

**POPULATION CENSUS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA:
STUDIES ON AKPAKWUME/NZE IN EZEDIKE CLAN OF ENUGU STATE**

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Abstract

Population censuses provide one of the keys to economic development planning in human societies. Statesmen positively manipulate these keys to formulate and as well implement policies that will stimulate growth and deepen development in their respective states. Development of course reduces vulnerability, crime rates and social vices in societies; and the people participate actively in economic development. These benefits of population censuses are clearly misunderstood by statesmen in Eastern Nigeria. Their attention is concentrated on the politics of how more states, local government councils, senatorial districts and other political constituencies will be created to their benefit. In this paper, we will explain how politics has shifted the focus of sustainable development plans offered by population censuses. The focus here is on the indifferent behavior of a large number of people in Akpakwume/Nze in Ezedike clan – a peripheral, rural micro society in Udi Local Government Council of Enugu State – concerning population censuses. Until now, no serious economic advantage has been taken by the government to develop the human and material potentials domiciled in this clan likewise other outlying, rural populations in South East geopolitical zone. The result is that up to the last population census in 2006, the people did not understand how their rural society in particular and the South East in general would benefit from their participation in a population census as a significant percentage of them refused to be enumerated.

Introduction

Population census is the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analyzing and publishing demographic data at a specific time to all persons in a country.¹ It is one of the most important sources of information that provide a base for official statistics in a country. Apart from providing accurate data for the purpose of creating political constituencies for proper representation of the people, it provides data for national health and social statistics used by a variety of local and foreign development agencies for policy purposes to promote rural development. Population censuses in developing countries should target vital areas that will deepen rural development where the citizens will have the benefits of economic and social infrastructures including transportation and communication. This will not only bring the rural areas nearer to the urban areas, it will also breakdown monopolies and open new markets to create fresh opportunities for investment.

The relevance of rural areas cannot be over emphasized, according to current estimates, they constitute up to 80% of Nigeria's population.² This means that rural areas can contribute meaningfully to the development of Nigeria if their capacities are built in key sectors of development. But the rural areas in Enugu state in particular and South East geo-political zone in general has been grossly marginalized in terms of economic development, access to opportunities, facilities and amenities which invariably will boost their standard of living. The gap between the urban and rural areas is staggering.³ The challenges of rural development should be of great concern to different tiers of government most especially with the gradual deterioration of the urban areas as a result of a huge influx of people from rural areas. The neglect of rural areas has progressively rendered it un-attractive to socio-economic investment. With this, the rural dwellers have developed indifference behavior concerning government policies and programmes, population censuses inclusive.

Our focus here is on the indifferent behavior of a significant number of people in Akpakwume/Nze in Ezedike Clan – a peripheral micro society in Udi Local Government Council of Enugu State. It is clear that the 2006 population census figures for South-East geopolitical zone is not a true reflection of the numerical strength of the zone. Most rural dwellers did not participate in the enumeration, partly because of neglect on the part of the government. Onokwlu Akanezigwe – a rural dweller in Amutu Nze in Ezedike Clan described the relationship between the government and the rural dwellers in terms of “use and dump”. He advanced that government are only interested in the rural areas whenever it has a political need after which the rural dwellers are abandoned for another time when such need would arise.⁴

For the purpose of this paper, we will make an overview of politics of population census in Nigeria from 1962. After that we assess the extent of rural development in Akpakwume/Nze to ascertain the reasons for the indifference behavior among a good member of them towards population census, then comes the conclusion. Primary and secondary sources constitute data for this research; it will be analyzed historically using qualitative research methodology.

Politics of Population Census Since 1963

Ethnic and regional rivalry which diversely affected government programmes, including population censuses, took impetus from the Richard's constitution of 1946. From the onset of British imperialism in Nigeria, the protectorates of Northern Nigeria, which was a merger of the Kanuri empire of Borno, the Fulani emirates and other smaller political units were governed as a monolithic unit⁵ likewise the protectorate of Southern Nigeria which dominantly comprises of the Yoruba, Igbo, Bini, Efik and other groups. In the south, the people participated in the political process as un-official members in the legislative council where some of the representatives emerged through electoral process. While in the north, laws were made for them through proclamation. The only link between the protectorates of northern and southern Nigeria was in the legislative council through the lieutenant governor of the North and some senior residents of the Northern Provinces who were Europeans, and European representatives of the Kano chamber of commerce and mining industry.⁶

Under the constitution a central legislative council of 45 members was established for the whole Nigeria.⁷ The legislative council united the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria for legislative purposes. That was the first time statesmen of northern and southern parts of Nigeria sat together in a constituted council to discuss national issues since the inception of colonialism in Nigeria. The constitution also introduced for the first time, regionalism in Nigeria. The protectorate of Northern Nigeria was left intact while the South was split into two to form the Western and Eastern Regions.⁸ Subsequently; a bi-cameral legislature were established for the Northern and Western regions, while a uni-cameral legislature was established for the Eastern Region. In explaining why the regional councils were necessary in the period, Sir Arthur Richard posited that it would not only promote the unity of the country, but would as well provide adequately within that unity for the diverse element to that made up the country.⁹ He contends that since the Native Authority is the unit of political consciousness, the establishment of regional councils will promote wider consciousness on a regional basis which invariably will be the necessary pre-requisite for the growth of national consciousness.¹⁰

Though the regional councils did not possess legislative powers between 1946 when it was established and in 1951 when it was set aside for another constitution, they planted the seed of regional consciousness in the minds of most statesmen. Political parties such as the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) which was formed after 1946 centered their objectively on strengthening their regions.¹¹ NPC particularly advertised their objective in their party motto "one North, one people, irrespective of religion, tribe or rank" as membership into the party was limited to northerners.

With the formation of these parties, ethnic nationalism triumphed over the forces of unity in Nigerian politics. In 1951 when the Macpherson's constitution was promulgated, the regional councils were politicized; they were allowed to exercise both legislative and executive powers.¹² The clash between the nationalist forces against the colonial overlords for independence gave way to clashes between major political parties that dominated the regions. For instance, when in 1953, Chief Anthony Enahoro an AG member, moved a motion for self-government by 1956, it was vehemently opposed by members of NPC. In an amendment moved by Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the leader of NPC, he suggested that the phrase "as soon as practicable" be substituted for 1956.¹³ He

contended that the North was not ready for independence and therefore could not be committed to a specific date; and also posited that since national unity was still lacking, accepting such a commitment would amount to suicide for the north.¹⁴ The events that followed this period showed very strong regional affinity which did not change until independence in 1960. Forsyth noted that at independence, none of the basic differences between the regions had been erased, nor the doubts and fears assuaged. The hopes, aspirations and ambitions of the three regions were still largely divergent and the structure that has been devised to encourage a belated sense of unity was unable to stand the stress imposed upon it.¹⁵ The politics of who gets what remained unabated which of course deepened ethnic politics among the regions in the country.

According to Nnoli, the colonial urban settings in Nigeria constitute the cradle of contemporary ethnicity.¹⁶ This is basically because ethnicity exists only within a political society consisting of diverse ethnic groups – a feature consistent with urban centers in Nigeria. Enugu for instance became relevant with the discovery of coal within its environment since 1909. Ever since, it has attracted people of diverse groups within and outside Africa who resided to work for a living. It became a flourishing urban center playing host to other government departments, corporations and multi-national companies. By 1946 when the Eastern Region was created, it became its headquarters. Kaduna and Ibadan has also played host to different government departments, agencies and corporations which transformed them into flourishing urban centers. With the policy of regionalism they emerged as headquarters of Eastern, Northern and Western and Regions respectively.

These regional headquarters become centers where the politics of who gets what was fomented. Different groups tried to use power not only to dominate other ethnic groups but to influence the outcome of appointments, government projects, contracts, the economy and most of all, politics. The ethnic group in control of political power virtually determined the fate of other ethnic groups. The NPC led government at the center formed an alliance with the Chief Akintola led faction of the Western Region and pitched him against Chief Awolowo, leader of the Western Region.¹⁷ The quest for the control of more political constituencies which will guarantee the control of the government also pitched the north against the eastern and western regions. That was the situation before the 1962 population census.

The 1953/54 national population census which was conducted by the colonial government gave the whole country a total of 30.4 million people.¹⁸ The head count was boycotted because of the presumption that it was for the purpose of determining eligible tax payers. However, the 1962-63 census was a very sensitive one because it would determine the number of constituency seats to be allocated to each region in the federal legislature¹⁹ as well as the spread of electoral polling stations across the country. The team of 45,000 enumerators was led by Mr. J.J. Warren. At the end of the exercise, the results were not published owing to the controversies it generated. The Northern Region was purported to have got 22.5 million as against 23 million for the Eastern and Western Regions put together.²⁰ According to the result, the population of the south dominated by 500,000. This indicates that more political constituencies would be created in the south to give them superior seats in the parliament than the Northern region. The result was vehemently rejected

by the leader of NPC Alh Ahmadu Bello.²¹ The census battle therefore became a crucial element in the struggle for power.

J.J Warren who conducted the census identified elements of fraud in the figures.²² The result showed an increase of up to 200% in the population over a single decade. The crisis that followed the census shook the NPC-NCNC coalition to the point of breakup.²³ Ademoyega advanced that if those figures had been accepted by the Alhaji Balewa led government, the consequent re-adjustment of the federal constituencies would have put more seats in the south – a condition that was vehemently opposed by the leadership of the NPC. A recount was quickly ordered in 1963.²³

In the second census held between 1963 and 1964, figures were allocated to the regions as follows: Northern Region 29,777,986; Eastern Region 12,388,646; Western Region 12,811, 837.²⁵ The southern domination with 500,000 recorded by the previous census was reversed by a massive domination of the North with a whopping 4,511,503. On that basis, the Federal Electoral commission re-allocated the 312 seats in the Federal House of Representatives, with 167 to the Northern Region, 70 to the Eastern Region, 71 to the Western Region and 4 to the Mid-Western Region.²⁶ With this, the Northern Region had more seats than all the other regions put together. This gave them a clear majority necessary to form the government without forming a coalition with any other region.

The controversy trailing the results centered on the attempt by the Northern Region to dominate the other regions.²⁷ However, the NPC led government succeeded in obtaining approval for the result through its control of the northern region and alliance with the Chief Akintola led Western Region. From that period onwards, the numerical strength of the north has always dominated that of the south in subsequent population censuses. For instance, in the 1991 population census headed by Alhaji Shehu Musa, the numerical strength of the north dominated that of the south by 5,369,980.²⁸ Also, in the 2006 census led by Chief Samila Makama, the gap widened the more as the difference between the north and the south stood at 8,691,526 in favour of the north.²⁹

Statesmen in the South East geopolitical zone have consistently played the politics of population census to ensure the creation of an additional state(s) and more political constituencies for the zone in general and their respective states in particular. They lost consciousness on other importance of population census, most notably in the area of rural development where most rural areas in south east geopolitical zone in particular and Nigeria in general reveal a vicious cycle of poverty with the inhabitants still living below the poverty average of one dollar per day.³⁰ Most leaders shy away from developing the rural areas in key capacities in order for them to participate meaningfully in the economic and social development of their localities in particular and state in general. Most rural dwellers perceive themselves as the rejected section of the society, only useful to the government whenever they (the government) have need to achieve result with numerical strength.³¹ The government attitude towards rural development have drawn rural dwellers far away that the society and even the government are gradually losing their usefulness.

Akpakwume/Nze in Ezedike Clan and Population Census

Ezedike is a clan of four large towns; they include Akpakwume and Nze which is at the extreme end of Udi Local Government Council. They are separated from their brothers Ukpata and Akpugo

Ezedike by Adada River.³² During the National Local Government reforms headed by Chief Jerome Udoji in 1976, Akpakaune and Nze Ezedike were separated from their brothers, Ukpata and Akugo Ezedike who from part of Uzo Uwani Local Government Council of present Enugu State. Akpakaune/Nze is bounded in the North by Aku in Igbo- Etiti Local Government Council, in the south by Affa in Udi Local Government Council, in the West by Adada River and in the East by Oghu in Udi Local Government Council.³³ It is located in the midst of Udi Hills – a range of highland which commenced from the Nsukka savannah on its southward journey through Udi, Nkanu and Awgu into Okigwe.³⁴ It is situated within a rough environment with the Umeake and Adada rivers flowing east wads.³⁵

The densely populated towns are at the remote part of Udi Local Government Council. Nze for instance is divided into two quarters, Ibute and Ezi. Ibute is comprised of three and afterwards four villages: Okinyigba, Ujata and Ilonze which was later sub divided into Anugwu and Oguda.³⁶ Ezi is comprised of Agbalah, Ntugevo, Ihe and Anutu n' asa which include Anutu Uwani comprising Isiube, Ifuezugwoke and Agulu Nze; Anuntu uwenu comprising Umuezugwu, Umuezugwu Okam, Ezeodeke and Ifuezike. Akpakwune (Ihegbu) is comprised of seven villages which include Umudiekwem, Obugo, Akaku, Agulu Ihegbu, Ntuogu, Amavu and Amobo.³⁷

The town adapted properly to the rain forest environment of West Africa. Climate has a dominant role in the culture and pattern of economic activities of various peoples of Nigeria.³⁸ Rainfall is the most important element of climate as far as agriculture, the main occupation of the people, is concerned. Since most farmers do not practice irrigation rainfall, the length of rainy season is a crucial factor in the nature of agriculture but most importantly crops produced in different environments.³⁹ Akpakwume/Nze experiences high rainfall of up to 7 months in a year which is favourable in the cultivation of tree and root crops, likewise grains and cereals.⁴⁰ The dominant pursuit of the people is agriculture, most importantly crop production.⁴¹ Virtually everybody is a farmer, villages and kindreds own vast expanse of land they share among themselves for the purpose of agricultural production.

The pattern of agricultural practice in Akpakwume/Nze is such that each village group has their farmland far away from their village. The distance, for instance from Okinyogba village to their farmland, (Agu Agbolo) is between 25 to 30 kilometers. For Ilonze village their farmland is Agu Ogidi and Agu Ujoma which is about the same distance. Ozigbo noted that Agriculture in colonial Igboland remained largely traditional.⁴² Agriculture for food production has suffered from neglect through successive administrations in Enugu State. The main producer of food has been the family. Different families in Akpakwume/Nze trek with their families to work in their distant farmlands. Makeshift buildings mostly made of mud and thatched roof were erected in the farmlands by different households where they temporarily stay with their families to farm over a period of time. Ayogu Ugwueze a native of Okinyigba Nze noted that at the peak of farming activities these families stay at the farm for up to four native weeks (that is 16 days) before they return for their monthly kindred or village meeting after which they return to the farm. Their children who form a major source of labour join their parents at the farm from school every Friday except for the weekends following their kindred or village meetings.⁴³

The cultivation of crops has experienced few innovations and farm tools have remained essentially simple with the use of hoe and machet. Efforts have not been made by successive governments to

take advantage of the large population engaged in food production in Akpakwume/Nze and other rural populations to produce a variety of food crops beyond the Enugu market. Despite the large population engaged in full time labour-intensive farming, food production has remained a little above subsistence and the farming population has remained largely the poorest group in the society. Onokwulu advanced that the only period government initiated the mechanization of agriculture in the town was in 1991 during the Babangida administration.⁴⁴ Farmers were asked to form cooperatives which they did. They were also promised that agricultural extension workers would be sent to build their capacities in best practices of crop production. Despite the farmers' usual meetings, every last Sunday of the month, the extension workers never came. In addition, the tractors they were promised, to cultivate their cleared farmlands at a subsidized rate did not give them services and the road to their farmland the government promised to grade to make the movement of their products easier and faster to major markets for higher value was never done.⁴⁵

Because of the remoteness of their location, access to larger markets where farmers can attract higher value for their products is difficult, and in their local markets, product pricing is very low. Haulage has largely been through foot portage and to some extent, bicycles and wheel barrows. Also, access to most of their farmlands is not open to vehicular movement. The rural dwellers were therefore of the opinion that the government did not know that their town exists. A greater portion of arable lands especially in the rural areas across the south east remained uncultivated, yet food shortages and famine continued to ravage the villages annually.⁴⁶

The rural areas and rural dwellers in Akpakwume/Nze in particular and the south-east geopolitical zone in general have been grossly neglected in terms of economic development, quality of life, access to opportunities, facilities, amenities and standard of living.⁴⁷ The gap between the rural and urban areas is very wide. In bridging the gap between the urban and rural areas and finding solution to sustainable rural development, Maxwell (et al) posit that it involves creating and widening opportunities for rural dwellers in the areas of education and training so as to realize their full potentials and participate in decisions and action, that affect their lives.⁴⁸ This will increase rural output, value for production and diversification in the nature of production, which will subsequently create employment opportunities, eliminate extreme poverty, disease and ignorance.

Cash flow in Akpakwume/Nze likewise other rural communities in the south-east is very minimal because the human and material potentials in those places have not been unlocked in order to increase their productivity and open up investment opportunities. For instance cassava is consumed both in rural and urban areas and its products (especially garri) is a staple foods not only in southern Nigeria but across the country. Apart from being processed into garri, it can also be prepared as fufu, tapioca (abacha) or grind into fine flour for bread making and other uses.⁴⁹ In livestock production, dried cassava peels and fibrous materials sieved from mashed cassava roots can be used as feed for pigs, sheep, goats and cattle. Also manufacturers of feed use cassava as a carbohydrate base as substitute for maize. Modified cassava starch, industrial starch, glues and other adhesives, industrial alcohol, pharmaceutical products and confectionaries, are derived from cassava for industrial purposes.⁵⁰ It is clear that cassava is important in the nutritional, economic and industrial lives of the people of Nigeria.

Since every household in Akpakwune/Nze produces cassava, it calls for an integrated production and processing strategy. This will encompass capacity building on best production practices in the use of herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers and hybrid cassava stems. It also includes a mechanized agricultural strategy and the setting up of functional cooperatives that will systematically manage procurement, production and marketing; also, establishment of cassava based industry in all the industrial processing chains. The strategy should also be applicable in other rural areas in the south east zone. The government in this regard should identify the special products particular in different rural areas for instance palm oil in Nsukka, Igbo-Etiti, Nknanu areas; rice in Aninri, Nkanu, Uzouwani areas and develop their capacities to properly exploit the products to the extent that will not only improve their income but also contribute to the development of their respective states in particular and south east in general.

They should mobilize the rural population for self-help and self-sustaining programmes of development. They should also expand the industrial base of the rural areas through the emergence of industries that will support raw materials and human population domiciled in particular rural areas. The possibility of achieving sustainable rural development should be adequately and vigorously be pursued to ensure a reversal of rural poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, deplorable health conditions and slim economic opportunities. This will bridge the gap between urban and rural area, and as well as reduce rural-urban migration.

The provision of rural infrastructures is one key area that boosts sustainable rural development. There is no government health center in Akakwune/Nze. The only health facility there is a maternity home and Ukamaka hospital which is sighted opposite the maternity home. It was established by a catholic Non-Governmental Organization in collaboration with St. Augustine Catholic Parish Akpakwune/Nze in 1998.⁵¹ The health facility is only close to people from Agballa, Umudiekwem, Ihe and some parts of Amutu villages. Getting medical attention from the facilities will take people from Ilonze, Okinyigba, Ujata, Akaku etc. about an hour or mores walk.⁵² The hospital primarily runs outpatient services as the doctor only consults twice a week. Eighty percent of the rural population therefore depends on local patent medicines stores and native medication to solve even complicated health challenges.⁵³ Only a handful travel to 9th mile corner, Ngwo or Enugu to seek medical attention.

A combination of these issues has made a good number of the rural population develop apathy in government or government oriented programmes and activities. During the 2006 population census, in spite of the awareness created by the community leaders, a significant number of them saw it as a waste of productive time and energy, and therefore remained in their distant farmlands without being enumerated. Some of them during our interaction advanced that even in some other towns in their environs; a lot of people were also not enumerated.⁵⁴

Conclusion

It is obvious that 16,381,729 which is the population of the South–East Geopolitical Zone⁵⁵ according to the 2006 national population census do not reflect the exact numerical strength of the zone. It also shows that the population of the south-east is the smallest among the six geopolitical

zones in the country. The figures realized did not position South-East Zone to seek additional state and local government councils and the expansion of other political constituencies for instance senatorial districts and federal constituencies to measure up with other zones. This is partly because of the scant interest of South–East leaders in bridging the widening developmental gap between the urban and rural areas.

The government particularly in Enugu State politicized the traditional institutions. They are no longer modeled to strengthen community based organizations in the areas of agriculture, health care, hygiene and sanitation which will strengthen local economy and man power. For instance there is no functional FADAMA Community Association in Akpakwune/Nze which will utilize capacity building trainings, advisory services and agricultural impute support to commercialize crop and animal production. All these will boost community participation in rural economy and governance and as well as tilt rural politics towards the path of development and natural integration of the rural populace to the government.

The traditional institutions in Akpakwune/Nze in particular and other rural areas in Enugu State and South-East geopolitical zone are not drawn from the natural leaders among the rural dwellers; rather they were chosen among ex-civil servants, politicians and business men or by the government and imposed on the rural communities. These leaders are mere political lackeys and appendages of the government, employed for political mobilization of the rural areas for the government. They reside in distant township areas to govern their rural communities and so lack the required attributes to adequately administer the rural areas. What it produced is crisis of leadership that has continued to drive the rural dwellers far away from the government.

Rural populations should be given a sense of belonging by the government through development driven programmes and responsive rural administration driven by natural leaders resident in rural areas. This will not only synergize the rural dwellers and the government, the people will also willfully and enthusiastically participate in programmes like population census. That is when population census will reflect the true numerical strength of South-East geopolitical zone. Only then will both the economic and political reasons for population census will be achieved.

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