

# **MANAGING RAPID POPULATION GROWTH FOR EFFECTIVE POVERTY REDUCTION**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

*The paradox and dilemma of a fast growing population of the world amidst virulent, global economic down-turn is receiving scholars' attention because it might be causal to the pervasive and phenomenal youth restiveness in most parts of the world. This study critically analysed secondary data on how poverty implicates the fast growing population of underdeveloped countries, including Nigeria. The study found that apart from the rigid cultural structures and practices against birth control, the growing polarity between individual political interest groups, in successive leadership of Nigeria and the interest of the nation, have always been at variance and in deficit. These phenomena inhibit development plans and militate against the poverty reduction objective of Millennium Development Goals.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

People play dual role in development process of economies of their countries and the world. They are the ultimate beneficiaries by ways of demand and consumption, which are relevant to investment and economic

growth. On the other hand, they provide the requisite input into production process, transformation and growth. According to Ugwuanyi and Anekeje (2009), individuals constitute a formidable force in providing human and capital resource. The humans provide labour force, leadership and co-coordinative abilities necessary for harnessing the factors of production.

In view of these all-important (dual) roles, what attitude should policy makers take towards the growth of population at individual, family, national and global levels? Should population growth be limited on grounds that it creates additional mouth to feed and bodies to clothe? When the world population projections and estimates of scarce resources available are compared, it creates a problem of considerable dimensions. Yet, each new individual can also bring additional labour power and even more importantly, additional human spark may lead to creativity that support solutions to many problems that society faces. Perkins et al (2001) provide strong argument for some forms of population limitation that are not universally acceptable, since important social, political and moral issues must be weighed.

The problem associated with population control policy is that the choice of one alternative increases the risk of its opportunity cost. This was the case in China, where population was increased as a matter of deliberate policy, to meet the manpower demand of the growing industries. It resulted in over-population of the country, bringing dependency ratio to as high as 78 percent in 1973. Consequently, a “one-child” family planning policy was adopted, which reduced dependency ratio to 38 percent in 2010, but the result was a risk phenomenon known as, the “Empty Nest”. The aged parents whose children died were left with no one to cater for them. Moreover, the “one-child per family” policy resulted in a dwindling manpower level. The authorities decided to review

upwards the one-child family planning policy to a “two-child” family (CCTV News, 2012). This paradox of population control policy makes birth control solution ineffective and dicey (Lipsey and Chrystal, 2007).

In Nigeria, the urban dwellers may seem to appreciate the vicissitudes of large family size. But, the rural beliefs and practices, and their distance from the media of communication, such as cable and internet facilities, seem to perpetuate their ignorance on the implications of a swift rising population.

Remarkably, the decision of how many children to have is an intimately personal one. In some cultures, it has been left to the choice of the couples involved, while in others it is a matter of religio-political decision. However, all societies seem to condition these individual decisions in different ways. Some argue that conscious policy intervention to limit population growth is premised on the rationale that many couples do not know how to achieve their desired family size or find it too expensive to do so and thus must be supported to achieve it. According to Jhingan (2007), every increase in population has led to more than proportionate increase in the gross national product (GNP). This particularly is true of countries that are wealthy and have abundant capital and natural resources. This calls for the necessity of reinforcing the implementation of the Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) objectives instead of dissipating all the foreign currency earnings from the excess crude oil sales, which has always led to the continual depreciation of the naira, as more naira is injected to the exchange for the petro-dollar proceeds.

There is also the need to build human capital formation relevant for active participation in a deregulated oil and gas industry. To this end, Todaro and Smith (2006) echoed that an end to poverty requires more than just increasing incomes of the poor. Consequently, in 2000, the 189 members of the United Nations (UN) adopted eight Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs), in the bid to wrestle humanity from the scourges of miseries and poverty, and committed themselves to making substantial progress toward the eradication of poverty and achieving other human development goals by the year 2015. The UN also enjoined all its members to domesticate the MDGs: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and development.

The target of the MDGs are people – the population. If material resources necessary for achieving these goals are shared as benefits among the people (as beneficiaries), then the dividends would increase as the population decreases. Conversely, the dividends would decrease as the population increases. Thus, the dividends of the MDGs may be inversely related to the population. The higher the population, the lower the chances of achieving them. This study was, therefore, premised on this notion. It set out to analyze secondary data to seek the effects of a fast growing population on a developing country (Mkpozi, 2008).

## **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Model of population growth**

#### **Malthusian postulations and evasion of Malthusian trap**

The consequences of population growth on economic development have attracted the attention of economists dating back to the era of Adam Smith, who saw a growing population as asset to a country by submitting that the the annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it

with all the necessities of life. On the other hand, some authorities have raised alarm over effects of rapidly growing population on growth of an economy and the well being of the citizens. Samuelson and Nordhaus (2010: 522) paraphrased Malthus' gloomy postulations were paraphrased:

*“As population doubles and redoubles, it is as if the globe was halving and halving again in size – until finally it has shrunk so much that food production is below the level necessary to support population.”*

But their fears, according to Jhingan (2007), proved unfounded because the growth of population in Western Europe has led to its rapid industrialization. Actually, Malthus did not say that population would necessarily grow at geometric rate, but he maintained that this was only its tendency if unchecked. He described the checks that operate in all times and places, to hold population down, to include pestilences, famine, and war. He advocated for *morale restraint*, such as abstinence or postponed marriages. Malthus' ideas had wide-reaching repercussions as his writing prompted people to argue that poverty should be made as uncomfortable as possible. This meant that the government should not seek to better the life of the poor populace because any increase in the *work balances* (net income) of poor couples, would only cause workers to increase their reproductive sex activities until all were reduced to bare subsistence.

The Malthusian view was disheartening. Despite his statistical analysis, demographers today simply think that Malthus' view was oversimplified. Malthus failed to anticipate the technological breakthrough of the Industrial Revolution and the birth control movement and the new technologies that provided families with capabilities to reduce birth rate. In the century following Malthusian postulations, technological advance

shifted out the production possibility frontiers in Europe and North America (Samuelson and Nordhause, 2010).

The technological changes in that era outpaced Western population, resulting in a rapid rise in wages, just as standard of living increased while the population in most Western nations declined. In this way, the world evaded the *Malthusian Trap* on population explosion. Notwithstanding, the salient issues in Malthus doctrines are still relevant for managing population size and the level of demand for food security, social security and other demands for social necessities have continued. This view, incidentally, is the nucleus of this study, especially at this time in Nigeria where the emerging youth restiveness and the appalling social insecurity, seemed to resonate with curtailment in reckless spending by the Federal Government in the process of pursuing economic reforms in forms of deregulation and the need to provide adequately, critical infrastructures in the country. The scarce national resources have necessarily imposed prudence and frugality on federal government fiscal activities. If the population were within the manageable size, vis-a-vis the economic resources available, the current security imbroglio orchestrated by a sect in northern Nigeria (Boko Haram) would have been minimal.

Todaro and Smith (2006) doubted whether the industrial revolution and the long-term growth rates of contemporary developed countries could have been achieved or proceeded so fast and with few setbacks and disturbances especially for the very poor, had their populations been expanding so rapidly. The monumental technological advances which outpaced population brought about increases in the production of goods and services, in which the scientific discoveries in medical sciences reduced morbidity and mortality and at the time, fertility rate declined. Note that a decreasing population, as productivity or income of workers rises, is critical to understanding the driving focus of this study.

### **Sen Amartya's postulations on money illusion, people and poverty**

Sen Amartya advocated that “income and wealth are not ends in themselves but instruments for other purpose ...” (Todaro and Smith, 2006: 17). This implies that money illusion should not be allowed to drive human development. Accordingly, poverty cannot be properly measured by income or even by utility as conventionally understood; what matters is not possessions (or the feelings they provide), but what the possessor is or can be, and does or can do, that is, “capability to function”. Accordingly, what matters for well-being of the people is not just the characteristics of the social commodities consumed, as in the utility approach. Rather, it is the use the consumer is able to make of the commodities that matters. Consequently, empowerment of the population is superior to minimum wage advocacy (income approach).

### **Institutional variables and cultural bottlenecks**

These are cultural and religious dogmatic beliefs that constitute impediments to human development. They simply hold that children are gifts from God and that human intervention aimed at restraining growth in population is an aberration. A marriage blessed with children is regarded as fulfilled and the one without children as unfulfilled, cursed and ominous. In some cultures children are not to be enumerated while some religions believe in marrying more than one wife. The danger with such practices is the absence of solutions for overcoming the effects of poverty on highly, populated families. The result is proliferation of destitute and child-slavery.

In the northern part of Nigeria with predominant Islamic believers (in marrying up to four wives and having as many children as the fertility of the wives could permit) suffer high rate of absolute poverty. In cognizance of these phenomena, the world political leaders realizing that population explosion is capable of destabilizing the peace of nations and that it might generate a contagion of political extremism, called for restraint in child bearing and recognition of responsible parenthood. However, in indigenous Nigerian societies, various beliefs, superstitions and cultural practices have held sway over the basis of many decisions, which in turn, affect societal life and value systems. The beauty of culture and tradition cannot be over emphasized, but when these traditions are detrimental to health and societal well-being, it becomes an issue of common concern. Culture is not, and should not be, seen as static, but subject to all kinds of pressures and influences.

Eneh (2000), succinctly stated that in Hausa societies there are certain beliefs and traditions that are detrimental to the life of the expectant mother, the type of food women consume is a number one factor. The diet is limited by lack and certain beliefs. Some types of food are assumed to be bad for the pregnant women. For example, she is discouraged from taking eggs in some Hausa cultures.

Population explosion increases unemployment and scarcities of social and food securities. Rural communities and some religious clerics have failed to imbibe cultural alterations that favour birth control in encouraging early marriage of the girl child.

**Social malaise and economic justifications**

A large population implies a large market for goods and services as well as large pool of human resources for development. However, the impact of population on development depends not only on the absolute size, but also

on its quality. Thus, it is not a matter of quantity of children. “The continuing large size of families is one of the fundamental reasons why parents and guardians particularly among the poor, find it difficult to provide adequate care for their children,” (FGN/UNICEF, 2001: 17). The over-sized families, in most cases could not cope with children education, food, clothing, shelter and responsible upbringing, moral and emotional care. Consequently, the reality of this scenario might not necessarily be with the absolute size of the population, but more importantly, with the implications of the growth rate for future size of the population, and ability of the economy to grow commensurately with and, therefore cope with the increase in population size. There is limit or capacity level beyond which individual family’s resources could not accommodate in naira terms. This is why over the years, many experts on development issues have advocated for family planning.

Onodugo (2000) enunciated the importance of planning, stressing that when business managers fail to plan, they indirectly have planned to fail. The couples should imbibe and adopt family planning through the process of identifying variables in the socio-economic environment which may be capable of derailing the marital objectives, which FGN/UNICEF, (2001: 33) described as “survival, development and participation rights” of children. In so doing, the parents qualify under responsible parenthood tests. Consequently, Becker (1981) in Perkins et al (2001: 264), expatiated that the rising cost of child quantity, caused many parents to opt to invest in child quality and spend more money on a decreasing number of children.

Todaro and Smith (2006) stated that children in poor societies are seen partly as economic investment goods in that there is an expected return in the form of child labour and financial support to parents at old age. Most Nigerians, therefore, marry to have children as a form of social

security in old age. In contrast, developed countries operate social security a system which guarantees the aged people of financial protection upon retirement, having contributed to the scheme. Although the social security alternative is culturally embedded in African society, the consequences of trading on children, in global culture parlance, is an aberration of international disrepute to the country and the parents that practice child trafficking. It is now a crime to trade or hire out children as a method of enterprise.

Arising from the challenges of fast growing population is trend in the abuse of psychoactive substances by adolescents. According to Ewhrudjakpor (2009: 264), the consumption of illicit substances "... is unambiguous with increasing youth population in secondary schools". The potential risks of a fast rising population may not easily be speculated with any scientific instrument, and this is one of the reasons why proactive solutions for birth control is superior to fighting crimes in a highly populated environment.

Furthermore, Nwosu and Nwodu (2007: 31) expressed dismay regarding uncontrolled population: "The proliferation of the number of children who were displaced from their rightful parental care into 'forced labour' in the hands of other people not related to them...", postulating that poverty was the major factor responsible for child labour. The inadequate financial resources of parents/couples with large family sizes cause them to fall short in their responsible parenthood, compelling some of them to hire out some of their children to other people not related to them. There is a direct correlation between a fast rising population and endemicity of absolute poverty. The doubling time (the number of years within which the population doubles) in population growth does not translate into growth in Gross National Income (GNI). The large proportions of children and adolescents significantly out-number their

parents, thus exacerbating the unemployment conundrum in Nigeria and other highly populated nations, as the workforce in these developing countries, must support almost twice as many children as it does in developed (wealthier) countries (Chiaha, 2009).

Dependency ratio (number of persons between the ages 0-15 years plus the aged of 65 years and above - the economically unproductive) is expressed as a ratio of the total workforce of the country. The dependency burden implicates high rate of population growth and is inimical to the attainment of MDGs. The population under 15 years of age is a major snag, as it accounts for almost half of the population, thus placing high dependency burden on the generally small productive labour-force and on the governments, which have to allocate resources to education, public health and housing, to say the least, for the citizens who do not contribute, in any way, to the production process.

Todaro and Smith (2006) submit that the incidence of poverty in developing world falls especially on minority ethnic groups and indigenous populations. This was confirmed in recent years, where domestic conflicts and even civil wars have arisen out of ethnic groups' perceptions of marginalisation in limited resource allocations and job opportunities. The magnitude and extent of poverty in any country depend on two factors: the average level of national income and degree of inequality in its distribution. For any given level of national per capita income, the more unequal the distribution, the greater the incidence of poverty. Similarly, for any given distribution, the lower the average income level, the greater the incidence of poverty. Despite numerous policies and programmes geared towards improving the living standard of Nigerians, it has been difficult to stem the growth of rural poverty, the number of women living in absolute poverty increased (from 400 million in 1965 to 600 million in 1988 in developing countries). This is because

the *doubling time* in population growth does not translate into growth in Gross National income (GNI), but development policies that create employment do. The scientific and industrial innovations necessary for increasing productivity more often do not keep pace with the rate at which population doubles.

Another way to appraise and appreciate how population growth may torpedo human development effort and the MDGs achievement is per capita income using the GNI and GDP functions. The GNI is composed of the GDP plus the difference between the income residents received from abroad for factor services (labour and capital) minus payments to expatriates through funds repatriation (of non-residents) on income generated in the domestic economy. The net amount is divided by the population, and where the population is exponentially high, the income per capita derivable would be very low and vice versa. In Nigeria, the amount of fund repatriated (capital flight) is usually very high because of the low contribution of oil and gas industry to the domestic economy. This means that when the contribution of the foreign international oil companies are deducted from the GNI, the resulting net balance would be too small, and lowers the income per capita. Part of the problems of underdevelopment presently facing the teeming population of Nigerians seems to stem from the weak linkage of the oil and gas industry to the entire domestic economy in all ramifications. Ahmed (2008, in Okeleke, 2012: 46) lamented the peripheral player of Nigeria in oil and gas production, adding that it behooves the political leadership to do the imperative in order to move the nation forward, through the reforms in the oil and gas industry.

**Some conflicting opinions on the consequences of high fertility rate and development issues.**

Development economist and other social scientists have debated the seriousness of the adverse effects of rapid population growth on individual families and the country for many years. The debate reached an all-time height in 1974 during the first world population conference held in Bucharest, Romania. Population growth is not the only, or even the primary, source of low levels of living. Eroding self-esteem and limited freedom in developing countries are serious intensifiers and multipliers of those integral components of underdevelopment. Limited to access internet facilities for up-to-date information on approved birth control methods and other vital information that could motivate decent living could be linked to pervading poverty. Eneh and Chionuma (2010) opined that causes of poverty were large size of family, low self-esteem, and lack of access to markets, pointing out that 25 % of the world's 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty are in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria ranked among the poorest nations. Some macro environment information are supportive of causal relationship between rising population and poverty and misery levels (AIT News, 2012).

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

The problems of population growth are corollaries of human development challenges. This implied that what may be observed as development problems are, indeed, the results of problems associated with excessive population growth. Consequently, an approach to resolving certain effects of population phobia may as well be redressed through resolving the failures of development.

**Population-induced poverty and inflation**

Rapidly rising population constitutes a clog in the wheels of national development for reaching the MDGs due to incessantly falling values and limited quantum of scarce resources available at the disposal of governments and individual families, resulting from global economic recession. Uduaghan (2012: 5) stated “all over the world, there is the problem of economic depression leading to a very high rate of unemployment. This was made worse by the astronomical rise in our population...”. The World Bank (2002, in Okiyi, 2006: 213) states that “An increase of people affects Nepal’s migration trends, land use and availability, restricts economic stabilization and nurtures ecological and environmental abuse. Already, a world poverty center, the addition of people every year is an on-going formula for despair among most Nepal’s inhabitants who scratch out a means to exist. Growing dissatisfaction of its primarily young citizens nurtures insurgent uprising, only adding to the uncertainty of Nepal’s future.” It is obvious that Nepal’s situation and that obtainable in some parts of Nigeria are symmetrical. The causal relationships between poverty, misery and hardships are positively correlated with poverty trends (Michael, Mikhail and Elena, 2007).

Another MDGs restraining variable is the subordination of women. Women often bear the disproportionate burdens of poverty, poor education, lack of jobs and social mobility. In many instances, their subordinative roles and limited access to birth controls and corridors of power are depicted in their high fertility. Rapid population growth is a natural outcome of women’s lack of economic opportunity or the absence of capability functionings. If girls are not given to early marriages, high fertility function would drop in many African countries. If the girl-child is educated, employed and empowered, their roles in the family size decision

would significantly lead to small but qualitative child production. The subjugation of women is a cultural phenomenon.

Certain administrative bottlenecks in leadership process in Nigeria are inimical to human development and perpetuate underdevelopment. Government should play the role of principal stakeholder in the change, agency systems (Okiyi 2006).

### **Unco-ordinated and conflicting interest groups in leadership of Nigeria**

The divergent political interest groups of different political parties in a democratic system of government, converges on the locus of national interest. This, of course, ought to be the beauty of democracy. However, in Nigerian polity, national interest is sometimes wittingly subjugated and subordinated to the whims and caprices of a combination of individuals, indifferent to national and human development paradigms, to the chagrin of unsuspecting electorates. The intrigues of these powerful and divergent interest groups often create distortion and distractions in the psyche of unsuspecting citizens, who unwittingly oscillate between opinions.

There is merit in the argument that if correct strategies pursuant to human development were followed, it would lead to higher levels of standard of living, greater self-esteem and expanded freedom. Underdevelopment is the evil in the society, and the only goal of the nations should be development. In this way, economic mechanisms will more or less automatically regulate population growth and distribution. Attention of leaders is also required on the high rate of inflation, which is invariably diminutive to salaries and profits of civil servants and small business.

### **Issues perpetuating rapid population in underdeveloped and developing countries**

Underdevelopment also results from the power play by divergent political interest groups. So as long as people remain impoverished, uneducated, and physically and psychologically weak, the large family sizes may only continue to constitute the available source of financial security, in the absence of any other alternative for securing social security at old age. Children in poor countries are partly economic investment goods for their parents at old age.

In Africa, Nigeria in particular, something to hope on must be in place as a motivation (a form of old age financial security). To encourage poor families to check family size is, therefore, an uphill task. Government should create employment opportunities. Integration of science, technology and innovation (STI) is one way to reduce poverty. It is an indisputable driver of national economic development and forms the focus of the MDGs (Eneh, 2011; Tokunbola, 2000).

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The implications of high population growth on poor countries could be vicious and devastating. The population-induced poverty and miseries could be ameliorated by stakeholders' co-operative and co-ordinated willingness to pursue development that would generate sustainable employment for the citizens presently crowded out from the oil and gas industry in Nigeria. Installing an adequate social security system for old-age financial support will obviate the practice of using children as shield for social security challenges, and may reduce the drive for large-size family.

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