



POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA , OAU & ECA

POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

A Briefing Note

Prepared by

Organization of African, Unity (OAU)

and

Economic commission for Africa (ECA)

POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

I. The Basic Issues: Population Growth and the Quality of Life

In recent years an increasing number of African people are being added every year. This was not always the case; these population increases are unprecedented in history. But the problem of population is not simply a problem of numbers. It is a problem of human welfare and of development. Rapid population growth can have serious consequences for the well-being of humanity worldwide. If development entails the improvement in people's level of living - their incomes, health, education and general well-being - and if it also encompasses their self esteem, respect, dignity and freedom of choice, then the really important question about population growth is how does the contemporary

population situation in many African countries contribute to or detract from their chances of realizing the goals of development, not only for the current generation but also for the future generations? Conversely, how does development affect population growth?

The major issues relating to this basic question are the following:

(1) The improvement in the level of living: Will African countries be capable of improving the levels of living for their people with the current and anticipated levels of population growth? To what extent does rapid population increase make it more difficult to provide essential social services including housing, transport, sanitation, and security?

(2) Increase labour forces and the problem of unemployment: How will African countries be able to cope with the vast increases in their labor

forces over the coming decades? Will employment opportunities be plentiful or will it be a major achievement just to keep unemployment levels from rising?

(3) the problem of poverty alleviation: What are the implications of higher population growth rates among the world's poor for their chances of overcoming the human misery of absolute poverty? Will world food supply and its distribution be sufficient not only to meet the anticipated population increase in the coming decades but also to improve nutritional levels to the point where all humans can have an adequate diet?

(4) improvement- in health and education: Given the anticipated- population growth will African countries be able to extend the coverage and improve the quality of their health and educational systems so that everyone can at least have the chance to secure adequate health care and basic education ?

(5) Poverty and the freedom of choice: To what extent are the low levels of living an important factor in limiting the freedom of parents to choose a desired family size ? Is there a relationship between poverty and family size?

In view of the above questions, it is important to frame the population issue not simply in terms of numbers, or densities , or rates, or movements but with full consideration of the qualities of human life: prosperity in place of poverty education in place of illiteracy full opportunities for the next generations of children in place of current limitations. Population trends if favourable, open man's options and enlarge his choices. Thus population policy

is not an end but only a means - a means to better life. This what the concern about population is about , or ought to be.

II. Africa's Demographic Features

Over the last one century Africa's population has grown at a rapid rate. The various estimates of the population size of Africa indicate that prior to 1900, the annual growth rate of population was less than 0.1 per cent; during the period 1900-1950, it was 1.2 per cent; in the period 1950-1970, the growth rate was estimated at 2.8 per cent; in the period 1980-1990, the rate was about 3.2 per cent. These data show that the recent demographic trends in Africa are characterized not only by unprecedented rapid growth rates but also by the associated youthful age composition.

Africa faces a major population explosion in the near future. Africa's population which was estimated at 257 million in 1960 had increased to 482 million by 1983. In 1993 the population of the continent was estimated at 682 million. The average annual growth rate during the decade was 3.2 per cent - the highest among Third World regions. In 1983, the ECA, using high variant assumptions, projected that total African population will be about 1.1 billion by 2008, taking an annual growth rate of 3.2 per cent during the 25-year period (1983-2008). The associated numbers of urban dwellers will be 472 million; children (0-14), 479 million; active population (15-64), 546 million; and school age 178 million (primary) 152 million (secondary). and 124 million (tertiary).

Even under the medium variant of the population projections by ECA, a 2.8 per cent annual growth would bring the total population to

997 million by the year 2008 instead of 1.1 billion based on high] variant assumptions. Thus the prospects of a new and better demographic setting that will not bring about unsustainable pressures and tensions but will rather ensure the progress and prosperity of all African countries seem rather remote during the next 14 years as drastic structural changes in the demographic situation take a long time.

III. Consequences of rapid population growth in Africa.

The costs of rapid population growth are cumulative: more births today make the task of slowing population growth later difficult, as today's children become tomorrow's parents. In general, food supplies and agricultural production must be greatly increased to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population, this limits the allocation of resources to other economic and social sectors, Secondly, the rapid increase in population means that there will be an increase in the dependency ratio This implies that the country concerned will have to allocate increasing resources to feed, clothe, house and educate the useful component of the population which consumes but does not produce goods and services Thirdly, a rapidly growing population has serious implications for the provision of productive employment Since the rapid population growth] is normally accompanied by a proportional increase in the supply of the labour force, it means that the rate of job creation should match the rate of supply of the labour force In Africa the rate of labour force supply has outstripped that of job creation, implying that the rates of unemployment have been increasing rapidly In other words, the number of people seeking employment increases more rapidly than the number of available jobs This kind of situation. poses a menacing problem for society

When an ever-growing number of workers cannot be absorbed in the

modern economic sectors of the African countries the workers are forced either into unproductive service occupations or back into the traditional sector with its low productivity and low subsistence wage levels. This large supply for cheap labour tends to hold back technological change, and industrialization is slowed by mass poverty, which in turn reduces the demand for manufactured goods. The end results are low saving rates and low labor skills, both of which inhibit the full development and utilization of natural resources in some African countries. In other countries, the growing population would outrun the levels at which renewable resources could be sustained, and the resource bases would deteriorate. Thus, widespread poverty, low labour productivity, the growing demand for food and slow industrialization distort and degrade the international trade of African countries.

Rapid population growth rates also have ramifications for political and social conflicts among different ethnic, religious, linguistic and social groups. As population grows rapidly, there will be increasing demands for governmental services in health, education, welfare and other functions. One of the major contributing factors in violence and aggression, the large proportions of young people, particularly those unemployed or who have little hope for a satisfactory future, might form disruptive and potentially explosive political forces.

The cost adequacy and nature of health and welfare services might be affected by rapid population growth in much the same way as are those of educational services. In the individual family death and illness might be increased by high fertility and frequent pregnancies, and

the necessity of caring for excessive numbers of children. It should also be noted that the physical and mental development of children are often retarded in large families because of inadequate nutrition and the prevalence of diseases associated with poverty, and also because the children are provided of sufficient adult contact.

Another major consequence of rapid Africa's population growth is the phenomenal growth rate of urban population. Due to an increase in the total population, the Africa's urban population will reach 377 million and 1,271 million levels for the years 2000 and 2025, respectively. Without adequate provision of housing facilities, the rapid population growth rate will result in poor and crowded housing in the urban slums of the rapidly growing cities, and this could also produce further social problems.

Rapid urbanization has also caused stresses in many African economies. Africa is still very largely rural and agricultural, as some 75% of all Africans live outside cities and towns. Nevertheless, during the past generation, urbanization has increased at an alarming pace. More than 42% of all population, compared with only 8% in 1960. In fact, there were only two cities in the continent with populations exceeding 500,000 in 1960. If recent trends should continue, Africa will have 60 cities with population of more than 1,000,000 by the year 2000 as against 19 cities in 1993. It should be noted that in 1950, only Cairo had a population of more than 1,000,000 in the entire African continent.

This rapid urban population growth has been caused by factors such as prospects for more jobs, access to medical treatment, and general attractions of urban lives. Many migrants to the cities, however, have

discovered that their prospects are not significantly improved by relocation, and unemployment and underemployment are rampant in every major city in Africa. Increases in population cause a number of serious problems. With an average annual growth rate in agriculture of about 2.5% self-sufficiency in food production becomes a more elusive goal. Additionally, high population growth puts pressures on the soil by decreasing the time it is allowed to lay fallow; pastures land declines and the result is over grazing, which in turn causes increased friction between farmers and herders.

IV. Inter-relationship between population growth and socio-economic development

The socio-economic consequences of demographic evolution and vice-versa are extremely difficult to measure with accuracy. However, some studies have attempted to show the relationship between population growth and socio-economic development.

The correlation matrix of population and socio-economic development for 50 African countries during the last three decades has proved that population and development are inseparable and their relationship is reciprocal. The most important findings from these studies are :

a) Population, agriculture and environment.

The relationship between the three variables show that the situation in Africa is critical. From the 660 million hectares of forest, about 3.2 million hectares per year are lost. The demand for fire wood is increasing about the same rate of population

growth (3 5). This degradation of environment has a negative repercussion on the agriculture production and among other things on the availability of water resources.

The food deficit generated aggravated the malnutrition situation in African countries. The agriculture and economic stagnation impede the process of transition towards the lowering of fertility.

The rapid population growth affected also the satisfaction of immediate needs of the people and sustainable development.

b) Population and education.

It is noted that population growth is closely correlated with the number of children per woman and in the countries where the primary school enrollment for girls is high it is found that the infant mortality is lower. The fertility rate is also negatively correlated with the number of girls registered in primary school showing that education of women is a crucial variable in the explanation of the fertility tendency observed in African countries and accordingly constitutes an important factor of the relation between demographic growth and development

c) Population migration and urbanization

Population growth affects the increase of urban areas through the process of migration. Fertility is higher among population working on agriculture than it is in urban population. As a result rural-urban migration takes place. This could cause serious shortage of labour force

in the area of origin and as a consequence lack of food supply while it could cause an excess of labour , increased demand for health and education services and could create rapid urbanization and development of towns in the areas of destination.

Therefore - this situation and realities which exist in our countries have become causes for the failure of our efforts in development.

d)Population and family planning.

The correlation matrix of fertility trends and contraception shows also that proportion of women using contraception are the most negatively correlated with fertility and was less degree to the proportion of children enrolled in secondary schools, the degree of urbanization, growth of GDP per capita and other factors. The African countries with low fertility are the countries where the contraceptive prevalence rate the primary school enrollment of girls, the expenditure in social sector are very high and the expenditure for defense and security very low. therefore increase of general education of the population specially for girls and favorable socio-economic situation constitute the important elements in the use of contraception and family planning and consequently control the fertility and better quality of life.

e) Population and Structural Adjustment Programmes.

African countries who have adopted the structural adjustment are those who have experienced lower GNP per capita, rapid demographic growth due to high fertility, high proportion of illiterate woman, slow

decrease of infant mortality, high poverty, low rate of prevalence of contraception, rapid degradation of environment etc.. It also appears that the adoption of the structural adjustment programme by those African countries seem to have no amelioration in their critical situation they were experiencing before the adoption of structural adjustment programme.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the population problem in Africa is real and challenging. The impact of the effect of high birth and death rates, increasing population size and density, rapid population growth, and increasing dependency burden all translate into greater demands on the African governments in productive activities which in turn accentuate the problems of unemployment, underemployment, persistent poverty, urban slums, crime and political unrest.

To the extent that population variables influence development and are also influenced by them, the the theme of this analysis is that if Africa is to effect changes in the critical growth components of their populations (especially fertility) consistent with the recommendations of the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action the Dakar/NGOR Declaration, and ultimately effect a marked reduction in Africa's population growth rate, then a viable population policy for the constituent states should be one integrated into their development plans.

The programme of ..action of ICPD which focused on the control of population growth mainly by means of family planning and contraceptives should take into consideration the socio-economic development aspect to

reach objectives. Every country should have the responsibilities to tackle prevailing population problems according to its development policy based on the local cultural, religious, political, ethnic and demographic diversity.

For further information, please contact: popin@undp.org
POPIN Gopher site: <gopher://gopher.undp.org/11/ungophers/popin>
POPIN WWW site: <http://www.undp.org/popin>