

**POPULATION POLICIES : FORMULATION,
IMPLEMENTATION AND PROSPECTS
KEY ISSUES IN NIGERIA'S POPULATION
POLICY IN THE 1990S**

by

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APRIL, 1988**

POPULATION POLICY IN NIGERIA

ABSTRACT :

This paper reviews Nigeria's population policy which was adopted during the first quarter of 1988. The policy has been adopted at a time of social and economic stress. The policy document is divided into eight sections, each section highlights demographic and socio-economic aspects of the society.

The major constraints to the realisation of the policy objectives are mentioned and the future prospects to the year 2000 are appraised.

INTRODUCTION

Many African countries since the seventies have been forced by ecological, economic and political factors to address the issues of their population - its size, growth rate, spatial distribution, urbanisation, the role of women and youth in the development process, the problems of the elderly, overcrowding in the urban areas, slums and housing shortages among other population related issues.

The realities that have informed their policies in this area are largely the ecological disasters of the Sahelian drought and desert encroachment which have continued to ravage farmlands and grazing fields, deplete livestock and contributed to hunger, malnutrition and inter-regional migration.

The economic problems have manifested in several ways that have led to zero or negative growth in per capita income. Exporters and importers of petroleum products have been adversely affected. One problem leads to the other: the Sahelian drought has contributed largely to the high import of food especially grains and protein. Importation of raw materials and spare parts from the industrialised countries have contributed to a greater drain of their foreign exchange reserves. The economies of countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Gabon, Ethiopia, Mali, Chad, Congo, Tanzania, Zambia and Morocco have been adversely affected.

The other factors have been the accumulation of external debts which have to be repaid in foreign currencies and the rise in prices of manufactured goods, the internal mismanagement of the domestic economy and political instability.

African countries now debate openly the importance and necessity for self-reliance strategy (as in Nigeria and Ghana) as an alternative method to revive their devastated economy while trying to identify policy options that can be adopted both in the short and in the long run. Among the policy options which have come to light have been the POPULATION FACTOR. We can, for example, contrast the "laissez-faire" attitude of Nigeria in the era of economic boom to population issues in the early 70s to the positive statement in the late 80s due in part to the realisation of the need to do something about the population factor.

In the Second National Development Plan 1970-74 the official statement on population read in part:

"The magnitude of the country's population problem is unlikely to be such that calls for emergency or panic action. What seems appropriate in the present circumstances of Nigeria is for the Government to encourage the citizens to develop a balanced view of the opportunities for individual family planning on a voluntary basis, with a view to raising the quality of life in their offsprings. The Government will pursue a qualitative population policy by integrating the various voluntary family planning schemes into the overall health and social welfare programmes of the country. The Government will establish a National Population Council to implement this population policy and programme, and to co-ordinate all external aid support for family planning activities throughout the country".

On the other hand, the National Population Policy officially adopted in March, 1988 is now positive.

"Given the population situation, the available resources, and the responsibility of Government to enhance and sustain the nation's welfare, there is a dire need to re-examine the nation's population trends with their consequences and to formulate a national policy on population for development, unity, progress and self-reliance in the country. In doing so it must be recognised that population growth and development are inter-related. The process of development has an important effect on population growth and population factors have a major impact on the attainment of development objectives and are very important for development plans and strategies.

A national policy must recognise that all couples and individuals have the same basic right to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have information, education and means to do so. The Government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria have the rights and responsibility to deal with and resolve their population problems in the best way possible. At the same time, Government actions shall be humane and responsible, recognising that the way the Government deals with its population problems may affect individual freedoms and the rights of its neighbours" (pp. 1-2).

The population policy has been adopted at a time of great stress in the economy and the society: the annual growth of the economy in the last four years has declined to one-quarter of its average annual growth rate of about 10% between 1970 and 1975; unemployment rate is about 20% of the labour force and the domestic currency (the Naira) has been devalued to 12% of its dollar rate in 1980. The massive retrenchment and retirement of workers which has occurred since 1975 coupled with astronomical inflationary pressures in the economy - all have combined to create a restless social situation. However, Nigeria's population policy has not been designed in response to its current economic and social situation.

II - NIGERIA'S POPULATION POLICY, 1988:

It is, however, against a background of a weak economy that Nigeria's population policy was adopted by the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) - (the highest legislative and administrative organ in the State) in March, 1988. The draft of the policy had been completed by the Federal Ministry of Health and circulated to interested members of the public since 1985. The formulation of the policy has benefited from contributions made by officials in the various Ministries, the academic community, the professions and from a document prepared by the Futures Group in Washington D.C.

Nigeria is the second country in the English speaking West African region to adopt an official population policy; the first country to do so was Ghana in 1969. Nigeria's population policy has set out a number of social and demographic objectives to be achieved between the year 1990 and 2000.

The current population is estimated at between 100 and 115 million; the annual growth rate has also been estimated at between 2.8% and 3.3%; about 47% - 50% of the population are under 15 years of age; about 30% of the population live in urban areas of 20,000 persons and above while the average expectation of life at birth is about 50 years. Three censuses have been conducted since 1960 but have ended in either rejected or disputed figures.

Nigeria's population policy is divided into eight sections.

Section 1 is a Statement of the objectives of the Policy. Section 2 discusses the population situation in Nigeria and focuses on population size, mortality, population growth, age distribution and migration. Section 3 discusses the consequences and implications of the population situation - population momentum; population pressures at the family level, population pressures at the societal level; Gross Domestic Product; Agricultural Development; land resources; energy resources; education; employment; health and environment.

Section 4 sets out Population Policy Goals and Objectives. The goals are:

- (i) To improve the standards of living and the quality of life of the people;
- (ii) To promote their health and welfare, especially through preventing premature death and illness among high risk groups of mothers and children;
- (iii) To achieve lower population growth rates, through reduction of birth rates by voluntary fertility regulation methods that are compatible with the attainment of economic and social goals of the nation;
- (iv) To achieve a more even distribution of population between urban and rural areas".

The Policy Objectives include:-

"To promote awareness among the citizens of this country of population problems and the effects of rapid population growth on development, within the shortest possible time;

To provide to every one the necessary information and education on the value of responsible family size to both the individual family and the future of the nation in achieving self-reliance;

To make family planning means and services to all couples and individuals easily accessible at affordable cost, at the earliest possible time, to enable them to regulate their fertility;

To improve demographic data collection and analysis on regular basis and to use such data for economic and social development planning;

To enhance integrated rural and urban development in order to improve the living conditions in the rural areas and to slow down the rate of migration from rural areas to the cities".

The targets are set to the year 2000 and discussed in Sections 4.3 of the Policy. The strategies for achieving these targets are set out in Section 5: These include:

- (i) Family Planning
- (ii) Raising the age at first marriage to after 18 years, but below 35 years.
- (iii) Discouraging men from 60 years of age from bearing children.
- (iv) Limiting the number of children to four per woman.
- (v) Intensifying the reduction of high childhood mortality, infant and maternal deaths, encouraging child spacing.
- (vi) Incorporation of traditional medicine into the medical and health programme of the nation".

Section 5 - 3A deals with an aspect of the social structure especially the patriarchal nature of the family in Nigeria:

"In our society, men are considered the head of the family and they take far reaching decisions including the family size, subsistence and social relations. At this transition period from subsistence to industrial economy, the average man bears greater paternalistic burden in caring for the family. Special information and enlightenment programmes are necessary to increase awareness of men as to the need of having the appropriate size of family they can foster within their resources".

Section 5.3 discusses the role and status of women in development while Section 5.4 presents the case for children and youth. Section 5.5 dwells on population education and information; Section 5.6 presents the case for spatial distribution of the population; Section 5.7 discusses population data collection, training and research.

Section 6 is on the Institutional and Organisational Structure for the implementation of the national population policy. It proposes the Office of Planning and Co-Ordination for Population Programme (OPCPP) at the Federal level and State Counterpart offices to initiate and liaise with the Federal Agency, OPCPP. Section 7 deals with Monitoring and Evaluation; finally Section 8 deals with leadership.

On leadership, the Policy argues:

"The success of the National Policy on Population for Development is vital to our national and every family in it. It requires the political will, support and participation of our leaders".

III - THE PROSPECTS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Although the Policy is launched at a time when economic and social conditions in Nigeria are oppressive and could advance the cause for adoption of the measures to control population growth, much emphasis should not be placed on the immediate success of the policy.

Firstly, the public adoption of the policy is on a voluntary basis. Government spokesmen have promised that they could mobilise the public through education and media publicity. Although a lively debate is going on on television and print media on whether religion and culture will not negate the objectives of four children per woman. While the elites may accept the idea of four children per woman, religious fundamentalists argue that they have a right to have as many children as God gives them. Many families in polygamous unions are taking consolation that since the policy allows a maximum of four children per woman there is the possibility that a man who has four or five wives can have up to sixteen or twenty children. Other people have also argued that the document is silent on the issue of sex preference - that couples in monogamy whose four children are all females may be tempted to go on trying till they can get at least one male child.

The cost of raising children in the absence of free primary and secondary education, medical care, etc, has become an additional burden on many families whose breadwinner may have lost his job; such families may react by not reducing their family size to four but by refusing to send the children they have to school. Instead of the Government's laudable objective to reduce illiteracy in the general population, negative action by parents may in fact increase illiteracy among the youths.

In some States of Nigeria parents are refusing to send their children to school; they argue that those who have completed their education cannot secure employment in the private and the public sectors of the economy. Government grants tax relief for only four children per couple.

The financial cost of implementing the policy-domestic and foreign has not been worked out beyond the statement that -

"the value of family planning and child spacing on the stability and well-being of the family, shall be promoted and family planning services shall be incorporated into maternal and child health services. Government shall ensure the availability and accessibility of family planning services to all couples and individuals seeking such services at affordable prices on a voluntary basis. Family Planning services shall include services to sterile and sub-fertile couples as well as individuals who want to have children to achieve self-fulfilment".

The establishment of the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) since 1987 may contribute to the opening up of rural areas for accessibility and for the evacuation of farm produce to the market areas.

Government has put emphasis on maternal and infant welfare since the past two years through the immunisation of children and pregnant women against communicable diseases such as dysentery, tetanus, diphtheria and cholera. The Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) and the Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) have become popular with families that have young children. These programmes have benefited from World Health Organisation assistance.

The population policy, however, makes no clear provision for the elderly persons 65 years and over who by the year 2000 will constitute between 5% - 8% of the population. This is a serious omission since the general tendency for the extended family kinship system to cater for the aged is no longer valid. A system of social insurance benefits including the provision of free medical care for the aged should be incorporated in the policy.

The policy is also silent on the issue of abortion probably because the subject is considered explosive and sensitive.

IV - KEY ISSUES AND PROBLEMS OF NIGERIA'S POPULATION POLICY IN THE 1990s

The most critical issue in Nigeria's population policy in the 1990s will be to ascertain the exact size of the population and maintain a viable system of vital statistics registration. The Present Population Policy wisely avoids the first and reminds Nigerians of the second for Nigerian censuses have become highly politicised. Since Independence in 1960 Nigeria's population censuses have failed to provide reliable data on the size, structure and rate of growth of the population.

The Military Government has given the undertaking that it would organise a population census in 1991 but most perceptive Nigerians have expressed doubts that the census (if at all it is executed), will go the way of the censuses conducted in the sixties and seventies. Nigeria should not waste her resources in conducting any population census during the 1990s but should mount a viable Vital Statistics System for the registration of births, deaths and marriages and ensuring that the data collected are analysed and published regularly.

The case for National Identity Card for all Nigerians 18 years and above which successive Nigerian Governments have proposed since 1979 remains on the drawing board though several millions of Naira have been spent on the planning. The insistence by the present Minister of Internal Affairs to commence the registration in the nineties despite very vocal and significant opposition is highly regrettable. National Identity Cards will not serve any useful demographic purpose in this country and should be abandoned.

The third key issue of Nigeria's population policy lies in meeting the targets set out in the plan. Meeting targets in an era, of economic uncertainty is a risk policy makers must take into consideration.

These Policy targets are:-

- (i) For the protection of the health of mother and child to reduce the proportion of women who get married before the age of 18 years by 50% by 1995, and by 80% by the year 2000.
- (ii) To achieve birth spacing of a minimum of two or more years interval in at least 50% of married women of child bearing age by 1995 and by 80% by the year 2000.
- (iii) To reduce pregnancy to mothers below 18 years and above 35 years of age by 50% by 1995 and by 80% by the year 2000.

- (iv) To reduce the proportion of women bearing more than four children by 50% by 1995 and by 80% by the year 2000.
- (v) To extend the coverage of family planning service to 50% of women of child bearing age by 1995 and 80% by the year 2000.
- (vi) To direct a significant proportion of the family planning programme in terms of family life education and appropriate family planning service to all adult males by the year 2000.
- (vii) To reduce the number of children a woman is likely to have during her lifetime, now over six children to four children per woman by the year 2000 and reduce the present rate of population growth about 3.3% to 2.5% by 1995 and 2.0% by the year 2000.
- (viii) To reduce the infant mortality rate to 50 per 1000 live births by the year 1990 and 30 per 1000 live births by the year 2000 and the crude death rate to 10 per 1000 by 1990 and 8 per 1000 by the year 2000.
- (ix) To make available suitable family life education and family planning information and services to all adolescents by 2000 to enable them to assume responsible parenthood.
- (x) And to provide 50% of rural communities with basic social amenities by 1990 and 75% by the year 2000 in order to stimulate and sustain self-reliant development.

"Family planning services shall be made available to all persons voluntarily wishing to use them. Priority attention shall be given to reaching high risk clients for example women under 18 years or over 35 years, those with four or more children, those with previous complicated pregnancies or childbirth or those with chronic illnesses which increase the health risk of pregnancy".

The Nigerian targets do not conform to those set out in the World Population Plan of Action (WPPA) in Mexico 1984 for most third world countries. For example WPPA expects that an average expectation of life at birth for third world countries should be 62 years by the year 2000. It is instructive that Nigeria has adopted targets in the light of her own expectations of her resources and economic development. These targets were worked out during the first half of the eighties when the economy was buoyant; the adoption of the Plan has been delayed to almost 1990 which leaves about five years to the accomplishments of the first target date of 1995.

Efforts have been directed by the Governments of the Federation to mobilise Nigerian women to participate in education, family planning and rural development. This mobilisation has been negated by the decline in employment opportunities - a necessary step towards modernisation of the rural and urban population.

A monitoring unit should be set up in OPCPP to record progress towards the achievement and realisation of the targets by 1995 and by 2000.

Nigeria must seek international assistance through United Nations Agencies and by bilateral co-operation with advanced industrial countries without compromising self-reliance.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria has taken a decisive step by adopting a population policy which forms the framework for measuring the structural changes in the population. The objectives of the policy are commendable though the targets set out in the policy will not be realised by the target date.

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