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POPULATION CONTROL IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARIANS

by

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Abstract

The need for population checks in any country cannot be over-emphasized. This need becomes very important in a country like Nigeria where people depend on speculations for information in all spheres of life. It was reported from the last census that the population of Nigeria is 167 million. This number is alarming in a country which depends on one source of income. The causes of over-population in the country are identified as, cultural beliefs, lack of sex and population education, religious beliefs etc. To avoid the side effects of over-population, which among others are ; mass poverty, increased death rate, unemployment, it becomes eminent that some measures should be put in place to address this issue. Prominent among them is the role of librarians in collecting and disseminating information on population control to the masses. Problems that may impede the execution of this task, like lack of funds, lack of information resources, and lack of government's attention were also discussed in this paper. The paper concludes that if the government pays attention to this project by funding and equipping our libraries, this assignment will be realized. Recommendations were made for improvement in the country's population management.

Keywords: POPULATION, POPULATION CONTROL, NIGERIA, LIBRARIANS

Introduction

Population is a group composed of all members of the same species that live in a specific geographical area at a particular point in time. It could be drawn from the above statement that human population, the focus of this paper, is a group of people that live in specific geographical areas of the world at a particular time. Geographical areas in this context refer to countries, for example USA, Great Britain, Nigeria, etc. The rate of population growth differs from one country to the other. From the 1900's to 1950's, Nigeria's population was not an issue because even though Nigeria's birth rate was high, death rate was also high which balanced the population. But since after the civil war, Nigeria's medicare has improved and women and child mortality has drastically declined. There is now a condition of high birth rate and declining death rate which has contributed to what is known as population explosion. This is as a result of the fact that they have not changed their cultural life style (in marrying more than one wife) nor reduced the number of children they were having.

Nigeria as a nation is witnessing population explosion at an alarming rate, and if nothing is done to address the situation, the nation will be heading for chaos. Overpopulation has an adverse effect on the economy of any nation especially developing countries, and on the social, economic and psychological life of its citizens. The population question in Nigeria according to Ottong, Ering and Akpan (2012) has been of some concern to demographers, development planners, and even government agents. Adewole (2012) is of the view that population growth affects economic development in two ways: by promoting economic development, and this occurs in developed economies like USA, Great Britain, Germany etc, and by retarding economic development and this occurs in developing countries like Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe, etc. According to United Nations Publication (2010), Nigeria's population is 167 million people and it has the 3rd highest population in the world. It is estimated that in twenty-five years it will rise to 300 million. This is the current size of USA in a land area only double the size of California (United Nations, 2015).

Population growth is normally influenced by three main factors namely- birth, death and migration. Population is important in any society because the growth rate has implications for the country, state, town, city, and even the village. (Adesina, Oribaber and Ehindero, 2005). Unfortunately, in Nigeria, there are no records that will enable the Nigerian Population

Commission to ascertain the exact population of Nigeria or aid them to project the population. Some population experts are optimistic that Nigeria's population is well above the 167 million that was recorded in the 2006 census. The Director-General of the NPC Mr. Jamin Zuberger has this to say about the problem of insufficient records for population projection in Nigeria;

“Projections are things you can do even beyond 2016. If you have a growth rate and a base population, you can even calculate for the next 100 years. But there are no exact records on birth rate, death rate and population of Nigeria. I have to do some calculations to get projections” (Olorun, 2012)

Causes of over population

It has already been stated in this work that due to improved healthcare in Nigeria since the 1960's birthrate has far outweighed death rate, thereby causing population explosion. But this is not the only cause of increase in population, other factors are:

Cultural values/beliefs: In many cultures in Nigeria a man is rated and respected based on the number of children he has notwithstanding if he has the resources to take care of them. Also in rural communities in Nigeria children are regarded as source of labour in the home and farm. So, the more children a man has the more helpers he has to take care of his domestic and farm work. In the Nigerian society male offspring's are more highly valued than females for a variety of reasons which leads to the common practice of continuous child birth in an attempt to have male children.

Religion

Religion has played a prominent role in the increase of population in Nigeria. The Islamic religion in Nigeria promotes large families with the encouragement of early marriage and polygamous family system. The Christian religion in turn prohibits the most effective forms of contraception and most are anti-abortion (Orama, 2006).

Lack of Education

The lack of education especially as related to population education, sex education, the lowering of infant mortality and birthrates has contributed so much to population problems in Nigeria. Women who married early have children all their productive years because they do not know

what measures they could take to stop bearing children. Likewise, young ladies who engage in illicit sex also get pregnant and have children who contribute to the over flow. All these are possible because they have not received any instruction on sex education and the adverse effect of over population.

Old Age Social Security

In Nigeria children are seen as support for their parents at old age. Due to this belief, a man is supposed to have many children so that he will not be stranded in his old age.

Effect of Over Population

Rapid population growth has economic, social and political effects and it also interacts with public education, health and welfare, and the quality of environment in which people live (Adewole, 2012). According to Ehrlich (1968) over population has been blamed for a variety of issues including poverty, high unemployment rate, environmental degradation, famine and genocide. Due to population explosion the resources of a country cannot satisfy the populace anymore. That is why many people struggle for very few available resources, for example during the post UME Examination at Imo State University, Owerri in the 2012/13 session more than 54 thousand candidates were competing for admission positions meant for about 6 thousand students (IMSU Fact Sheet). This overflow is experienced in many other sectors, be it employment, medicare, fuel provision and even land tenure.

In a country like Nigeria where according to Adewole (2012) and Awe (2009) population is playing an adverse role in all spheres of life, it has contributed in deteriorating the quality of lives of the masses thereby resulting into severe poverty, loss of value for life, various diseases, high rate of crime and slow development. These problems led Zuberger to posit that, “A large population is a liability for most countries, especially one dependent on one source of income that offers limited employment. Why would any right thinking person want to bring children up into a country with Nigeria’s problems? You have out of control poverty, unemployment, mega-corruption in all spheres of government, very, very serious security problems, serious diseases, everyone hates everyone else be it political, religious or ethnic... it sure would not be a world I would want to bring a child into”. In this direction, Onyekwere (2012) revealed that over population brought increasing unemployment, social and political unrest, increased pressure on

agricultural population, high percentage of dependent children, high rate of rural urban migration, low returns on investment and low per capita income.

The effects of over population are more severely felt by the poor in the society and that is why Malthus advocated for the education of the lower class about the use of moral restraint or voluntary abstinence, which he believed would slow the growth rate. As a result of the adverse effects of overpopulation on the economy of any nation, demographers and population experts advocate population control as the only cure for it. Ehrlich (1968) likened over population to cancer. According to him, cancer is an uncontrolled multiplication of cells, while population explosion is an uncontrolled multiplication of people. Treating only the symptoms of cancer may make the victim comfortable at first, but eventually he dies-often horribly. A similar fate awaits a world with population explosion, if only the symptoms are treated. He offers some solution to population problem in the way of outright sterilization and compulsory birth regulation through the addition of temporary sterility to water supplies or staple food. These may be extreme measures, but still we need to apply control to our teeming population or things may get out of hand.

Population Control

Population control is the practice of artificially altering the rate of growth of human population. As a result of the problems associated with population explosion, many countries at one time or the other have embarked on population control programmes to improve the standard of living of the masses. Historically, human population control has been implemented by limiting the population's birth rate, usually by government mandate, and has been undertaken as a response to factors including, high or increasing levels of poverty, environmental concerns and overpopulation (Knudsen, 2006). Nations enact population policies for the sake of population control. Worried by her exponential growth rate Nigeria in 2004 prepared a comprehensive policy to reverse/control her size. The policy has six (6) goals, twenty (20) objectives and ten (10) targets. It also has nine (9) strategies for family planning and fertility management (FGN, 2004).

Earlier Attempts at Population Control

Population control is an age long phenomenon and it started from ancient times. In ancient Greece, Plato (427-347BCE) and Aristotle(348-322 BCE) discussed the best population size for Greek City states, such as Sparta and Athens, and concluded that cities should be small enough for efficient administration and direct citizen participation in public affairs, but at the same time needed to be large enough to defend themselves against hostile neighbouring city states. Immigration to colonies would be encouraged should the population become too large. Aristotle advanced that a large increase in population would bring poverty on the citizenry, and poverty is the cause of sedition and evil. To halt rapid population increase, Aristotle advocated the use of abortions and the exposure of new borns. Chinese philosophers led by Confucius were interested in population of the best fit where food supply/resources would balance with number. To them excessive population growth will depress the living standards of the people (Onokerhoraye, 1985).

The means of controlling and regulating populations can be traced back to many cultures. Infanticide or the killing of infants and young children has occurred since early times. In early civilizations like Rome and Greece, the father was given complete power to kill, abandon or even sell his child. In Hawaii, China and Japan, many female and disabled children were killed to maintain a strong race without over population. Apart from these submissions, some early writers such as Malthus indicated that natural disasters like scourges, wars, earthquakes and flood can help to check population growth (Onyekwere 2012; Stuart, 1992). In recent times, many countries of the world example, India, China, Singapore, Iran, and Uzbekistan etc have applied different types of population control measures to prune down their population. So, instead of Nigerian leaders to allow wars (Boko Haram), extreme poverty which will result into starvation and floods to act as population checks, they should strive to initiate a population control programme that will benefit the masses. This is because the era when population increase is seen by many in Nigeria as the key to political power and resources should be discarded and pro-active approach developed.

Population Control in Nigeria

There has not been any serious population control measure in Nigeria, apart from policy statements. As far as freedom of child production is concerned, Nigeria and many other 3rd world countries rank highest. No government in Nigeria has a documented evidence of population control goals and strategies being executed. The first meaningful population policy document was the Nigerian Population Policy, 1988 (Onyekwere, 2012: 153-155). The head of state at this time was General Ibrahim Babangida who in a post policy statement suggested that each couple should have a maximum of four children. His suggestion was not adhered to and for many years, there was no mention of it again. President Goodluck Jonathan is another Nigerian leader that has broached on this issue. He suggested that Nigeria should limit the number of children they have, although he also acknowledged the sensitivity of the issue (Olokor, 2012).

The Nigerian film industry (Nollywood) has silently preached the gospel of population control. This idea is depicted in their films where couples have only two or three children. This has been the trend for a long time; the ones with large families suffer hunger, and are not able to send their children to school. Another example is from Living Faith Church aka Winners Chapel. It is mandatory on the pastors to produce not more than three children. The reason for this is that if they have many children their resources (salary) may not be able to take care of them.

Other attempts at population control are made by health officials who have been creating awareness on child spacing. Also many enlightened Nigerians have decided to have few children so that they live comfortably and train them at all levels. In this direction, National Population Commission does periodic demographic and health surveys whose activities/reports are published in Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NPC, 2009).

Nigerians should be informed on the adverse effects of over population. They should know that some of the hardships that the country is facing is an outcome of over population. When this information gets to the people they will constructively pattern their lives to avoid population explosion which has been predicted by 2020. Information available to the government on population growth in Nigeria will enable them to promulgate laws that will favour a method of population control for Nigerians and stand by it. This is where the librarian comes in because

he will be the one that will gather information on these subjects and disseminate it to the Nigerian populace.

The disseminator as implied in this paper is the librarian. One of the principal roles of the librarians in every setting is the dispersing of information they acquire from various sources. In this case, librarians in Nigeria have to reach out to the populace to inform them on the unchecked population growth in Nigeria, and the dangers of such uncontrolled growth. This position is important because it is widely accepted that availability of information that is timely, accurate and relevant enhances decision making by eliminating uncertainties. The observation has been made by Iselin (1990), Chetewan (2003) and Okoro (2010). It is also expected that reports of demographic survey by NPC, USAID, DFID will be kept by librarians and disseminated to the public.

Krolak (2005) commended the role of librarians towards environmental issues when he stated that, they are no longer passive keepers and preservers of books, rather, they have evolved to become facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on service, identifying user needs and communicating solutions. The solution that the librarians are out to communicate here is very vital to our society and that is population control.

There are about five (5) library types in Nigeria and they include, the public library, school library, academic library, special library and the national library. Apart from the public library which has the general public as its clientele, the others have groups of people that they serve. Librarians in these setting should device means of disseminating this important information to their clients.

Public Library.

The public library has the responsibility of serving the general public and because of this, the dissemination of information to the masses always rests on it. It has the mandate of meeting the needs of its users at all times and in varied locations (Long, 2003).

The public library can engage in the following activities to promote awareness of population control in the country:-

- a. Displays and Exhibition: Pictures, posters, books, realia etc that are related to population control can be displayed at strategic spots in the community as a way of keeping the people abreast of the consequences of over-population. Pictures of malnourished children and people dying of hunger will create a permanent impression in the minds of people.
- b. The public library should organize public awareness activities for its clientele in the form of campaigns, rallies, talk shows, workshops/seminars, meeting with youths and film shows.
- c. They can also use books, pamphlets, newspaper articles, journals, plays and songs, quiz competitions and drama with population control themes to reach out to the masses.
- d. Television and radio programmes, film shows, audio tapes etc can be used to educate the masses on the adverse effects of over population. Mabawonku (2001) noted that audio-visual recording materials like the television and films are very useful in providing information on environmental issues.

The school librarian has a role to play in the dissemination of information on population control. This is so because, it is at this level of education that cases of unwanted pregnancies are rampant. This situation also adds to the already bad case of population explosion.

In this case, the school librarian will stock books and other information materials that will help the students to get a good grasp of sex education, and also arm their Guidance Counselors with materials that they will use to educate the students on the side effects of premature sex. Other avenues of reaching the students are through storytelling, book talks, drama, film shows, debates and talk shows, all aimed at exposing the evil effects of over-population on the society.

Academic environments also need information on population control. In this paper, academic environment is used to refer to universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. The target group in these environments is the students. They need information on population control so that they will know how to pattern their lives. Libraries in these environments can achieve this by offering them the following services;

- provide a rich collection of books, journals, newspaper articles and some ephemerals on population control.

- organize seminars, workshops, symposiums, forum lectures etc.
- use social media like, *To Go, Twitters and Face Book* to reach the students.
- provide e-libraries so that students can also access information on population control in the net, and
- use e-mail to send information to individuals and groups.

Special Libraries

These are libraries that are established for specialized clientele. Their stock is patterned according to their areas of specialization in order to facilitate their research work. The librarians in these libraries are usually concerned with providing information materials to their clients that will facilitate their researches. The librarian can disperse information on population control to them through the use of: journals, newspaper clippings, research report, selective dissemination of information (SDI) and repackaging relevant information on population control. With the help of these information materials provided for them, these researchers (especially medical doctors) can carry out researches/studies that will help them to come up with the best method of population control device that will benefit Nigerians.

Librarians in all these libraries can also liaise with Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are interested in population education to introduce programmes that will benefit their clientele. These Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) normally sponsor these programmes and it goes a long way to alleviate the cost of mounting such programmes on the part of the libraries.

Conclusion

In every country, population is always checked to make sure that the rate of growth in population equates the infrastructural and material development of the nation. Though there are periodic checks (census) in Nigeria, demographers are still suspicious that the figures that are proffered to the masses may not be relied on. From all indications Nigeria is heading towards population explosion with its attendant problems of mass poverty, out-of-control population in our educational institutions, unemployment, traffic jams and high death rate. This information should be delivered to the masses so that they would become courteous and cut their excesses. But, surprisingly, so many Nigerians have not been intimated with this development. Therefore

this paper suggests that librarians as information managers should be used to disperse this all important information. They can do this work through the use of resources like, books, films, audio tapes etc. If our libraries will be properly funded and equipped for this mission, then librarians in these setting will achieve this purpose.

Recommendations

- a. Governments at all levels should equip libraries to enable them provide vital information to handle some of their environmental issues.
- b. The mobile library service should be revived and stocked with materials that will help them to disperse population control information to the masses.
- c. There is need to introduce sex and population education into the curriculum at all levels of education in Nigeria. This will help to enlighten the young people on the issues of sex and reproduction.
- d. Libraries should engage the services of NGO's, the mass media, women groups and youth groups to propagate the information on population control.
- e. Library work is dynamic as Ranganathan rightly said that, "the library is a growing organism". So, librarians should be ready to handle challenges as the era of traditional librarianship is gone. The modern day librarian should be versed in the knowledge and use of ICT so that he can always access information and repackage it for his clientele. The implication of this is that the librarian is needed in all the facets of national agenda.
- f. Librarians should be trained and re-trained to be able to function effectively in this era when Nigeria is facing a lot of environmental problems so that they can be in the position to provide information that will be useful and handy to tackle them.

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