

HUMAN RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

A country's potential for economic growth is greatly influenced by its endowments in terms of physical and human resources. Despite Nigeria's abundant physical and human resource endowments, the economic growth rate has been slow (0.1% between the years of 1965-1996). Information from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey records, Federal Office of Statistics records, and United Nations Information and Children's Education Fund were used to highlight the interactions between the demographic trends and the state of economy in Nigeria. The high rate of fertility of 5.9 per woman and a youthful population (45% below 15 years old) in Nigeria has been responsible for the consistent high population growth of 2.38% per year and a slow economic growth rate. Population growth seems to retard economic growth and women are perceived to be the perpetrators of these phenomena. A program of social and economic development for women should aim at improving their health; in particular, an effective fertility regulation should be used and empower them educationally. In view of this, government should encourage the use of contraceptives by both men and women since it take two to conceive a child. These suggestions, if applied, will help slow down population growth rate and facilitate the desired economic development in Nigeria.

Key Words: Human Resources, State of Economy, Development

INTRODUCTION

Development, in any society, aims at the following:

1. Increase the available and widen the distribution of basic human life sustaining goods (food, shelter, health, etc)
2. Raise the standard of living (through increasing income, creation of more jobs, better education, etc) and
3. Expand the range of economic and social choices available to the individuals (Chen & Fawcett, 1970).

Based on the above mentioned aims, a country's potential for economic growth is, therefore, greatly influenced by its endowment in terms of physical and human resources. In the realm of human resources, the physical size of its population and its level of national income per capita are important determinants of its economic potential. The physical resources include land, mineral resources, climate, etc.

Nigeria, as a country, is endowed with physical and human resources, yet the economic growth rate has been low, 0.1% from 1965 – 1996, with per capita income of \$790, which is far below \$1,060 for West Africa (World Bank, 2003). This stems from the fact that physical and human endowment, without administrative skill, may make a country not realize its economic potentials. For instance, the Nigeria's economic development seeks to expand industrial sector in order to create more jobs at the expense of agricultural production. There is also a continuous reliance on oil production, which contributes more than 90% to the nation's export earnings, 70% of nation's budget resources, and 30% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Microsoft, 2008).

Decline in oil price, coupled with government's over ambitious industrialization, neglect of agriculture and excessive foreign borrowing, led to prolongation of the economic stagnation and declining. This phenomenon is due to the policy makers' inadequate understanding of the economy as an interdependent social system, in which economic and non-economic forces are continuously interacting in ways that are, at times, self-enforcing and at other times, contradictory.

The non-economic forces, which are the demographic characteristics of the population, include the size, distribution, structure, and change of population. An analysis of relevant current demographic levels and past trend is a necessary first step in the construction of population forecast which, in turn, will form the underpinning of national plans for economic development programs and explicit population policies in some cases.

METHODOLOGY:

Data Required

The data that is needed for the study are demographic data; like size, distribution, structure, and change of Nigeria's population.

Sources of Data

The data used for this study was secondary and was received from the Federal Office of Statistics, United Nations Information and Children Education Fund, Nigeria Demographic, and Health Survey. Other

information was received from National Development Plans, published and unpublished research work, and related literature.

Method of Data Analysis

Simple percentage and descriptive statistical analyses were used to express the information obtained from the various sources.

DISCUSSION:

Population Trend

Over the years, Nigeria witnessed rapid population growth from 30.3 million in 1953 to 55.65 million in 1963 to 76.76 million in 1973, 88.9 million in 1991, 121.8 million in 1998, and projected to 150.3 million in 2010 (Population Reference Bureau, 2003). Currently, about 46% of Nigeria's population (male and female) is below age 15 years, while females between 15 – 19 years that are already giving birth is 15%. The total fertility rate (TFR) decreased from 6.3 in 1991 to 5.9 in 2008 (Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 1991 Population Reference Bureau, 2008). Though the TFR has declined, Nigeria's population will continue to increase rapidly in the next few decades due to the in-built momentum of a youthful population (46% under age 15) and a sizeable female population under 20 years already giving birth.

Fertility: Determinants and Consequences

With by far the largest population and the current growth rate of 2.38%, Nigeria adds 3.7 million people to the world's population every year (Microsoft Encarta, 2008). This phenomenon, as Malthus warned, has serious consequences, like the cycle of poverty, starvation, women subordination, social conflicts, and political instability.

In many cases, women's inferior roles, low status, and restricted access to birth control is manifested in their high fertility. High fertility, however, affects the health of the mothers. Ill health of mothers, in turn, could result in low birth weight and, eventually, infant and maternal mortality. As of 2008, infant mortality was as high as 100 per every thousand born, female life expectancy is 47 years and child malnutrition or underweight was 39% (Population Reference Bureau, 2008).

Women form about 36.2% (compared to 23% of men) of the illiterate population in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2008). This situation makes it difficult to enter the high status employment of the public sector. For instance, women's proportion in federal civil service was 24.1% in 1991 and increased to 36% in 1997 (Federal Office of Statics, 1996; To'darro, 2001). Such women, therefore, end up in the informal sector of the

economy. Ogunleye-Adetona (1996) discovered that women in southeastern Nigeria that are in the informal sector of the economy and low educational attainment had high fertility rate. This was due to the ease with which they can bear and bring up children without fear of losing their job due to frequent maternity leave. Women and children also form the bulk of the people living in poverty (United Nations Information and Children's Education Fund, 2000). Poverty and low standard of living induces a large family size because more children is believed to serve as a source of cheap labor and old age security (United Nations Information and Children Education Fund, 2000). A large family, however, means greater population growth, high dependency burden of 35%, 46% lower savings (both at household and national level), slow economic growth, and, ultimately, greater poverty.

As a result of large number of the population under 15 years, government will have to increase its expenditure on education. This will imply less investment in other sectors of the economy. Less investment in other sectors, on the other hand, will mean lower savings and, therefore, slow economic growth. As such, the prospect for any improvement in the living standards of the existing generation is reduced; therefore transmission of poverty to the future generation, especially of low-income family, is assured. For instance, people with low educational attainments are easily thrown out of their jobs due to government's economic restructuring or re-organization programs, which is a panacea to the slow economic growth. These people thrown out of jobs may not be able to send their children to school, which will unable unschooled children to get good jobs, through which they could have relief their parents' of the poverty burden. The vicious cycle of poverty, therefore, continues (To'darro, 2001).

Apparently, higher population growth retards economic growth. Since women are perceived to be the perpetrators of these phenomena, a program for social and economic progress should aim at improving their health and empower them educationally. Their economic well being should be improved, along with their role and status, in both the family and the community. The empowerment of women will, inevitably, lead to smaller family size and lower population growth, as echoed at the 1994 United Nations Conference on population and development in Cairo.

In line with the above assertions, the family planning program was put in place by the Federal government to make birth control methods readily available and accessible to women, since they are the ones at the risk of child birth. Accordingly, women's contraceptive knowledge increased to about 64.4% at the national level and 70% in Kwara State (Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 1999). However, its use is just about 15% and 18% at the national level and in Kwara State, respectively. Men's contraceptive knowledge is also moderate

(78%); however, only 14% of men used the modern method. The low percentage of those using contraceptives calls for concern and re-examination of population issues, especially because, according to the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (1999) report, sexual activity is high (48.8%) in the country. Fertility rate may increase or remain high if contraceptive usage does not increase. Apart from this, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and the consequent high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV, and/or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) could be on the high side.

The need to promote behavioral change in communication for no risk sexual behavior and effective fertility regulation cannot be over emphasized. This could be done by the government putting in place incentives and disincentives that will encourage the use of contraceptive, by both men and women, since it takes two to make babies.

State of the Economy and Population Structure

Prior to the oil boom of 1970's, Nigeria was one of the poorest and least economically developed nations, with a per capita Gross National Domestic Product of \$90 in 1968 to \$1,020 in 2008 due to the rapid economic expansion and major structural transformation (Microsoft Encarta, 2008). However, the per capita Gross National Product dropped to \$752.30 in 2005, one of the lowest in the southern Sahara and in the world (Population Reference Bureau, 2008). This was due to the neglect of agricultural sector and massive rural-urban migration with the attendant consequence of a high rate of unemployment. The consistent urban bias in development kept the unemployment rate persistently high. Accurate unemployment rates are difficult to obtain especially in a society where many who work are marginally employed. Also data on Nigeria labour force have limited values because most Nigerians earn their living in more than one field. For instance urban workers "moonlight" to make ends meet and most rural dwellers have second jobs. However, from national statistical records, the number of registered unemployed, vacancies declared, and job placement presents a gloomy picture. For instance, in 1991 about 12,391 people registered as unemployed. Of the 20,475 vacancies declared, only 2,795 persons were employed. As of 2005, the number of government workers was 46,868 and about 3.2% of the population unemployed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2006). This situation has remained so ever since.

Furthermore, out of the economically active population, out of the people between the ages of 24 – 45 years, those not employed was as high as 23.0% in 1991 and 31.0% in 1996 (Federal Office of Statistics, 1996). This is an additional stress on the economy, coupled with a dependency ratio of 35% accruing from large number of

the young and the aged people in the country. The number of the unemployed persons, by educational qualification of between 19.0 in 1991 to 18.7 in 1995, confirms the high illiteracy rate in the country.

Human Resource and Development

There is, therefore, a need for policy makers to have a sound knowledge of the demographic situation in the country at any point in time in order for them to plan ahead to meet the nation's educational and industrial labor force need and demographic changes. In other words, the knowledge of the determinants and consequences of population size, distribution, structure, and change in population is a necessary tool to planning and implementing. For instance, the knowledge of the age structure, particularly the number of young children under five years, will enable planners to plan ahead of time for the provision of primary schools facilities for an adequate and effective primary education. Also, the knowledge of the number of people that will graduate from the universities in the next two or three years time will enable the government to create more jobs. This is because unemployment is not only due to the relatively slow growth rate of labor demand in both the modern and industrial sector, but a rapid growth of labor supply due to accelerated population growth. Therefore the higher the nation's rate of population growth the greater the amount of capital that will be necessary merely to make provision for the added population and the less the fund left over for making capital improvement.

The knowledge of high level of unemployment in the urban areas will enable the government to redirect population away from the rapidly growing urban areas, by eliminating the current in-balance in economic and social opportunities, in both urban and rural areas. Otherwise, the agricultural labor force will dwindle and the nation might not be able to feed its people, which will negate the planned objectives of a self-reliant nation. The above explains the fact that, it is not the number of people that is causing population problems, rather it is the inadequate understanding of the determinants and consequences of population structure as it interact and influences socio-economic development in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

People should be encouraged to have similar family through incentives and disincentives and by political commitments and rigid enforcement of the population policies. Women's social and economic status should be raised in order to create favorable conditions of delayed marriages and lower marital fertilities. This will lead to a small quality of children and, thus, a higher standard of living. More employment opportunities should be created to alleviate poverty. The National Poverty Eradication Program, though in the right direction, might not be enough because it is a short term measure of creating employment. More technical colleges should be created and small loans should be made available and accessible to the economically active population. This

will enable them to become self employed at one point or the other. Rural-Urban migration should be discouraged through the establishment of the relevant industries in the rural areas and relevant social amenities. In summary, there is the need for a more egalitarian economic and social development to bring about an eventual slowing down of population growth at low level of fertility and mortality to facilitate the desired rapid economic growth.

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