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**REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON**  
**POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN AFRICA**



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**POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES 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 wellbeing - 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 realising 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 in labour forces and the problem of unemployment:** How will African countries be able to cope with the vast increases in their labour 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 a 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 ignorance, health in place of illness and death, environmental beauty in place of deterioration, 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 to better life. This is 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 rapidly and 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 increase 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.

## II. Consequences of rapid population growth in Africa

The costs of rapid population growth are cumulative: more births today make the task of showing 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 youthful 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 proportionate 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 and underemployment 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 of 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 labour 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 base 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. Although there is no evidence that rapid population growth is by itself the cause of or even the major contributing factor in violence aggression, the large proportions of young people, particularly those unemployed or have little hope for a satisfactory future, might form disruptive and potentially explosive political force.

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, maternal death and illness might be increased by high fertility, early 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 deprived of sufficient adult contact.

Another major consequence of rapid Africa's population growth is the phenomenal growth rate of urban populations. 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 urban-dwelling sub-Saharan Africans now reside in cities of more than 500,000 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 education, medical treatment, and the 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.

It is important to emphasize that the foregoing consequences of a rapidly growing population are likely to be realized in Africa regardless of whether measures are taken to influence the future trends in the growth components of the continent's population. This will be the case because even the current growth rate of 3.2 per cent is still very high. The good news is that Africa's population growth is now a matter of concern to many African governments. This is exemplified by the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action adopted in 1984 and the Dakar/NGOR Declaration adopted in 1992. These two policy positions called for effective programmes to reduce the future trends of these growth components.

#### **IV. Policy implications of the rapid population growth**

Hence demographic factors will constitute a daunting challenging for Africa in the years ahead as the race between population and economic growth will intensify during the remainder of the century and the first decade of the next. How can Africa cope? How can it produce enough food for an additional 15 to 20 million people per year when it is unable to feed its present population?

In a continent which has been continuously plagued by open unemployment and underemployment since independence and before, and whose unemployment problems have recently been aggravated by worsening climatic, agricultural and overall socio-economic conditions in the rural subsistence sector, how can it be expected to create 200,000,000 additional productive jobs more than 10,000,000 annually - between now and the year 2000?

Can Africa provide primary education to 137,000,000 children that will require it in the year 2000? This is more than two and a half times the primary school age population in 1990. Can Africa provide secondary education for the 70,000,000 that will require it by the end of the century? and with a projected urban population of 472,000,000 in the year 2008, how can Africa hope to cope with the accompanying fast expansion in urban services like water and sewerage, transport, health and housing? How will this massive urban population be fed and clothed?

These demographic phenomena constitute the heart of the African development problem. These are the data that lead most analysts to project a continuing and deepening crisis in Africa. There is no doubt about the imperative and urgent need for a far reaching population policy. Given the rapid rate of population growth, Africa urgently needs a green revolution, if it is not to continue to be plagued by hunger and famine, and if its poverty is not to persist. There is no other way in which Africa will be able to feed its projected total population of 1.1 billion and an urban population of 472,000,000 by the next 15 years.

#### **V. The evolving attitude of African countries towards rapid population growth**

It is important to point out that, since independence, the attitude of African governments on population growth has been evolving over time. Until fairly recently, most African governments did not view rapid population growth as a matter for concern. When the First African Population Conference was held in 1971, there was little concern among African governments with the issue of rapid population growth rate. The rates were increasing only slowly at about 2.5 per cent, and was at par with that of South-East Asia and Latin America. The population growth rates

were viewed as a problem to be solved by government action in only very few African states. In fact, many African political leaders argued in favour of more rapid population growth, to provide an increased number of inhabitants to serve as factors of production and consumption, that is, to increase the country's ability to produce more and to increase aggregate demand.

However, the attitude towards rapid population growth has been reversed in many African countries. During the past ten years or so, a succession of African countries have realised that their resources cannot service the vast and expanding population. Today, many African governments view their population as increasing too rapidly. These views were first crystallized during the Second African Population Conference, held in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1984, and echoed by African governments in their statements at the International Conference on Population held in Mexico City, Mexico, in the same year. The Third African Population Conference held in Dakar, Senegal, in December 1992, adopted the Dakar/NGOR Declaration which epitomizes the seriousness with which African countries have taken the population variable in their development equation. It is expected that many more African countries will participate at the Third International Conference on Population scheduled for Cairo, Egypt, in September 1994, and that they will express their population and development policies at the Conferences, taking into consideration the Dakar/NGOR Declaration.

## **VI. The role of the OAU in the field of population and development**

Within the framework of the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action, the Final Act of Lagos and the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, the OAU governing organs have called for a broader scope of activities in the field of population and development policy. The Secretariat focusses on (a) increasing and promoting awareness of member states on population and development issues; (b) encouraging issuance of official government pronouncements on population issues; (c) encouraging and promoting the establishment of appropriate high-level political institutions at the national level for the establishment of national population commissions; (d) preparing and assisting member States to implement the various protocols provided for under the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community; (e) working closely with other

institutions such as the ECA, ADB, UNFPA in promoting appropriate population policies and programmes among member states. At the continental level, the OAU Population Commission has been established to provide high-level political backstopping to population activities and to coordinate national activities.

### VII. 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 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 and 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 that integrates the foregoing suggestions into their development plans.



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