedal and that is when census results will serve its purpose. In a nutshell, detach federal allocation from census figures and Nigeria will achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) faster.

On how best to arrive at a more acceptable method of census enumeration, most respondents (25 or 71%) are of the opinion that evolving a method through grassroots consultations will provide the needed relief of census problems in Nigeria.

In the words of a respondent:

Before the colonial era, decisions are usually taken through consultations of elders in a community. Community members, believed to have wisdom and knowledge on issues of interest, gather in the village square to deliberate and come up with tentative solutions. Decisions reached through this medium usually pass the test of time. In the same vein, decisions reached through such consultations will have an impact since they will also see such decisions as their own and will do all it takes to protect and make it function.

Another respondent added:

Grassroots consultations will help identify areas of weakness and redress such anomalies by making sure that community members look out for renegades who may want to thwart the opinion of the majority. Such people will be classified as outlaws and treated as such. Any effort on their part to distort what the community approved will be met with stiff opposition and sanction.

For still another:

Must we follow the method used by the developed nations? Not necessarily so! More so, when it had failed us so many times. Decisions agreed upon at grassroots are likely to make impact because members will see it as an innovation coming from them and will not want it to fail. By so doing, they will get the required result.

Some (6 or 17%) feel that strengthening what is already in place is key.

One prominent submission made by one of them is this:

The methods in place had been tested and used by various countries and successfully too. Why can't it also work here? I think that the problem is not the methods but the usual attitude of seeing such information as Government problem. In other words, Nigerians always detach themselves from the running of government believing that such should be the worry of government officials who, they think, will represent their interests but that has not been the case over the years. So why rely on their initiatives?

The remaining 4 (11%) think that whatever method proposed can only work if Nigerians change their attitude of seeing census enumeration as an avenue of siphoning resources meant for public use for their personal and selfish interest.

According to one of them:

Most Nigerians live on less than \$2 a day and that is for those who can afford that. Yet, this country is endowed with natural and mineral resources to allow for good life for every citizen but our leaders, mostly political elite, had shamelessly, over the years,

misappropriated these resources for their personal and selfish use. Their children do not even go to school in our country because the facilities are not up to standard. Same for medical check because of the same reason and they are not ready to upgrade these facilities to stand the test of time. Rather, they siphon the resources of the country to these already established countries who put it in good use for their citizens to enjoy. If an average Nigerian can avail him/herself of the opportunity of enjoying the basic necessities of life, the issue of census enumeration problem will be a thing of the past.

This section has shown the various views and responses of people on ways to circumvent the politicization of census figures in Nigeria. Their responses also show that government is not fully committed to the expansion and promotion of other sources of information for development purposes. The next section discusses the findings.

Discussion of Findings

To have reliable and acceptable head counts in Nigeria begins with the preparation (Ahonsi, 1988). Most developed countries have a cyclical form of census exercise. What is meant by this is that as each census enumeration comes to an end, planning of the next one follows with the result that there is hardly any gap. Several authors have identified the hasty preparations characteristic of Nigerian censuses as a problem (Nnorom, 2011, 2008; Ahonsi, 1988). To have a successful census exercise, there should be at least three years successive plan. During this period issues found to be contentious in the previous census could be addressed through wide consultations across local, state and federal levels.

There is the need for thorough and widely covered consultations among the citizenry. Between one census and another, officials responsible for this task should go from one locality to the other and meet with elders, traditional rulers and members of their cabinet to seek advice on acceptable methods that can be adopted (This is different from the usual visit that seeks their unalloyed cooperation during head counts). This reverberated in the interview conducted with stakeholder where majority see it as a way forward. As one of the interviewer's response revealed, such

consultations will make Nigerians see the outcome of such as their own and will do everything possible to protect and own. These consultations could take months or even years to resolve and this is why enough time is required for such debates. Considering the land mass as well as the diverse ethnic and cultural settings in Nigeria, creating avenue for these groups to express their opinions could go a long way to providing the needed solution. It should be recalled that this is the method widely used to take important decisions during the traditional epoch.

Before the colonial era, consultations for developmental projects were usually done through these media and all men considered of certain age gathered to take important decisions on behalf of their localities and such decisions usually yielded fruits when implemented. These consultations should cover the nooks and crannies of the country and take into account all ethnic nationalities no matter how insignificant they might seem in the eyes of policy makers. Wisdom is not an exclusive preserve of anybody and we may be surprised at the ideas that might emanate from such small groups. This is where Heron's (1999) model becomes significant since their experience in dealing with local matters will yield benefits. The ideas that may come out of such discussions may produce a more acceptable method of census counts.

The views from interviews also revealed a combination of vital events with surveys and other sources like the FOS, CBN and NDHS among others as viable options to be explored. This paper agrees with these views but feels that strengthening the registration systems as it pertains to births, deaths and migration statistics (both local and international) will provide useful data for planning without resort to census figures. With the introduction and use of the biometric system, double registration can easily be detected and movement from one state or local government to another can also be traced and changes effected accordingly. With these systems in place, relying solely on census data for planning and other uses will be relegated and gradually the interest in

its falsification for self-aggrandizement might end. It is not being suggested here that census enumeration should be abandoned completely rather the focus on its results as crucial input for planning for development should be downplayed in the interim until Nigerians begin to see census exercise as a source for development purposes.

Nigerian demographers have not played the leading role they are supposed to play. The Nigerian Association of Demographers – currently under the umbrella of the Population Association of Nigeria (PAN) - should be able to contribute in no small measure to the planning and execution of census exercises. There seems to be no consensus among its members with the result that they approach the Commission for participation individually rather than as a group. The result is that they create room for the Commission and other interested stakeholders to fill key positions with people who represent their interests rather than the Commission and the country. In addition, rather than condemn in strong terms what they consider to be irregularities plaguing census exercises, some of their members compromise by accepting to serve as officials far below their statuses making a ridicule of the exercises. It also becomes impossible for them to reject the outcomes even when they consider the results to be fraudulent.

The above-named Association should go beyond its present docile state to occupy the foremost position in census exercise as it should. There should be regular consultations and workshops among them coupled with constant researches on how to conduct credible census in the country. With time, if this is done at regular intervals, a lee way will surely emerge. If funding is considered a problem, approaching funding agencies interested in seeing reliable census counts conducted in the country would help.

Government's role in the entire process is huge. Constant registration of vital events requires commitment on the part of government to provide the needed resources. What government should do is to take the collection of these events as a matter of priority, make funds for its implementation available and set mechanisms in place to monitor its execution. Transportation for field staff was also reiterated by the interviewers. In agreement with their views, the use of the bicycles in the rural areas by NPC officials would be of assistance. This is because of the topography of the localities where there are windy and hardly ever good roads.

In addition to providing a functional system of data documentation that would detect anomalies at the slightest suspicion, a reliable official that will confirm information through the system in whatever location he/she might be is also required. The inability to verify entries of data at short notice does not show dedication and may imply to an observer that government is playing lip service to the exercise. Such data must be seen to be protected from manipulations and destruction by having a centrally designed system which could access the data garnered from all the registration centres of the country. Such positions, however, should be entrusted to trustworthy personnel who will not manipulate the data for self-enrichment or ethnic loyalty.

Closely connected to the above is the use of school enrolment, hospital admissions and migration (movement) records if such are properly documented. The number of births recorded in a year, for instance, will give an estimate of the number of children expected to enroll for primary education in six years' time and such will inform government budget with respect to the educational sector. In the same vein, school records as they pertain to number of students at primary, secondary and tertiary levels will provide estimates for the needed figures for projection on education and employment. Hospital records, on the other hand, could reveal the most common cause of ill health in the country, show facilities that are deficient and adequate

provision can be made to cater for such. Migration records on internal migration/movements, obviously, will reveal the lopsidedness in the cluster of people rather than the assumed claims to numerical supremacy (Nnorom and Kunnuji, 2006) which are, often, not substantiated.

Monitoring teams made up of credible Nigerians should be put in place to see to the day-to-day execution of these projects. Such teams should pay impromptu but regular visits to inspect and observe events. It should incorporate members of the community where the project is being executed thereby making them have a claim to such projects. By so doing, NPC officials and community members charged with such responsibilities will be alert to their tasks and information required for planning will become easily generated and unadulterated.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the problem of census enumeration in Nigeria and how the inability to conduct a reliable census has made planning and development difficult in the country. It tried to proffer alternative ways of getting data needed for development, in the interim, without resort to census figures since it is controversially inflated for political reasons. However, in solving the census problem in Nigeria, the paper submits that having wide consultations with Nigerians from all ethnic nationalities, irrespective of their size, in designing an acceptable method based on their varied traditional, cultural and other experiences are imperative. This method is suggested because, as the interviews revealed, it is believed that whatever method that evolved through such approach will have a more enduring and acceptable output.

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