

IMPLICATIONS OF A RAPIDLY GROWING NIGERIAN POPULATION: A  
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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**Abstract**

This paper examined the Nigerian population situation with specific reference to its history and growth by reviewing the available literature and documents. It discussed efforts made by different governments as regard population policies to influence demographic variables, increase welfare and standard of living of people and why these policies were ineffective. The paper also discussed the possible consequences/implications of an unchecked rapidly growing Nigerian population and suggested ways of reducing its growth to pave way for rapid socio-economic development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

KEYWORDS: Nigerian population, Population policies, Population growth, Population census.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria has a growing population and what can also be referred to as an increasing population. The 1991, census figure put Nigerian population at about 89 million people with the growth rate of 2.82 and the total fertility rate as revealed by Post Enumeration Survey (PES) at 5.89 percent. The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), (2003 and 2008) put the total fertility rate at 5.7 percent as against that of 1999 NDHS which was 5.2 percent. Going by 2006 Nigerian National Population Census, Nigeria had a population of one hundred and forty million, three thousand and five hundred and forty two (140,003,542) (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). The growth rate was 3.02 percent per annum. The population is capable of doubling itself in less than twenty three years. In addition, the United Nations estimates of 2009 put the Nigerian total population at one hundred and fifty one million, thirty thousand and four hundred (151,030,400). Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and also the most populous among the black nations of the world. Globally, Nigeria is among the ten top countries with the largest population, in fact, the seventh among the countries with the largest population in the world (United Nations, 2009).

Population of Nigeria is increasing rapidly. Rapidly increasing population may result due to the effect of three important factors. They are birth rate, death rate and higher net migration. Migration has played a negligible role in Nigerian population increase. Therefore, it will not be given prominent in this write up. If an increasing population is brought about as a result of an increase in birth rate, there will be higher percentage of young people and children in the population. However, if it is by a decrease in death rate, then, there will be an increase in the total number of old people in the population. Furthermore, if an increase in population is brought about as a result of a higher net migration, then, there will be a larger number of people between ages of 16 and 50 years. Nigeria population is increasing mostly due to the effect of the first factor, that is, high birth rate. For instance, Crude Birth Rate (CBR) was 39.0 and 44.6 in 1990 and 1991 respectively (NPC, 2000). It was 42.0 in 2003 (NDHS, 2003). All these buttress the fact that there is high CBR in Nigeria.

Nigerian population has gathered momentum. It will continue to increase for some time even if there is a change favourable towards family planning and birth control. Increasing population at the expense of socio-economic development is inimical to people's well being and development. An increasing population has consequences and implications most especially for a country like Nigeria. This is the thrust of this study.

## **Rationale for the Study**

The growth rate of the population needs to be studied, monitored and managed properly with conscious efforts. If not, it can militate against all the efforts of government to fulfil its commitment to improving the quality of life and standard of living of the people of the country.

To achieve the following goals of the 2003 Nigeria National Policy on Population for Sustainable Development - sustained economic growth, poverty eradication, protection and preservation of the environment, and provision of quality social services, balance between the rate of population growth, available resources, and the social and economic development of the country and complete demographic transition to a reasonable growth in birth rates and low death rates and also that of Millennium Goals, population management is desirable (NPC, 2004 and NDHS, 2009).

British political economist Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus (1766 – 1834) who was regarded as the first professional demographer buttressed this point. He wrote the first and the most influential book on population growth. In his book (Essay on the principle of population), he wrote many years ago about the possible consequences of a rapidly growing population. He explained that when population increases more rapidly than the food supply, population is checked by war, diseases, famine, etc. Malthus' proposition is relevant to Nigerian situation. Rapid population growth is detrimental to economic and social development. There will be little or no time to adjust economy to developmental efforts. Population will continue to eat up any gain in economic development and these may lead to adverse effects on the people as put forward by Malthus.

Nigerian population requires and deserves urgent attention as a result of its alarming and unprecedented growth rate, also, because the population has gathered momentum. Regardless of any efforts, Nigerian population will continue to grow for some time.

Nigerians need to learn from China's experience in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Qing government faced many problems associated with population growth. More and more people lived in poverty; they were unable to cope when floods or droughts occurred. The government of Qing was unprepared for the effects of population growth (Clunas et al., 2008).

The population situation of Nigeria and issues related to it need to be discussed to bring many population related factors to the consciousness of people. For instance, Nigeria is suffering from wide spread poverty and rising unemployment. Moreover, there is mass movement of people from rural areas to urban areas thereby creating many social vices. This is because the available industries cannot afford to employ the growing number of labour force.

For Nigeria to turn the tide of its economic misfortunes and mismanagement, it will have to take steps to raise domestic food production, labour productivity, reduction of absolute poverty, lower population growth among many other things.

For the health of mother, child and welfare of the family, population growth should be monitored and regulated. Healthy family can help in socio-economic development while an unhealthy family is a liability to the government and society. It is also inimical to economic growth and development of the nation and the world at large.

### **Nigeria Census-taking and Population History**

Nigeria has engaged in many censuses in its forty nine years of existence. Among many others, censuses were taken and restricted to only Lagos Island and part of the Mainland in 1866, 1871 and 1896. Many urban towns were included in the censuses of 1911 and 1921. There were variations in the Northern and Southern Protectorate as regards the census conducted in 1931. Though, the two were based mostly on estimates (NPC, 1998).

No effort was made to conduct census in 1941 due to Second World War. This was conducted in 1952/53. It was elaborate but probably under-enumerated the population of Nigeria. After the independence of Nigeria on first of October, 1960 census was carried out in 1962 (Iro, 1987). The result of the 1962 census was nullified and another one was conducted in 1963 (Ekanem, 1972). The result of this census was nullified by the Supreme Court. In addition, the result of 1973 census was unacceptable (NPC, 1998).

1991 witnessed another census-taking and Post Enumeration Survey (PES) in Nigeria. It was a successful attempt and it provided a robust set of socio-economic and demographic data for social and economic planning. The total population as at 1991 was 88,992,220. Sixteen years later, that was, in 2006, another headcount was

conducted. The headcount revealed a total population was more than 140 million. Table 1 presents the population of Nigeria from 1911-2006.

**Table 1: The Population of Nigeria 1911-2006 Censuses**

Population (Million)										
Region	1911	1921	1931	1952/53	1962	1963	1973(High)	1973	1991*	2006
Northern	8.12 50.60%	10.56 56.41%	11.44 57.03%	16.84 55.36%	22.01 48.60%	29.78 53.50%	32.00 48.85%	51.38 64.42%	47.26 53.40%	-
Eastern	4.50	5.11	4.55	7.22	12.33	12.39	18.00	13.75	18.92	-
Western	2.15	2.17	2.95	4.60	8.10	10.28	11.00	8.92	11.91	-
Mid-Western	1.21	0.78	0.99	1.49	2.40	2.53	3.00	3.24	4.73	-
Lagos	0.07	0.10	0.13	0.27	0.45	0.68	1.50	2.47	5.69	9013534
Total	7.93	8.62	8.62	13.58	23.28	25.88	33.50	28.38	41.25	-
Southern	49.40%	42.64%	42.64%	44.64%	51.40%	46.50%	51.15%	35.58%	46.60%	-
Total Nigeria	16.05	18.72	20.06	30.42	45.29	55.66	65.50	79.76	88.51	140.0

Sources: S.A. Aluko (1974): Nigeria Crucial Count

\*Africa: An International Business, Economic and Political Monthly No. 29 pp 12-15, 1995 (based on the preliminary population figures of 88.5m)  
NPC, 1998

**Table 2: Recorded Census Population and Intercensal Growth Rate**

Census Year	Population (Million)	Period of Years		Growth Rate (%)	
		A Intercensal	B From 1953	A Intercensal	B From 1953
1911	16.05	-	42	-	1.52
1921	18.72	10	32	1.54	1.52
1931	20.06	10	22	0.69	1.89
1952/53	30.42	22	0	1.89	-
1963	55.66	10	10	6.04	6.04
1973	79.76	10	20	3.60	4.82
1991	88.99	18	38	0.61	2.82
2006	140.0	15	53	3.02	2.88

Sources: NPC, 1998

National Bureau of Statistics, 2009

The Guardian, January 10, 2007

### **Why Nigeria Population is increasing rapidly**

Among many other factors causing unprecedented growth of population in Nigeria is birth rate and this has affected greatly the growth rate of the population. According to 2006 Population Census, the growth rate was 3.02 (see Table 2). This shows that Nigerian population will double in less than 22 years.

There are many factors that have generated increase in birth rate. One of them is improved medical services and facilities. Compare to many decades ago, there are better though not adequate medical services and facilities. Better drugs and immunization services which have reduced greatly infant, child, maternal and other forms of mortality and consequently high birth rate.

Another factor is early marriage most especially in the northern part of Nigeria. Early marriage tend to lead to high birth rate because women will have opportunity of having many children due to long child bearing/reproductive years while postponement of marriage because of educational aspirations will reduce birth rate.

Another factor though not significant is the increase in material well being of some families. When people are materially well off, they give little thought to the number of children to have. Wealth has encouraged many people to have large families and thus result to high birth rate. Moreover, old age security also encourages people to have large families. People want to have many children base on the fact that these children would provide for them when they are old and cannot engage in productive activities again. They believe the more the children the more the guarantee of better life at old ages. They strife and try to have more and more children.

In Nigeria, religions, superstitions and customs have encouraged population growth. All these favour large families and discourage the practice of family planning. Many religions and customs also allow polygyny. For instance, Islam favours polygyny and allows men to have up to four wives each.

Death rate is also worth mentioning as a factor in population growth in Nigeria. Many of the factors mentioned above can also be held responsible for low death rate that is generating increase in population growth. Factors that affect death rate include improvement in medicine, dietary standard, hygiene, increase in the levels of standard of living and literacy etc. They are part of the reasons for the decline in mortality or

death rates of infant, child and adult in Nigeria and consequently continue to generate rapid increase in population.

### **Past Efforts to Reduce Rapid Population Increase and why the efforts did not yield the desired results**

Nigeria government made the first serious efforts to influence the population variables in 1988 during the Buhari administration. The policy, “Nigeria Policy on Population for Unity, Progress and self-reliance” was introduced after the approval of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). A lot was done in preparation for the policy. It was a proof of the government seriousness and concern about family planning as part of overall socio-economic development of the country. The Head of State and Government emphasized the need for the policy (Federal Ministry of Health, 1985). Furtherance to this, another policy was introduced in 2003 by Olusegun Obasanjo Administration. This was called “Nigeria Policy on Population for Sustainable Development”.

However, the rate of population growth in 1991 (2.82 percent) and in 2006 (3.02 percent) attest to the fact that the policies have little or no influence on the people (Council of State, 2007). Despite the two policies, the Nigerian population is growing rapidly and the rate of growth in 2006 was higher than that of 1991. The policies have not achieved the stated aims and objectives.

Many factors militated against success and proper functioning of the population policy programmes. Ebigbola (1988) explained many socio-cultural and other constraints that militated against effective implementation of the population policy programmes in Nigeria. The policy was voluntary in nature. According to the policy document, ‘couples will only be encouraged to have the number of children that they can adequately cater for, since all couples have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and the spacing of their children’. There is also prevalence of polygyny most especially in the Northern part of Nigeria. Islamic injunction allows a man to marry many wives. The policy advocated four children per woman rather than four children per couple.

Another impediment is the belief that Islam does not support the fixing of marriage at 18 years or more. The programme cannot be implemented wholly or in part most especially in the Muslim community of the North due to this belief. Moreover, there is a

wide belief that the male children are the pillars of the family and object of perpetuation of the family lineage. Therefore, many families strive to have many male children irrespective of the number of female they have had. In addition, the policy was voluntary in nature. There is no legal backing, sanction or incentive for compliance. Frequent change of government in Nigeria is another serious impediment. Every government wants to be the architect of a new policy. For political reasons there is no continuity or equal zeal to implement the policy on the part of most successive governments (Ebigbola, 1988).

### **Implications of a rapidly growing Nigerian population**

Growing populations like that of Nigeria has many effects. Some of them are explained below.

Growing population will create a large market for goods and services. Many people mean large demand for commodities and services. There will be high number of consumers. Demand for food, clothing and shelter will be on the increase. Moreover, demand for materials being used by children will also increase. A rapidly growing population always has large number of children. According to 1991 population census of Nigeria, 45% of the total population fall into 0-14 years age group. Therefore, there will be an increasing demand for toys, children wear, etc.

As explained above, a growing population will stimulate demand and change investment pattern. A large children population means large production of materials needed by the children. Many producers will change their production pattern and shift to the production of children's goods. On the part of government, more school should be built for children especially nursery and primary schools, more recreational facilities should be provided, more health institutions that will treat them and give vaccines.

An increasing population will increase dependency ratio and workers will have more mouths to feed. More children or aged people to cater for. There will be greater dependants on the working population. There will be social burden and economic liability on the working population. Having met their needs and that of their dependants, there will be little or nothing left out of the populace income. This will reduce savings and there will be a lower rate of capital formation. This in turn will hamper the socio-economic development of the country. This is one of the reasons why Nigeria is



experiencing low capital formation and epileptic or very low socio-economic development.

Increase demand without corresponding increase in production will bring about high cost of living. Many people will be chasing few goods and this will lead to upward movement of prices of commodities and services. Demand and price are increasing in Nigeria due to population pressure and cost of living most especially in the urban areas. Many people in Nigeria are spending large percentage of their income on goods, services and children upkeep. Lagos and Abuja are typical examples.

Another effect of a rapidly increasing population is the low level of income per head. There will be fewer income or resources per head. The result of this is a lower standard of living or general fall in the standard of living. The consumption of goods and services per head will be low. This can lead to consumption of sub standard goods and inferior commodities. Moreover, this can as well generate a situation whereby many people live in ghetto or slump areas. Such areas are conducive for contagious diseases and epidemics. This is the case in many places in Nigeria especially in Lagos, and many parts of the Northern Nigeria.

In addition to aforementioned points, high and rapid population growth without corresponding social and economic growth will lead to inadequate social services and misuse due to heavy pressure on housing, educational facilities, roads, health facilities, water supply, etc due to overuse. To forestall incessant breakdown of these facilities and also to meet the increasing demand for them, the government will spend more money on provision of more facilities and on the repair and maintenance of existing ones. In Nigeria, there is an acute shortage of amenities in urban areas. There is frequent power failure. Shortage of pipe born water and inadequate tertiary institutions are all due to population pressure.

Increasing population will generate increasing manpower most especially in the long run. The children who are great in number will later enter the labour force and generate higher supply of labour. In Nigeria, rapidly increasing population has generated rapidly growing supply of labour. 1991 Population Census revealed that 51.7% of the total population belonged to age group 15 - 64. The population Census of 2006 is likely to reveal greater percentage though the government has not published the total breakdown of the population figure. Now in Nigeria, there is a great number of people who are

able, capable, willing and available for employment. But it is saddening to also point out here that there are not enough jobs to absorb this great number of labour force. The resultant effect is the high level of unemployment and poverty. As explained earlier, there is low savings due to low income, high and growing number of dependants. Low savings lead to low investment, hence, inability to absorb growing number of labour force.

Growth in population normally results to growth in population density especially in developing countries of the world. The average population density for the country in 1991 was 96 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. In some parts of Nigeria, population density is as high as 1,000 persons per square kilometre. For instance, the most densely populated states are Lagos (1,712), Anambra (534), Imo (438) and Akwa Ibom (389). These states are all in the southern part of the country. Kano State is the most densely populated in the northern part of the country, with a population density of 281 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (NPC, 1998).

### **Recommendations**

1. 1988 and 2003 Population Policies should be reviewed and there should be comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the population policy.
2. Population factor is important in socio-economic development; therefore, population considerations should be taken into account at all levels of decision-making.
3. It is necessary to promote accessibility to educational opportunities at least up to the secondary level to enhance job performance and ability to get good job.
4. Efforts at providing reproductive health services should be doubled and intensified to meet the increasing needs of the increasing population.
5. Effort should be made by government and other concerned institutions to solve the problems of unemployment, underemployment, inadequate social amenities etc.

### **Conclusion**

The population of Nigeria has a built-in potential for rapid growth through natural increase. Nigerian population is growing rapidly without corresponding growth in socio-economic development, as explained by Rev. Thomas Malthus an increasing population without corresponding increase in the means of subsistence will breed poverty, diseases, unemployment and other social ills. Nigeria needs to design an

intervention programmes that will help in reducing population growth rate and stimulate socio-economic development. Government should create enabling environment that will facilitate savings, investment, innovation, entrepreneurship and technical know-how.

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