

**APPRAISALS OF THE
PREPARATION FOR
2006 POPULATION AND
HOUSING CENSUS
IN NIGERIA**



Edited By

**Felicia Durojaiye Oyekanmi
&
Peter Bola Ogunlade**

CHAPTER 9

Cultural Values and Successful Census Operation

Patrick A. Edewor,
Department of Sociology
Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State

Abstract

In this chapter which is on cultural values and successful census operation, we shall first clarify the concepts of cultural values and successful census and thereafter try to identify specific cultural values in Nigeria and then examine how they can either make or mar the forthcoming census.

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL VALUES

Values are one of the elements of culture. They constitute part of the non material aspect of culture Edewor (2003). According to Haralambos and Heald (1980), "a value is a belief that something is good and desirable. It defines what is important, worthwhile and worth striving for." Similarly, Johnson (1995) considers a cultural value as "a shared idea about how something is ranked in terms of its relative social desirability, worth, or goodness."

Values are important part of any culture because they influence how people choose and how social systems develop and change. In actual fact Talcott Parsons has argued that a social system cannot exist without a concensus around values (and by

implication, the norms that support them). It is unlikely that members of society would cooperate and work together if there are no shared values. If there are differing and conflicting values in society, the members would be pulling in different directions and pursuing incompatible goals. However values vary from society to society.

WHAT IS POPULATION CENSUS?

One widely accepted definition of population census is that given by the United Nations (1975). It sees a population census as "the total process of collecting, compiling, and publishing demographic, economic and social data pertaining at a specified time or times, to all persons in a country or delineated territory." It involves the enumeration of all the people living in a country or a defined territory at a particular time. Information on the size, distribution, composition and other social and economic characteristics of the population are normally collected and collated during a census. There are four important requirements which must be met by any modern census. These are: (i) individual enumeration, (ii) universality within a defined territory, (iii) simultaneity, and (iv) defined periodicity.

An official census is normally sponsored by the government of the area concerned or some larger region within which the area falls. The Federal Government of Nigeria is committed to funding the 2006 Census to the tune of Forty-eight percent of the total cost of the census while the remaining fifty-two percent is being provided by development partners especially the European Union. Other development partners which have assisted in cash and kind include United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department for International

Development (DFID), and Chinese National Standard Certification & Accreditation Association (CNSCA).

The precise definition of the area covered by a census is essential and the principle of universality must be applied. By the principle of universality, we mean the need to include every individual in the defined territory. The principle of simultaneity and defined periodicity must also be applied. In other words, enumeration must be done simultaneously and censuses should be conducted periodically. Usually, at least in the developed countries of the world, censuses are conducted decennially (i.e. every ten years). Some countries even conduct census every five years. Unfortunately, most less developed countries, including Nigeria have not been able to apply this principle of defined periodicity.

The history of Nigerian census dates as far back as 1866 when the first organized attempt was made to enumerate the population of Lagos area. Since 1866, there have been 14 documented attempts to enumerate the population of either part or the entire territory of Nigeria. The earliest attempts were through conjectural estimates or through tax returns. These were later followed by partial censuses and later, complete national censuses.

CULTURAL VALUES AND CENSUS OPERATION IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is a culturally diverse society with a multiplicity of ethnic groups. Ethnographers have estimated that there are between 250 and 400 ethnic groups in Nigeria (Edewor, 1993). With such ethnic and cultural diversity, it is expected that cultural beliefs and values will vary widely from one cultural group to another.

Viewed as the totality of a people's way of life that completes the design for living, culture covers all aspects of human life ranging from economics of a society to its technology, religion and political dimensions.

Be it in economic or political spheres, it is undeniable that culture plays an important role. The values that people hold and their beliefs may influence their receptivity of enumerators or census officials. In certain cultures in Nigeria, for example, among the Yorubas, the counting of people, especially children, is considered a taboo. It is believed that children should not be counted for their owners. The belief is that when children are counted, they would die. This is a myth and a wrong notion that the counting of children affects infant and child mortality. Similarly, in some societies, it is traditionally held that children are a gift from God and as such should not be reduced to the level of chickens or other animals which are counted. In such communities, it is believed the counting of infants and children spells doom for families. Whenever there are unfortunate events such as death, epidemic or other epidemic occurring after a population head count, such are normally attributed as punishment from the gods who are angry for the head count. The import of this notion can better be appreciated when one considers the fact that in most Nigerian cultures parents place high value on children, not only as a means for perpetuating the lineage but also as a source of social prestige and a means of old age security and support (Isiugo - Abanike 1994; Orubuloye,1987; Edewor et al. 1997, Edewor,2001a; Edewor 2001b). Of course, a belief that people or children should not be counted certainly serves as a serious impediment to a successful census operation if there is no education and awareness or enlightenment campaign.

Similarly, in certain parts of Nigeria, as among the Urhobos and Isokos, visitors are normally welcomed with gifts. Enumerators or census officials who reject such gifts from their hosts may be considered unfriendly or arrogant. The Nigerian society varies greatly between urban and rural areas, between levels of education as well as between ethnic and religious borders. In northern Muslim communities, women are confined to the home and kept in purdah. This is the practice of keeping girls and women in seclusion from men and from public view. The consequence is that grown-up males are not permitted to enter into houses and quarters where women are kept in purdah. This implies that male enumerators cannot be allowed to see women in purdah. This constitutes a challenge, especially as the National Population Commission will adopt the de-facto method of enumeration which requires physically sighting the individual to be enumerated. In order to avoid the problems usually associated with counting women in purdah, the National Population Commission has decided to engage female enumerator for this purpose. Another cultural practice which is found among the nomadic clans of northern Nigeria is that nobody attends to visitors when the heads of families and households are not present.

There are other myths about a population count which have their origins from the traditions, misconceptions and suspicion about the intentions of governments. For example, it is erroneously believed that a census is meant for taxation, military conscription or that it is an invasion of individual privacy, racism or diversion from economic development efforts. While it is true that ancient civilizations conducted census for taxation purposes and to access potentials for military conscriptions, modern census are not for these purposes. Neither do census questionnaires contain sensitive questions that may constitute the invasion of the privacy

of individuals (PAN, 1990). In the same vein, population census is not a racist idea; it is not a ploy by the white race to convince Nigerians to accept birth control as some claim. Similarly, the argument that census-taking is a diversionary tactic to avoid the real issue of social and economic development is erroneous. Indeed, census data are needed for social and economic development planning especially in the area of education, health, employment, housing foreign policy, and the evaluation of development programmes.

Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing discussion, especially the cultural values myths which may hinder a successful census operation, the only solution is the mounting of public enlightenment machinery to overcome these problems. Census should not be politicized and all Nigerians must cooperate with the National Population Commission and with enumerators and census officials so that we can have a successful census exercise.

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