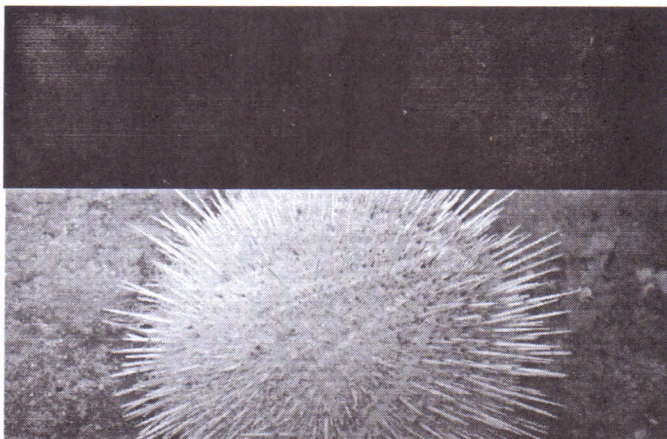




Contemporary Issues in Nigeria:

Social Scientific Perspectives
(SECOND EDITION)

Edited by:
Gboyega E. Abikoye
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Chapter One

POPULATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: PROSPECTS OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

Olubukola A. Oke

Abstract

Much attention in the development field has focused in recent years on research on the "demographic dividend." The demographic transition creates a window of opportunity during which economies may benefit from a temporary increase in the working age share of the population. While many economies have already enjoyed these benefits, they remain a promising opportunity for much of Sub-Saharan Africa. As youth becomes an increasingly precious resource, Nigeria will be one of the few large countries in the world that has young adults in plentiful, and growing, supply. Research in this area has emphasized that the degree to which this dividend is realized depends on the adoption of national policies to improve health, lower fertility, increase human capital, and encourage participation in the formal labour force. On the contrary, if appropriate policies are not formulated, the demographic dividend might, in fact, be a cost, leading to unemployment and an unbearable strain on education, health, and old age security. This paper examines this debate and synthesizes current research on the topic by looking into the demographic dividend being offered to Nigeria and its implications for the country by linking Nigeria's economy and population.

Key Words: Economy, Development, Demographic dividend, Population, Fertility

Introduction

Much evidence has been emerging that population and reproductive health matter has considerably contributed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Deaton, 2003; UN, 2010). Population growth becomes a problem when it outpaces economic growth. It has been established that rapid population growth and poverty are correlates, although a causal association has not been established with finality (Kent & Haub, 2005; Nnorom & Kunnuji, 2006:69). There are three major contrasting views about the relationship between population growth and poverty. Some believe that high fertility causes poverty and that lower fertility is the key to reducing poverty (Malthus, 1976). There are two powerful arguments as to why population growth has a negative impact on income growth. The first is that population numbers tend to overwhelm scarce natural resources. The second is that population growth tends to overwhelm reproducible resources created by people, such as infrastructure and capital, at least in the short run. Malthus's successors (dubbed "neo-Malthusians") further argued that because high birthrates create large numbers of children relative to the number of working adults, savings that might otherwise be invested in the country's infrastructure and development instead must be diverted to meeting the immediate food, health care, housing and education needs of growing numbers of children and adolescents. This prevents countries and families from making the long-term investments needed to help lift them out of poverty (Coale & Hoover, 1958; Myrdal, 1968; Enke, 1970; National Academy of Sciences 1971; Kelley, 2001).

An opposing school, however, believe that economic policies determine poverty reduction and that contraception is a "private good." (Kelley 1986). As Birdsall (1988) puts it, 'rapid population growth can slow development, but only under specific circumstances and generally with limited or weak effects'. Economists were quick to point out that even if high fertility and high proportions of the population living in poverty were correlated, this correlation would not imply causality. In fact, the relationship could run in the opposite direction: Poverty could be the cause of high fertility. Advocates of the "population optimism" have pointed out that population pressure can increase the incentives to innovate and that a larger population increases the pool of possible innovators (Simon, 1981).

A third view, "population neutralism", emerged from a lack of evidence that population numbers or growth rates affect economic development. Consequently, it was concluded that population neither impedes nor promotes development or that, on average, the positive and negative effects tend to cancel out. This was the dominant view in the 1986 report of the US National Academy of Sciences, which culminated in the reproductive health and rights agenda that emerged from the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994 (Singh 1998).

Despite these debates, a broad consensus by economists and demographers has developed over time that as incomes rise, fertility tends to fall (National Research Council 1986; Bloom & Canning, 2003).

However, the question of whether a large population is a bane or a boom has changed into the need for creating a sustainable population to keep economic growth going. It is not so much the absolute number of inhabitants that counts, but rather the way the population is composed and the existing

human capital. Reducing fertility to accelerate demographic transition and reduce the dependency ratio is an essential process for sustainable economic growth. Newer analyses have recently demonstrated the importance of modifying age structures to accelerate economic growth in developing countries.

In terms of production and consumption, each age group in a population behaves differently, with distinct economic consequences. It is known that in all societies, the young (below 15 years) require intensive investment in health and education, prime-age adults (15-64 years) supply labour and savings, and the aged (65 years and above) require health care and retirement income. When the relative size of each of these groups in a population changes, so does the relative intensity of this economic behaviour's. This matters significantly to a country's income growth prospects and consequent socio-economic development. It is therefore, of policy significance, to take a broad view of population in relation to development and the complex relation between economic and human development must factor these effects of changing age structure into decisions about a country's future. The phenomenon of large youth cohorts population coupled with declining fertility is referred to as a 'youth bulge', and can either be regarded as an opportunity or a threat.

Beginning in 1950, East Asian countries moved quickly through falling fertility rates that resulted in a change in the percentage of their populations in the working age group. Their dividend opportunity rose quickly during the next fifty years. It is peaking just now and will fade steadily as their population's age. Their window of opportunity is beginning to close (Caldwell, 1993; Bloom & Williamson, 1998; Bloom, Canning & Malaney, 2000; Bauer, 2001; Ross 2004). There are

some debate in the literature about whether or not Africa can follow their model and capitalize on this one-time demographic bonus of a large working age population (Bloom, Sachs, Collier and Udry, 1998; Bloom, Canning, Fink and Finlay, 2007; World Bank, 2009). Nigeria's population, in combination with its relative wealth, could be a dynamic engine of growth if harnessed properly. This paper highlights the urgent need by government and relevant stakeholders for fresh approaches to understanding the youth component of the Nigerian population in the context of fundamental demographic changes and prevailing socioeconomic transitions.

Nigerian Demographic Structure

At independence, there were just 45 million Nigerians. Today its population has more than trebled. The 2006 Population Census results of the Nigerian Federation gave total population figures of 140,431,790 for the nation (United Nations [UN], 2008; National Population Commission, [NPC] 2009). Of Africa's total population of 1,070, 096, 00, Nigeria's population (which yields about 16% of the region's total), translates to mean that out of every 6 or 7 Africans, one is a Nigerian. In the record of the world's largest countries in 2012, Nigeria is placed 7th with a population of 166,629,000, constituting 2.36% of world population (UN, 2011). This exceeds the population of several nations of the world including Gambia, Liberia, Mauritania, Qatar, Latvia etc.

The age distribution shows a very young age structure where about 41 percent of the total populace is less than 15 years of age, and on the other hand about 5 percent of the nation's population are aged 60 years and above (UN, 2008).. Hence the people who are in the economically active age groups in the country form about half of the population. This results in a high dependency ratio whereby each economically

active person would cater for about three people on average. As noted earlier it is estimated that 23 percent of the male and 61 percent of the female populace aged 15 years and older are unemployed. Hence each worker, in fact, has to cater for 5 or more people (Population Reference bureau [PRB], 2011). The general picture one gets is that of a country with rapid population increase of 3.18% annual growth rate and a young age structure (NPC, 2009).

The implication is that much of the resources of the nation are devoted towards consumption activities like education, training for capacity building and provision of social services for a large proportion of the population who are not in the labour force and cannot contribute to production of goods and services. It is in this light that adolescent population may be regarded a burden on the nation as they constitute more of consumers than producers.

There are various reasons for continued high fertility in many African countries. With limited financial infrastructure in rural areas offering little incentive or means to save, children are still viewed as insurance against old age. They are also a key source of labour. Furthermore, and despite medical advances, infectious disease is still widespread, particularly in rural areas, so cultural norms and policies encouraging high fertility in order to achieve desired family sizes (such as child fosterage, polygamy and the distribution of land according to family size) are changing only slowly.

It is also important to note that high fertility in sub-Saharan Africa is usually not due mainly to unmet need for family planning services but rather to high levels of desired numbers of children. Indeed, in some countries in the region, desired fertility is higher than actual fertility. Fertility will not fall in sub-Saharan Africa until desired fertility falls.

If the appropriate policy environment is not in place, particularly to educate and provide appropriate skills training for the youth who are the product of pre-transition high fertility, unemployment and instability may result, health, education, and social welfare systems may undergo unbearable strain (Bloom, et al., 2002).

It is the complex interactions between these demographic and socio-economic variables that have given rise to the notion of 'Demographic Dividend' in the literature. The large population of Nigeria makes it a "giant" relative to the other African countries, which implies a large market for goods and services as well as a 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.

Demographic Transition Leading To Demographic Dividend

Demographic dividend is a term in Demography that is used to describe the benefit a country gets due to increase in the working age population compared with dependants such as children and old people. Basically, it occurs when the majority of the population is of a working age and can contribute to the country's economy, so the economy grows. So the dividend means that this surge of working people is good for the economy. In an opposite situation, if a country has too many older, retired people or too many people who are too young to work, then this is a burden on the economy (Bloom & Williamson, 1998; Bloom, Canning & Sevilla, 2003; Dhillon & Yousef, 2007).

This stage of a country's growth begins with a shift from a rural agricultural society with high fertility and mortality rates to an urban industrial society with low fertility and mortality rates. Fertility declines in a population combined

with falls in mortality rates — known as the “demographic transition”— produce a typical sequence of effects on age structures. The child-dependency ratio (the ratio of children to those who support them) at first rises somewhat due to more children surviving, then falls sharply as average family size decreases. Later, the overall population ages rapidly, as currently seen in many developed and rapidly developing nations. Between these two periods is a long interval of favourable age distributions, known as the “demographic dividend. During this period, a country generates higher income that leads to higher savings and growth (Mason, 2002; Bloom & Canning, 2006; Speidel, 2009).

A key requirement for any country to make use of the current demographic transition is to significantly broaden and deepen opportunities for young people to develop their human capital and to participate in the economy. If not, the growing youth populations can contribute to high unemployment and increase social instability. Literature on the demographic dividend has identified three overarching mechanisms through which the dividend can be ‘realized’ or ‘reaped’. These are highlighted as labour supply, savings and human capital (Bloom, Canning, & Sevilla, 2003).

Labour Supply:

- The generations of children born during periods of high fertility finally leave the dependent years and can become workers (but good policies, preferably in place before the demographic transition, are required to educate and train them so they are not just unemployed).
- Women now have fewer children than before and are released to take jobs outside of the home; also they tend to be better educated than older cohorts and are therefore more productive in the labour force. (Lee & Mason, 2006)

Savings:

- Working-age adults tend to earn more and can save more money than the very young. The shift away from a very young age distribution favours greater personal and national savings.
- The ability to save money is even greater when individuals born during periods of high fertility move into their 40s, when their own children are mainly on their own and require less support.
- Personal savings grow and serve as a partial resource for industrial investments that fuel economic growth. (Ross, 2004)

Human Capital:

- Having fewer children enhances the health of women. Their participation in the labour force, in turn, enhances their social status and personal independence. They tend to have more energy to contribute both to their families and to the society.
- Parents are under less strain to provide for many children.
- Family income can be focused more upon better food for infants, including girls, who are often given less to eat.
- Incomes can go toward prolonged education for girls, and for teenagers of both sexes to improve their life prospects. (Bloom, 2002; Ross, 2004)

The demographic dividend, however, does not last forever. There is a limited window of opportunity. In time, the age distribution changes again, as the large adult population moves into the older, less-productive age brackets and is followed by the smaller cohorts born during the fertility decline. When this occurs, the dependency ratio rises again, this time involving the need to care for the elderly, rather than the need to take care of the young.

In addition, the dividend is not automatic. While demographic pressures are eased wherever fertility falls, some countries will take better advantage of that than others. Some countries will act to capitalize upon the released resources and use them effectively, but others will not. Then, in time, when the window of opportunity closes, those that do not take advantage of the demographic dividend will face renewed pressures in a position that is weaker than ever. Thus, there are many interactions that increase benefits from the demographic dividend, always assuming that government policies are constructed to build upon the dividend during the window.

Demographic Dividend: The Nigerian Case

Nigeria is Africa's demographic giant, and at the threshold of reaping the demographic dividend following the expected decline in dependency ratio, or the number of children and elderly (under age 15 and over age 65) divided by the number of working age adults (between ages 15-64), over this period from 83 dependents per 100 workers in 2010 to only 50 dependents per 100 workers by 2050. The median age of the total population is likewise anticipated to increase from 18.6 to 28.2 years over the 40-year period from 2010 to 2050 (UN, 2008).

Despite observed declining fertility, Nigeria's population is expected to continue to grow due to population momentum. Moreover, it has emerged that Nigeria is one of the Africa countries in which the ongoing fertility decline has been stalling. An analysis of fertility trends in countries with multiple nationally representative datasets identified about 15 African countries, including Nigeria, as experiencing a stall in fertility decline (Bongaarts, 2006, 2008; Westoff & Cross, 2006; Garenne, 2007; Moultrie et al., 2008; Schoumaker, 2008; Shapiro & Gebreselassie, 2008). With the slow pace of fertility

decline in many Sub-Saharan African countries, growing evidence of a stall at high fertility levels (more than five children per woman in a third of the countries), and several other countries remaining at pre-transition or early stage-transition levels, fertility decline in Africa is thought to have slowed considerably in the second part of the 1990s and early 2000s (Bongaarts, 2008).

The World Bank (2008), United Nations (2008), and the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) (2006, 2011) argue that if current trends persist, Nigeria's population will hit 200 million by 2025 and 300 million by 2050, by which time Nigeria will be the fourth most populous country in the world. Despite enormous human and mineral resources, the projected population growth will not be economically sustainable and this grim prognosis is exacerbated by the country's long history of economic crisis and political and religious conflicts.

The benefits of the demographic dividend are not automatic. For this demographic dividend to materialize there must be in place a conducive policy environment, including:

- Sufficient flexibility in the labour market to allow expansion
- Macroeconomic policies that permit and encourage investment
- Access to adequate saving mechanisms plus confidence in domestic financial markets
- An environment where high quality and education provision is possible

There is a large body of evidence indicating that the policy environment can influence economic growth (Sachs & Warner, 1995; Bloom & Sachs, 1998; Rodrik, Subramanian & Trebbi, 2002; Acemoglu, 2003; Sachs, 2003). Bloom & Canning (2004) have also shown that the beneficial effects of the

demographic transition can be magnified or muted by the extent to which the policy environment allows them to operate.

The additional supply of labour generated by the transition must be put to work and the potential savings of the "baby boomers" must be channeled to produce investments. Failure to do this may create a large pool of unemployed and disaffected young adults, whereas success in doing this will lessen poverty. For example, in Uganda, waged jobs grew at 13percent per year between 2003 and 2006 (World Bank, 2010), but this absorbed less than one fifth of the country's new workers. In Nigeria, Burundi and Mozambique, more than 60percent of employed young people earn less than one dollar a day (Simon, 1981; Crenshaw & Robinson, 2010; African Development Bank; ADB, 2012).

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2011) survey showed that the national unemployment rate increased to 23.9% in 2011 compared to 21.1% in 2010 and 19.7% in 2009. The rate is higher in the rural area (25.6%) than in the urban area (17.1%). The result of the survey shows that persons aged 0--14 years constituted 39.6%, those aged, between 15--64 (the economically active population), constituted 56.3%, while those aged 65 years and above constituted 4.2%. It is only when a Nigerian passes the age of 30 that unemployment levels drop below 25 percent.

Three in ten graduates of higher education are not working, and nearly as many of those who have completed secondary education are unemployed (NPC, 2009). A highly educated Nigerian is not significantly more likely to find work than one with no education at all. Many are also forced to accept jobs that do not use their qualifications to the full. The proportion of graduates in technical and professional jobs is falling. Many educated men and women can only find marginal employment in sales, agriculture, or manual labour. Brain drain

has resulted in massive numbers of Nigerians leaving the country to seek employment abroad (United Nations Development Programme; UNDP, 2009). The need for jobs will continue to become more pressing with every passing year, as growing numbers of baby boomers enter the workforce. Increased educational requirements will also mean growing demand for skilled opportunities.

The growing population also poses challenges for education. The education that most Nigerians receive is of dubious quality, and illiteracy remains high, even among those who attend schools. Only 45 percent of primary school children in urban areas and 19 percent in rural areas can read a simple sentence (Central Intelligence Agency; CIA, 2008; NPC, 2009; World Bank, 2010). Failure to tackle the twin crises of access to school and the quality of learning will not just limit the right to education, undermine prospects for economic growth and waste human potential; it will render countries all the more vulnerable to the political and social instabilities that inevitably accompany urbanization and youth employment.

There is also need to scale up the reproductive health and family planning services (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 2001; Joshi & Schultz, 2004; Allen, 2007). Family planning has generally been neglected on the continent, and has not necessarily received the same degree of attention and resources that which has been applied to other parts of health agenda. This is despite the fact that evidence shows strong correlation between contraceptive use and reductions in maternal and child mortality (Guengnat & Rafalimanana, 2005; Moreland & Talbird, 2006). Improvements in family planning use can accelerate the attainment of MDG goals for maternal and child mortality reduction (Miller, 2004; Caldwell & Sai, 2007). Allowing families to choose the numbers and spacing of children can also free up family resources for education and

other important family needs, thus improving the human capital of the next generation (Boongarts, 2003). This impact is passed from generation to generation: educated mothers have healthier and more educated children, accelerating the demographic transition, enabling a society to maximize its demographic opportunities, and helping create the wealth that can support greater human capital investment for future generations. Nigeria's future rests on educated women who are able to shift the prospects of the next generation (NPC, 2009).

Nigeria can only reap the demographic dividend of its current and future population composition through proper investment in its current and future labour force, development of its oil and gas industries to produce long term growth in both jobs and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and diversification of its economy (World Bank/Department for international Development; DFID, 2005). While it is important to increase the employability of young people themselves, it is also essential to facilitate dynamic structural changes to create jobs for youths. By doing so, the youth bulge can be transformed into a demographic dividend, and the demographic bomb can be defused (Weil, 1999; Lee, 2003).

Nigeria has the potential to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend; however, solid institutional settings will be imperative to its realization. Lee and Mason (2006) and Bloom et al. (2003) acknowledge the ineffectiveness of the demographic transition in realizing the demographic dividend when quality institutions are not put in place. Institutions as a general term include rule of law, efficiency of the bureaucracy, political freedom and expropriation risk, openness (political system, trade barriers, black market premium), freedom of political representation and freedom of speech, infrastructure (health care systems, schooling, roads, transport), and a formal

labour market with unions and laws protecting both employees and employers.

Corruption and inefficient bureaucracy create difficulties and uncertainties in establishing enterprise or gaining and maintaining employment. The lack of political freedom and high expropriation risk leads to short sighted behavior and undermine long term investment. Thus, a poor institutional environment critically affects the potential gains from the demographic transition.

Without the right policy environment, countries will be too slow to adapt to their changing age structure and, at best, will miss an opportunity to secure high growth (Feng & Mason, 2005). At worst, Nigeria will see growing numbers of restless young people frustrated by lack of opportunities, increased competition for jobs, land, natural resources, and political patronage; cities that are increasingly unable to cope with the pressures placed on them; ethnic and religious conflict with radicalization; and a political system discredited by its failure to improve lives. Solid institutions that can gain the confidence of the people and markets alike may help countries to reap the potential benefits created by their demographic transition.

Conclusion

New views have emerged in which population and reproductive health matter substantially to the achievement of the goal of reducing poverty, the first of the Millennium Development Goals. The view that population played a neutral role with regard to economic growth has been replaced with a more nuanced position: although the overall rate of population growth may not affect economic growth, the changing age structure of the population does in all probability have a major impact on economic well being. Achieving the

demographic transition, especially by ensuring a reduction of fertility is at the heart of this mechanism.

Demography is pushing Nigerian states and regions onto widely different economic trajectories and could further increase inequality if measures are not taken to promote social cohesion. Overall, Nigeria's demographic trends hold a potential in the coming decades for economic and social development. However, advantage of this demographic opportunity must be taken by developing appropriate policy frameworks. Good governance, solid macroeconomic management, good trade policy, efficient infrastructure, and effective investments in health and education must all be taken into consideration.

Nigeria can seize the demographic dividend by doing the following:

- National planning to include demographic issues and adequately explore positive demographic factors to stimulate development
- Re-position family planning and restore its lost place as a tool for population management
- Access to quality education to ensure that the strategic generation of children and young persons are prepared for the future
- Well developed labour market information system and proper alignment between the demands of the labour market and products of the educational institutions. This is to ensure that education and the job market fit the demands of the times and the population
- Gender barriers and imbalances in access also have to be addressed. Schemes that are gender sensitive and support the contribution of women irrespective of their location to the economy need to be encouraged.

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