

Unifying Nigeria's Data Ecosystem: A Policy Proposal for **merging the NPC and NBS** and **transferring Civil Registration** to the Ministry of Interior

Executive Summary

Nigeria's capacity for evidence-based governance is fundamentally constrained by a fragmented and inefficient national data architecture. The critical functions of demographic analysis, socio-economic statistics, and civil registration are currently dispersed across multiple agencies, leading to inconsistent data, duplicated resources, and administrative bottlenecks. This fragmentation directly undermines national planning, especially as Nigeria seeks to harness its demographic dividend for sustainable development. This policy brief proposes a comprehensive, two-part institutional reform to resolve this systemic weakness:

- **The Merger of Core Statistical Functions:** A strategic merger of the **National Population Commission (NPC)** and the **National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)** into a new, unified **National Bureau of Statistics and Demography (NBSD)**. This will create a single, authoritative source for all official statistics, ending data conflicts and enabling integrated analysis of population trends and economic outcomes.
- **The Transfer of Civil Registration:** The relocation of the operational birth and death registration function from the NPC to the **National Population Registry** under the **Ministry of Interior**. This move logically places the administrative task of vital registration alongside national identity management, simplifying citizen services and creating a definitive legal population register.

Together, these reforms establish a clear, efficient separation of duties: a Ministry of Interior focused on administrative registration and legal identity, and a powerful NBSD dedicated to world-class data production, analysis, and dissemination. An accelerated 90-day implementation roadmap, initiated by a Presidential Executive Order, is proposed to launch this transformative restructuring. This reform is not merely an administrative adjustment but a strategic imperative to provide the reliable, coherent data necessary to guide Nigeria's future development, security, and prosperity.

1. Introduction: The Imperative for Integrated Data and Administrative Reform

Our nation faces a dual challenge of unprecedented demographic growth and an urgent need for precision in national planning. With a population exceeding 220 million and projected to become the world's third most populous nation by 2050, the country's potential for a demographic dividend—or the risk of a demographic crisis—hinges on the quality of its governance decisions, including investments in education, healthcare, job creation, and infrastructure. These decisions, in turn, depend entirely on the availability of timely, accurate, and coherent data.

Currently, the institutional framework for data production is fundamentally misaligned. The National Population Commission (NPC), established primarily to conduct decennial censuses, also holds the mandate for the civil registration of births and deaths—a continuous, administrative function. This has contributed to low registration completeness and a disconnect from other key identity systems.

Simultaneously, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the apex body for socio-economic statistics, operates in parallel, often producing demographic estimates that conflict with NPC figures. This division has created a costly and confusing ecosystem of duplicated field operations, competing population estimates, and fragmented data that obscures rather than illuminates the nexus between population dynamics and economic outcomes.

This brief argues that solving Nigeria's data challenge requires a holistic rethinking of both *statistical production* and *civil administration*. It proposes a synergistic dual reform to build a coherent national information framework. First, it recommends the **merger of the NPC and NBS** into a single, powerhouse statistical agency focused exclusively on data, to serve as a unified source for demographic and socio-economic intelligence. Second, to **transfer the operational birth and death registration function from the NPC to the Ministry of Interior**.

Together, these reforms are designed to achieve a clear functional separation: a Ministry of Interior that efficiently registers all vital events and serves as the definitive legal registrar of the population, and a strengthened national statistical agency that serves as the primary analyst of this and other data, to inform policy. This restructuring is a critical foundation for achieving national goals in economic planning, public security, efficient social service delivery, and sustainable development.

2. The Case for Merger: Aligning Structure with National Need

The argument for consolidation is grounded in the urgent need to overcome systemic weaknesses in the current data ecosystem and to capitalize on emerging opportunities for integrated analysis. The separation of statistical production from civil registration administration has resulted in systemic weaknesses that this reform directly addresses:

- a) **Eliminating data conflicts and building credibility:** The coexistence of two agencies producing demographic statistics has frequently led to the publication of conflicting population and vital rates. For instance, significant discrepancies exist between urban population estimates from household surveys and UN projections, creating confusion for infrastructure and housing policy. This undermines the credibility of all official data, creates confusion for policymakers and investors, and hampers coordinated planning at national and sub-national levels. A single, unified National Bureau of Statistics and Demography (NBSD) with a unified methodology will ensure one authoritative voice on all national statistics, from birth rates to GDP.
- b) **Achieving operational efficiency and cost savings:** Maintaining separate agencies with overlapping data collection mandates (e.g., both conduct large-scale household surveys) results in significant duplication of fixed costs: parallel field staff, independent IT systems, and separate administrative overheads. The merger will consolidate these resources, generating substantial savings that can be redirected towards advanced technologies like geospatial analytics and real-time data systems, which the NPC is already piloting with partners like UNFPA and scaling them nationally.
- c) **Strengthening technical capacity and institutional clout:** A unified NBSD will concentrate technical expertise, creating a stronger centre of excellence for statistics and demography. It will streamline partnerships with international bodies (e.g., World Bank, UN agencies) and simplify capacity-building initiatives. As a larger, more central institution, the NBSD will have greater authority to mandate data standards across all government MDAs, ensuring interoperability and consistency.

- d) **Enabling integrated and forward-looking analysis:** Nigeria’s complex challenges require interconnected analysis. Understanding poverty (NBS domain) requires correlating it with household size and fertility rates (NPC domain). A merged agency can seamlessly integrate demographic and socio-economic data, providing deeper insights. Furthermore, freed from the administrative burden of civil registration, it will be better positioned to modernize the national statistical system by embracing "Big Data" sources—such as mobile network data, satellite imagery, and digital transaction records—to complement traditional surveys and provide more real-time intelligence.
- e) **Streamlining civil registration for administrative efficiency:** A critical adjunct to the core merger is the rationalization of the **vital registration** function. Currently, the NPC is tasked with the statistical registration of births and deaths, while the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) under the Ministry of Interior handles identity registration. This creates parallel citizen interfaces and data systems. Also, placing birth and death registration within a statistical commission has historically treated it as a data-gathering exercise rather than a core civic service. This has contributed to Nigeria’s chronically low completion rates for vital registration. Transferring this function to the Ministry of Interior - which already houses the NIMC - creates a logical **one-stop shop for civic documentation**. It aligns registration with national identity management, simplifies the process for citizens, and leverages the Interior Ministry’s broader administrative network to dramatically improve coverage and timeliness.

3. The Proposed New Structure: Clear Mandates for Enhanced Governance

The reform establishes two institutions with distinct, complementary mandates:

- a) **The National Bureau of Statistics and Demography (NBSD):** Formed from the merger of the NPC’s statistical departments and the NBS.
 - **Core Mandate:** Produce all official national statistics, including socio-economic data (GDP, inflation, poverty), demographic statistics (censuses, surveys, population projections), and analyse vital statistics received from the Ministry of Interior.
 - **Key Outcome:** A central, trusted source of integrated data for policy, research, and public information.
- b) **The Ministry of Interior (via the National Population Registry):** Assumes responsibility for the operational system of birth and death registration from the NPC.
 - **Core Mandate:** Administer the legal and administrative registration of all vital events, issue certificates, and maintain the definitive, secure national population register in synergy with the National Identity Database (NIN).
 - **Key Outcome:** A complete, accurate, and secure legal identity record for every citizen, streamlining service delivery and enhancing national security.

4. Accelerated Implementation Roadmap: A 90-Day Sprint to Launch

The merger must be carefully planned and executed to ensure a smooth transition, preserve institutional knowledge, and minimise disruption to ongoing data production cycles (e.g., the annual Gross Domestic Product report or the Demographic and Health Survey). But to achieve rapid momentum, we propose an intensive three-month implementation sprint, driven by high-level political will.

Phase 1: Legal & Strategic Foundation (Months 1-2)

- Establish a **Presidential Implementation Task Force** with representatives from NPC, NBS, NIMC, the Ministry of Interior, Finance, Budget and National Planning, and external experts, to oversee the transition. Its first mandate is to draft the **NBSD (Establishment) Bill**, repealing or amending the Acts that created the NPC and NBS. This should include clauses for the formal transfer of the Vital Registration function from the NPC to the National Population Registry under the Ministry of Interior, for legislative action.
- Develop a comprehensive transition blueprint covering organisational structure, HR integration, legal transfer of assets, and a unified IT strategy.
- Develop a Technical Protocol between the proposed NBSD and the Ministry of Interior for secure, routine data sharing of aggregated vital statistics.

Phase 2: Organisational Integration (Months 3-4)

- Design and adopt a new integrated organogram for the NBSD. A proposed structure is outlined below, merging functions into thematic directorates.
- Develop a transparent staff harmonisation plan, addressing grading, redeployment, and necessary retraining, in full consultation with civil service unions.
- Commence the physical and digital consolidation of offices, data centres, and archival records.

Proposed Structure of the NBSD

- **Office of the Statistician-General:** Provides overall leadership and represents Nigeria in international statistical bodies.
- **Directorate of Censuses & Geospatial Data:** Manages the decennial population and housing census, geospatial framework, and GIS capabilities.
- **Directorate of Socio-Economic Statistics:** Produces economic indicators (GDP, inflation), labour force surveys, and poverty assessments.
- **Directorate of Demographic & Health Statistics:** Oversees demographic surveys, vital registration (births, deaths), and health statistics.
- **Directorate of Methodology & Big Data:** Develops statistical standards, explores new data sources (e.g., satellite, mobile data), and ensures quality assurance.
- **Directorate of Corporate Services:** Consolidates all administrative, finance, HR, and IT functions.

Phase 3: Operational Unification & Capacity Building (Months 5-6)

- Fully integrate all fieldwork operations, creating a single national network of enumerators and coordinators.
- Launch a unified data portal as the sole official repository for all national statistics.
- Initiate a major capacity development program focused on data science, geospatial analysis, and modern census techniques, leveraging existing partnerships.

5. Expected Benefits and Impact

The successful merger will yield transformative benefits for Nigeria's governance and development planning:

- **For Policymakers:** Access to unified, high-quality data dashboards that link population trends with economic and social indicators, enabling smarter, targeted policies. For example, educational planning can be directly informed by granular, projected age-structure data from the census:

- **For Resource Allocation:** Enhanced ability to guide the equitable distribution of national resources. Accurate, geo-referenced population data is crucial for the fair allocation of funds from the Federation Account and for targeting social intervention programs.
 - **For National Development:** Direct support for key national goals, including harnessing the demographic dividend, tracking Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and managing urbanisation. The merger will provide the integrated evidence base needed to address the root causes of high fertility, such as unmet need for family planning and girls' education.
- For International Standing:** Improved credibility of Nigerian data will increase investor confidence and fulfill reporting obligations to regional and international bodies more efficiently.

6. Recommendations

To realise this vision, the FG should:

- a) **Initiative Leadership:** Direct the Ministry of Finance, Interior and Budget and National Planning—under which the NBS currently operates—to lead the merger process in collaboration with the NPC.
- b) **Secure Legislative Action:** Prioritise the passage of the NBSD Establishment Act to provide an unequivocal legal mandate for the new agency.
- c) **Commit Financial Resources:** Allocate a dedicated transition budget in the next Appropriation Act to fund integration costs, technology upgrades, and staff training.
- d) **Launch a Change Management Campaign:** Proactively communicate the rationale and benefits of the merger to all stakeholders, including the public, to build support and manage expectations.

7. Conclusion

Nigeria's demographic future is one of its most powerful assets. To unlock its potential, the country must first master the information that defines it. The merger of the NPC and NBS into a National Statistical and Demographic Agency is a strategic, necessary, and achievable reform. It will replace fragmentation with synergy, doubt with credibility, and data with intelligence. By taking this decisive step, Nigeria will build a world-class statistical system capable of guiding the nation toward balanced, inclusive, and sustainable development for generations to come.

We urge the Federal Government to initiate this reform by directing the relevant ministries to lead the process, prioritizing the passage of the necessary establishment act, and allocating a dedicated transition budget. Unifying Nigeria's statistical system is a foundational step toward transforming data into actionable intelligence for national development.

Author:

This brief is compiled by Ademola Rabi, CEng, Director of Strategic Engagement & Partnerships, from the recommendations at the Forum's Nigeria's @ 65th National Roundtable held in Abuja on 23 September 2025.

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The views and opinions expressed by the author are those of the members of the TGF and reflect the collective position of the Forum.



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