



# Open Letter on National Population Census 2023

**President Muhammadu Buhari**

President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces  
Federal Republic of Nigeria

**May 9, 2023**

## 2023 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS: CIVIL SOCIETY CONCERNS

**Your Excellency,**

The undersigned Nigerian civil society organisations have written to express our reservations about the 2023 Population and Housing Census (PHC). We are pleased that you have authorised the postponement; however, because no specific reasons were provided, we felt it was necessary to express our concerns.

### 1. Insufficient Awareness

While citizens were aware that a census was planned, they were unaware of the specifics. Will there be declared public holidays so that they can stay at home and be counted? What questions will they be asked so that they are prepared? Should they return home, as some citizens do for elections, or remain in their state of residence? Will schools be closed? Are there other FAQs that citizens need to know well ahead of the exercise for effective cooperation?

### 2. Use of Technology

The National Population Commission (NPC) has stated that the 2023 PHC will be Nigeria's first Digital Census, which will increase the accuracy of the data derived during the activity. However, we believe that further evaluation and testing of the technological tools - the Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and software to be deployed - is required.

Given the difficulties that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) encountered in deploying technology, we believe the federal government would be unwise to embark on another technology-driven exercise without learning from INEC's experiences. Because INEC has not audited the 2023 elections and identified the merits and demerits of the ICT facilities used, the 2023 PHC should take place after the process is completed. What is worth doing is worth doing well, especially given the financial resources approved and deployed for the exercise.

### 3. Transparency with Funding

The NPC's budget for this exercise is N896 billion (eight hundred and ninety-six billion naira), which is approximately **\$1.88 billion** for about **213 million people**. This seems quite high compared to India, with a **population of 1.3 billion**, which spent **\$470 million** on its PHC in 2011.

The NPC should publish its expenditure on the PHC 2023 to date, including disbursements to the 774 LGAs, the 36 states, and the FCT. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests have been written to the NPC requesting details of proposed expenses, details of contracts awarded, and a quality assurance test of the technology to be deployed by the Commission. In addition, a case is in court requesting a declaration that the defendant's (NPC) refusal to release the requested information *amounts to a violation of Section 7(1) and 4(a) & (b) of the FOI Act and the Privacy Act*. However, as of writing this letter, we are yet to hear from the NPC.

### 4. Transparency in Sources of Funding

Though the budget for the PHC is known, the actual funds for the exercise have yet to be fully collected. With requests made for donations from private sources and donor organisations, these resources will be combined with what the government has already committed.

However, it is not clear what the disclosure, reporting, and transparency guidelines will be for the collection of these funds. It is critical that the federal government publicly communicate how much has been received and from whom.

In conclusion, we commend the postponement of the 2023 Census, and we hope you will add these concerns to what informed your decision to pause the Census in your handover notes for the incoming administration.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

- **Gabriel Okeowo, BudgIT**
- **Tobi Oluwatobi, Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID)**
- **Ijeoma Oforka, Connected Development (CODE)**
- **Arowolo Ayoola, DataLead Africa**
- **Joshua Olufemi, DataPhyte**
- **Busayo Morakinyo, EiE Nigeria**
- **Olayinka Akeredolu-Martins, PAV**
- **Kolawole Oluwadare, SERAP**