
REPORT ON THE FIRST NIGERIAN ECONOMIC SOCIETY PUBLIC SEMINAR, 2009

A synopsis of the 2009 Public Seminar, titled, Statistics for National Development held at Reiz Continental Hotel, Central Business District, Abuja, June 16, 2009

A. Preamble

As part of its policy analysis and community service focus, the Nigerian Economic Society (NES) organized the first in the series public seminar on June 16, 2009 at Reiz Continental Hotel, Abuja. The public seminar, which theme was Statistics for National Development, witnessed a large attendance of professionals, practicing economists, statisticians and other social scientists, scholars from within and outside the country including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as members of the NES College of Fellows and Past Presidents (CFPP).

The Chairman of the occasion was Alhaji Abubakar Alhaji, KBE, CON, BA (Honours), Doctor of Science, Sardauna of Sokoto. Dr. Shamsudden Usman, FNES, Honourable Minister and Deputy Chairman, National Planning Commission, delivered the keynote address, while the special guest of honour was Alhaji Suleiman Barau, Deputy Governor, Central Bank of Nigeria. Distinguished speakers on the theme were three seasoned professionals, namely, Dr. Sani Doguwa, Director, Statistics Department, Central Bank of Nigeria, Dr. Vincent Akinyosoye, Director General, National Bureau of Statistics and Prof. Ademola Ariyo, Head of Department, Department of Economics, University of Ibadan. Dr. N. Nwokoma, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Lagos and Mr. Ayodele Omotosho, Director, Macroeconomic Analysis, National Planning Commission were discussants.

B. Highlights of the Issues Raised in the Presentations

1. There was under-funding of statistics in Nigeria. This is more apparent as statistics is a public good whose production process is often very expensive.
2. This definition of statistics as a public good in its traditional sense limits its funding essentially to the Government.

3. The National Statistical System should take advantage of the current pride of place it enjoys in the allocation of resources by Nigeria's development partners. However, the system should plan beyond the current support by the development partners to enable it be maintained post-development assistance. Though the System has moved away from the past position of Stolper's "planning without facts", much is still required.
4. There was need to develop and maintain a good statistical system. This would include production and dissemination of good statistics; censuses, surveys and administrative data; producer/user relationships; the use of technology; and taking advantage of the costs and benefits of updating the statistical system.
5. Though there was possibility of obtaining assistance in developing the national statistical system especially in the areas of building capacity; more important was the need for the country to rely on its own resources to maintain the system.
6. A fundamental area, worthy of note, is an examination of the new road-map for the National Statistical System as it relates to building capacity at the state and local government levels.
7. The National Planning Commission, the National Bureau of Statistics and the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research in collaboration with other relevant agencies of Government are currently working on two important projects, namely, Computation of the States' Gross Domestic Product and a nation-wide Employment Survey.
8. There was need for current arrangements to address the problems at the sub-national levels, adequately. It is very important to carry the states and local governments along in the development of the National Statistical System. There was need to obtain as comprehensive and disaggregated data as possible for planning purposes, while there was no doubt that both the strengths and weaknesses of the states' statistical system should come to the fore.
9. Summarily, "Using Statistics for National Development" encompasses six sub-components. These are data for managing Government; data for managing the economy; data for longer-term policy-making; statistics for business growth; using data to improve people's lives; and statistics to attract foreign investments and meet international obligations.

The discussants' comments on the presentations stimulated further floor discussion.

10. The release of the Statistical Master Plan and recent strengthening of the statutory statistical organ, the National Bureau of Statistics, would contribute immensely to building veritable statistics for national development.

C. Discussants' and Floor Comments

Given the resources of Government and the multiplicity of competing needs, it will be difficult to rely on Government alone to fund statistics. While Government should provide the necessary infrastructure for statistics, which are usually expensive and lumpy, it is important for the national statistical agencies to increase their interaction with the private sector as a way of providing some solutions to the issue of under-funding. Current public and private partnership arrangements encourage such interaction.

Another important issue is the size of the informal sector of the Nigerian economy. Collection of data is “more complicated because many people work in what is known as the informal sector where statistics are not so readily available”. The estimates of the informal sector of the economy point to one direction and this is to say that the informal sector of the Nigerian economy is large and could be as large as 60 per cent of the economy. This is a major constraint for data collection for national accounting in Nigeria.

In the final analysis, there was the need to eliminate completely, all forms of direct or indirect government/political intervention in the dissemination of statistics in the country.

Dr (Mrs.) Angela Sere-Ejembi
Secretary