

A Critical Appraisal on Population Explosion and Poverty in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study is an empirical and critical appraisal of the problem of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria. Indeed, the interconnectedness, relatedness, intricacy and interdependence of the two concepts (population explosion and poverty) is beyond doubt. However, a lot of literature have focused more on population growth which is far from the newly advancing idea of population explosion; even though the latter is the extreme and trending consequences of the former. Thus, this research sees population explosion and poverty as two potential negative consequences of population growth for economic development, which needed more scholarly attention and critical appraisal of its underlying factors and implications to Nigeria's national development.

1.0 Introduction

Historical evidences abound on the ever increasing nature of the world population at large. According to Carolyn Kinder of Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute (1998):

It took the entire history of humankind for the population to reach 1 billion around 1810. Just 120 years later, this doubled to 2 billion people (1930); then 4 billion in 1975 (45 years). The number of people in the world has risen from 4.4 billion people in 1980 to 5.8 billion in 1998. And it is estimated that the population could double again to nearly 11 billion in less than 40 years.

Recently, Worldometers (2018) rated the world population 7,693,637,631, while Nigeria total population as at 2018 is 199,636,597, almost nearly 200million, thus ranking the 7th most populous country in the world and the 1st most populous African country (The World Population Review, 2019). This is in commensuration with the United Nations Statistic Division report that, "by 2019, Nigeria would have hit 200million or more". In line with Kinder's earlier mentioned argument, one can infer that Nigeria's population explosion and poverty experience, is just her fair share of the world ever booming population (Kinder, 1998), because as at February 2019, the total population of the world exceeds 7.71 billion people. Although the world population is now growing at a much slower rate of 1.12%, while that of Nigeria is at 3.5% (World Population Review, 2019).

Also, UN Habitat World Cities Report (2016) has shown that during the period between 1995 and 2015, low income countries experienced an average 3.68% annual rate of urban population growth while high income countries experienced in contract 0.88% urban growth during that same period.

Fig 1: Average annual rate of change of the urban population, 1995-2015

Region/Area	1995-2000	2000-2005	2005-2010	2010-2015	Entire Period 1995-2015
World	2.13%	2.27%	2.20%	2.05%	2.16%
High-income countries	0.78%	1.00%	1.00%	0.76%	0.88%
Middle-income countries	2.74%	2.77%	2.61%	2.42%	2.63%
Low-income countries	3.54%	3.70%	3.70%	3.77%	3.68%
Africa	3.25%	3.42%	3.55%	3.55%	3.44%
Asia	2.79%	3.05%	2.79%	2.50%	2.78%
Latin America and the Caribbean	2.19%	1.76%	1.55%	1.45%	1.74%
Europe	0.10%	0.34%	0.34%	0.33%	0.31%
North America	1.63%	1.15%	1.15%	1.04%	1.24%
Oceania	1.43%	1.49%	1.78%	1.44%	1.53%

Source: UN Habitat, World Cities Report 2016.

There is no gainsaying that this remarkable achievement is as a result of the determinations and serious commitments of governments of some countries such as Russia and Japan in reducing their population growth rate (Nwosu, Dike and Okwara, 2014:8). Nigeria, with its vast economic resources, can also take such decisive steps in order to solve the problem of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria.

Hence, contrary to the widely shared views of both the international communities and Nigeria government that Nigeria population explosion and poverty is a looming ‘time-tomb’ with profound inherent challenges (Council on Foreign Relations, April 20, 2018; *Daily Trust*, 2018; *The Punch*, 2018); one must note that the rapid population explosion in Nigeria and its attendant consequences is not an uncontrollable development as countries such as China, India, USA among others have been rated 1st, 2nd, 3rd, most populous countries in the world respectively. The fact that these countries are more technologically advanced with less dependency ratios at 37.7%, 52.2%, and 51.2% (Index mundi, 2018) have been well acknowledged. Yet, one cannot doubt the fact that their success is profoundly rooted in the decisive efforts of their governments in maximizing their rapid population situation for sustainable national development. Or initiating decisive population control policies through the adoption of proficient health, agricultural and other economic policies. It is in this wise, Vijayakumar(2013) opines that:

Every county should empower its poor people to take decision and participate in social and political matters which enhance the living standard of poor, and at same time prevent the transmission of poverty to the next generation... to achieve this positive impact on the economy as well as poor people, visionary and uncorrupted government needs to be formed... without visionary and well-policy structured government, countries would never make significant contribution on the whole economy (Vijayakumar, 2013:68)

Similarly, Hermanson (2016) mentions that strong community engagement and participation and investment in resources infrastructure and service delivery, combining public, private and community resources, constitute essential parts of a multi-pronged strategy in achieving equitable development. However, it is baffling that the dependency ratio in Nigeria remained very high at 78.8 per cent, even as at 2018, despite innumerable population and poverty alleviation policies, thereby exerting much pressure on the productive population in particular and the nation’s resources at large. By implication, Nigeria has become the poverty capital of the world as 90.8 million Nigerians now live in extreme poverty, which is measured to be less than \$1.25 (N381.25) a day (*Quartz Africa*, 2018; *Pulse.ng*, 2018).

Fig. 2: Top Ten Countries with largest extreme poverty population (June 2018)

S/N	Countries in the world with extreme poverty population	Extreme Poverty Figures	Top 10 African Countries with extreme poverty	Extreme Poverty Figures
1.	Nigeria	86.9million	Nigeria	86.9million
2.	India	71.5	Democratic Republic of Congo	60.9
3.	Democratic Republic of Congo	60.9	Ethiopia	23.9
4.	Ethiopia	23.9	Tanzania	19.9
5.	Tanzania	19.9	Mozambique	17.8
6.	Mozambique	17.8	Kenya	14.7
7.	Bangladesh	17	Uganda	14.2
8.	Kenya	14.7	South Africa	13.8
9.	Indonesia	14.2	South Sudan	11.4
10.	Uganda	14.2	Zambia	9.5

Source: ATLAS/Data World Poverty Clock (2018) reported by *Quartz Africa*, <https://qz.com/Africa/1313380/nigerias-has-the-highest-rate-of-extreme-poverty-globally/>

In the figure 1 above, the World Poverty Clock Report (2018) shows that Nigeria has overtaken India and Democratic Republic of Congo as the country with the most extreme poor people in the world. Of interest is that despite the fact that India has a population that is seven times larger than that of Nigeria, Nigeria still top the extreme poverty list. Besides, of those countries in top ten, only Ethiopia, Ghana and Mauritania are on track to meet the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of ending extreme poverty by 2030. In 2015, 193 countries at the United Nations Development Summit signed on to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development (Agenda 2030) to eradicate poverty, fight inequality and injustice and combat climate change (Hermanson, 2016). This further implies that Nigeria is still far behind the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. It is on this basis, there is need to probe deeper and further into the problem of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria so as to adequately understand the underlying factors or inherent challenges influencing this pervading issue. This is crucial for us to know the necessary corrective measures to be taken by Nigerian government for positive or more yielding outcomes.

2.0 An Appraisal of the Underlying Factors of Population Explosion and Poverty in Nigeria

This section assesses the existing views of scholars on the core and fundamental factors of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria. Their views are summarized under three major sub headings as follows:

2.1 North-South Dichotomy

Ukpong, Ekpebu and Ofem (2013:278-279) have traced the problem of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria to the issue of North-South dichotomy in which Northern population is about two third of the Nigeria's total population. As rightly put by Ukong, Ekpebu and Ofem, the northern region has been noted to have high prevalence of population explosion and poverty, which is presumed to be the root cause of unrest and social upheavals especially in the North-eastern region. Odusina has attributed this situation to early marriages culture of the Nigeria Northerners. The works of Omonoma (2010) and Ukpong *et al* have shown that the region records the highest population of about 75 million people against about 65 million people in the south, as at 2006, and has experienced increased poverty incidence averaged at 35.17% in 1980 and 70.13% in 2004, while the southern region recorded an average poverty incidence of 13.17% in 1980, and 34.93 in 2004. Even recently, the population of Northern part of Nigeria is about two third of other regions in Nigeria. More importantly, apart from evidences of corruption and other economic inadequacies, high poverty incidence in northern Nigeria cannot be separated from the influence of high population growth, high rate of illiteracy and poor rural infrastructure.

2.2 Weak Policy Implementation

(a) Population Control Policies: With regard to population control policies on poverty, ADB-ADF (2000) have also recognized two schools of population thoughts. There are those who view poverty and population policies or programmes as foes and point to Malthus' first essay, which suggest that law to boost the poor's wages would self-destruct by inducing early marriage, greater fertility and ultimately, lower labour costs. The skeptics who are the other school of population thoughts believe high fertility is precisely a survival strategy by which the poor in development countries attempt to meet their needs for labour, socio-economic advancement, and old-age security. By implication, policies solely aimed at reducing fertility would do little to help the poor, and in fact, would deprive rural and low-income families of the very means by which they seek to escape poverty.

It must be emphasised that the major population control policy in Nigeria is the Family Planning Programme which had been adopted since early 1970s to date, however, there are lots of inherent challenges to this programme. Of prominent is the issue of socio-cultural factors which are highly profound in Africa at large and Nigeria in particular. Religious issue is part of this challenge, for instance Islam strong frowns against family planning programme or the use of contraceptives, so also is the Catholic Church. Cultural factor is also at stake as African culture believe in large families and having many children. More so, there are political dimension to population control policies in Nigeria. The issue of North-South dichotomy is relevant here as rapid population growth in the Northern region is always to the best advantage of the Northern politicians as against their Southern and Eastern politicians counterparts. The recently conducted 2019 general election is a very good example, because despite the fact that majority of the voters in the South and Eastern region of Nigeria didn't vote for APC government, President Muhammed Buharire-emerged as the winner of the Presidential election due to the political backing he received from the Northerners. The same is applicable to the 1999 and 2003 elections in which former President Olusegun Obasanjo became winner of the two elections based on the perpetual support from the North. Thus, aside from the socio-cultural factors besetting population control policies in Nigeria, there is political dimension to it.

(b) Poverty Alleviation Policy: An article on "Poverty Alleviation: Imperial Studies" has assessed the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes across some selected countries by governments and civil society organizations. For instance, in China, it was noted that since 1978 to date, china has empowered more than 400 million of its previously poor citizens. The country further recognized the important role of civil society to play in addressing the issues of poverty alleviation, population, reproductive health and gender. In Vietnam, Ha Tinh Rural Development Project (HRDP) became a model for other provinces as it centers on

community self-implementation of infrastructure schemes. In this article, the author attributed the problem of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria to prolonged years of economic mismanagement, macro-economic instability and widespread corruption. The findings of the study further indicate that Nigerian government has established more than twenty poverty alleviation institutions between 1986 and 2015, which though superficially seem impressive; are very weak, non-participatory and lack decisiveness. Other scholars such as Akena (2008), Frank (2008), Hussaini (2014), Joseph (2005), Lawal (2012), Maduagwu (2000), Lawal and Hassan (2012), Molokwu (2010), NBS (2010) and Ogene (2010) have also supported this viewpoint. Poverty alleviation policies such as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Directorate of food road and rural infrastructure (DFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW), National Empowerment and Development Scheme (NEEDS), among others spread across Nigeria agricultural sector, social infrastructure and large and small-scale industries. However, according to Fasoranti (2013:492), a major flaw in all the programmes is that the peasantry was completely excluded in the processes of policy formulation and execution of these programmes. Indeed, they were just to receive whatever every successive government brings. In effect, the rural poor benefits little from these national and state policies and in many instances, they are only marginally influenced and in others never at all. Thus, this study recommends the imperativeness of pragmatic poverty alleviation programmes, such as what obtained in China and Vietnam, for the purpose of curbing the problem of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria.

2.3 Socio-cultural and Economic Factors

Vijayakumar (2013:68) argues that in developing countries such as Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, chronic poverty is being transmitted to next generations basically because of high population growth rate due to high fertility rate and low death rate. The combined opinions of Odusina (2006) and Vijaya kumar (2013) has shown that aside from the fact that this situation is an evidence of higher standard of living, higher literacy level, good hygiene and medical services facilities, it can as well be accomplished by unstable and poor economic growth, lack of education, severe unemployment, low paid wage and refusal of social and political freedom. Consequently, Vijayakumar attributes the causal factors of population explosion and poverty in developing countries to high dependency ratio and high population. This he explains thus:

In General, virtually all developing countries are characterized by the high population and high dependency ratio which is one of the main causes for poverty, hunger and unemployment. Therefore, many economists and socialists put forwarded their emphasis on the control of population growth in wake of 1950s and thereby decreasing the dependency ratio. Indeed, age dependency ratio is high where severity of poverty and unemployment is high whereas age dependency ratio afflicts the poverty and economic growth (Vijayakumar, 2013:68).

Vijayakumar therefore sees population explosion as a direct factor of poverty, hunger and unemployment in Nigeria. Similarly, Todaro and Smith (2006), Cassen (1994), Ahlburg (1994) and McNicoll (1995) have identified poverty and inequality as a potential negative consequence population explosion aside other consequences.

Other scholars such as Odusina (2006) has explained that birth rate has influenced population expansion and poverty in Nigeria. This he attributed to good and improved medical facilities and services. He also identifies the issue of early marriages precisely in the Northern region of Nigeria, which poses a big problem. According to him, this is as a result of the fact that women marry at an early stage which leads to increased birth rate and prolong their child bearing years, thereby making them giving birth to many children. Most of these women who married very early are often less empowered, and many are with little or no entrepreneurial skill to support the total family income. This often has worsened the problem of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria.

Habiba (n.d) and Odusina (2006) have identified the issue of material welfare of the citizens. They asserts that when people are materially well off, they begin giving birth to as many children as they wish without giving any thought to the implications of their actions since they are thriving well at that particular time. This is also based on the arguments of Thomas Malthus on the poor laws in England, which they suggested that relief materials should not be discouraged because an increase in material welfare makes them have more babies. At a point in time, it was observed that an increase in a family's wealth or income causes them to have large families given that they have more capacity to cater for them. Old-age security is another factor that contributes to large families given that parents have the mentality that having many children given them security by guaranteeing that the child will provide for them and give them a better life when they are old and unable to

do productive activities. Some parents in the past also believe that having many children is of advantage to them as it enables them have many people to work on their farmers (Odusina, 2006; Habiban.d.).

Another social factor pinpointed is the matter concerning customs, religions and superstitions in Africa and Nigeria in particular which has intensely escalated population growth and poverty situation of the country. Odusina and Habibaexplains that religions like Islam supports polygamy (act of marrying more than one wife). This gives access for a man to marry up to four wives and have as many children as he wishes. This practice makes an average man have a least of eight children. They also indicated that the Catholic Church on the other hand discourages the act of family planning as they view it as a sin, based on the teaching that God commanded us to go ahead and multiply without any limitation (Odusina, 2006). This belief tends to encourage couples to give birth without control or limit, thereby increasing the population. Also, some customs in Nigeria believe so much in having male children as they view the male child as blessing and the pillar of the family who will carry the family lineage. This in fact makes them strive so hard to get male children regardless of the number of females they might have had (Nwosu, 2014).

3.0 Implications of Population Explosion and Poverty for National Development in Nigeria

ADB-ADF (2000) has indicated that there are two dimensions to population growth. Each of these dimensions is perpetually linked to rapid population growth rate and poverty. First, at the micro level of individuals and families, where high rates of population growth are associated with high dependency ratios and low investment in the human capital of children and young adults. Second, at the macro level where high rates of population growth hinder investment in both human and physical capital formation, and exert pressure on the environment and often fragile resource base.

For instance at macro level, Hassan, Abu and Ajayi (2018) while corroborating the stance of Todaro& Smith (2011) adopts "population-poverty cycle theory" to demonstrate how population explosion and poverty yields negative economic consequences on national development. According to them, advocates of this theory start from the basic proposition that population growth intensifies and exacerbates the economic, social and psychological problems associated with the condition of underdevelopment. By implication, the prospects for a better life for the already born is believed to be retarded by excessive population growth. This is because savings rates are being reduced at the household and national levels. It also severely draws down limited government revenues simply to provide the most rudimentary economic, health and social services to the additional people. This in turn further reduces the prospects for any improvement in the levels of living of the existing generation and helps transmit poverty to future generations of low-income families.

Although Hassan, Abu and Ajayi try to establish an economic theory, the reality of this theory is further epitomized in the empirical research of Cassen (1994), Ahlburg (1994), McNicoll (1995) and the current Nigeria population explosion and poverty situation. The experiential studies see economic growth poverty, education poverty, health poverty, food poverty and environmental poverty as consequential effects of population-poverty cycle on national development (Hassan, Abu and Ajayi, 2018: 153). Similarly, *Economics Discussion* studies have reflected on some population-poverty cycles consequences, which mostly are similar to that of the empirical research findings of Cassen, Ahlburg and McNicoll. As rightly indicated thus:

Rapid growth of population is largely responsible for the perpetuation of vicious circle of poverty in underdeveloped countries. On account of rapid growth of population, people are required to spend a major part of their income on bringing up their children. Thus, saving and rate of capital formation remain, reduction in per capital income, rise in general price level leading to sharp rise in cost of living. No improvement in agricultural and industrial technology, shortage of essential commodities, low standard of living, mass unemployment etc. As a result, the entire economy of an underdeveloped country is surrounded by the vicious circle of poverty (www.economicsdiscussion.net/population-explosion/14-major-negative-effects-of-population-explosion/4461).

Nwosu (2014) has weighed both the positive and negative implication of rapid population growth. While explaining that a large population mostly attracts foreign investors and increases demands for manufactured products, he as well notes that excessive population increase or population explosion can lower income per head and causes a low per capital income. He as well explore the micro implications of population growth by arguing that population explosion lowers the general standard of living and consumption of goods and services, which as a consequence increases the consumption of inferior goods. He further asserts that such situation forces people live in slumps which are not conducive and health for individuals. As a result, it

increases the outbreak of diseases, epidemics and other contagious diseases. This condition is seen rapidly in places like Lagos and some Northern states in Nigeria due to the congestion and overpopulation (Nwosu, 2014). More importantly, the multidimensional nature of poverty have exacerbated population explosion consequences. This view agrees with Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (2001) position that poverty encompasses different dimensions of deprivation that relate to human capabilities including consumption and food security, health, education, rights, voice, security, dignity and decent work.

Tartiyus, Dauda and Peter (2015) while exploring both the macro and micro implications of population growth, have also established the impacts of population explosion on poverty in Nigeria thus:

However the effect of population explosion on per capita incomes is unfavourable. Overpopulation tends to retard per capita income in three ways; it increases the pressure of population on land, it leads to rise in cost of consumption goods because of the scarcity of the cooperant factors to increase their supplies, it leads to a decline in the accumulation of capital because with increase in family members, expenses increase. This is in addition to the adverse effect that population growth has on standard of living, employment, capital formation, environment, social infrastructure, and agricultural development (Tartiyus, Dauda and Peter, 2015: 116).

The view of Tartiyus *et al* accentuates the diverse effects of population explosion on poverty in Nigeria especially with regard to standard of living, capital reduction, and government cuts on the socio-economic programmes and its attendant burden on the poor.

On the other hand, Pat-Mbano and Nwadiaro (2012) have attributed the rise of urban slums and poverty in Nigeria major cities such as Lagos, Abuja, PortHarcourt, Aba, etc to population explosion and the lack of secure tenure. They maintained that high population increase has resulted into rapid growth of slums and squatter settlements because government cannot cope with the population increase in terms of provision of serviced building plots. Population explosion generally has created a number of problems like shortage of dwelling units, mushrooming growth of shacks, encroachment of public land and expansion of unauthorized residential colonies Wheln (2004) also indicates that one third of world population lives in a slum with rapid unplanned population expansion greatly exacerbating what is already a human disaster. The UN-HABITAT Report (2010) indicated that 61.7% of the total population in Sub-Saharan Africa lives in the slums.

4.0 Conclusion

The study so far has done a critical reassessment of the numerous existing works on rapid population growth and poverty Nigeria. The study sees the problem of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria as not a looming crisis but failure on the part of Nigerian government to device rightful population control and poverty reduction policies that would be highly pragmatic and participatory for the betterment of the Nigerians, and in order to promote sustainable national development goals. The study therefore recommends that:

- (i) There is need for adequate involvement of the poor in the development programmes because non-involvement of the representatives of the poor communities or beneficiaries in the discussion, preparation, design and implementation of programmes can exacerbate the problem of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria. This study therefore recommends the adoption of participatory model of China, India and Vietnam by the Nigerian government.
- (ii) Nigeria Government must respond to U.S. advice that the government must invest in the young people because future leaders are really important. Although they have been trying to do this through some Youth empowerment programmes, the most recent of which is the N-Power programme of the present democratic dispensation. But the fact remains that Nigerian Youths need more of these programmes that would be devoid of corruption or mismanagement of its allocated fund.
- (iii) All hands must be on desk in addressing the issue of corruption in the country so as to free up the funds to be invested on education, health and future leaders of this country.
- (iv) It is essential that Nigeria's family planning programme receive adequate political and financial support. This has not been the case in the past, especially from the government's budget. Nigerians especially the Northerners must be adequately sensitized on the important of such programme with regard to curtailing the challenges of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria.
- (v) It is critical that all ministries consider population in key policy and planning decisions. Ministries should not merely account for population growth, but must also recognise that population growth is variable and can be influenced through their advocacy efforts.

- (vi) High-level officials must publicly support efforts to reduce population growth. These officials not only decide on policies that affect population growth, but they send an important message to everyone that reducing population growth is beneficial.
- (vii) Governmental and nongovernmental organisations and affiliations including the private sector must be able to work together to bring about necessary actions, including programme implementation and engagement in public-private partnership activities to help reduce fertility.
- (viii) Nigeria need visionary and decisive leaders to be able curb the challenges of population explosion and poverty in Nigeria. The competence of our leaders is therefore fundamental. Nigerians must realize this and must consciously guide against their golden opportunities during electoral process.

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