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Environment and Family Planning Programmes in Nigeria

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Abstract

Both physical and social environment play important role in facilitating higher population growth. However, the social environment particularly traditional beliefs and cultural practices have a stronger influence on family size. This explains the slow rate of fertility decline in Nigeria despite the huge resources made available by government to reduce it. This study therefore examines the relationship between population, environment and family planning programmes in Nigeria. The study revealed that both men's and women's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours on the issues of sexuality and reproductive health are essential in achieving a reduction of total fertility rate in Nigeria. Appropriate methods were suggested to empower women and enlighten men.

Introduction

Ten to twelve thousand years ago, Homo sapiens were relatively rare species living in small bands by hunting and food gathering. Man had very little significant control over fertility and mortality, both of which were high; as such population grew very slowly. In fact, studies revealed that not more than 10 million people lived on earth 200 BC (McEvedy et al, 1978). The discovery of horticulture and the accompanied used of iron assured man of steady food supply, which enhanced permanent settlement, and growth of towns. The growth of towns was characterized by specialization, economic activities and political and intellectual developments. Modern health care facilities, improved nutrition and expanded transport networks raised the standard of living, life expectancy. Mortality, especially, infant declined while fertility remained relatively high too. Population therefore increased at an accelerated rate known as population explosion. This rapid growth rate however were not even. For instance the developing countries, experienced population increase from 1.7 billion (1950) to 4.9 billion (2000) compared to 0.8 billion to 1.2 billion over the same period in developed countries (Population Bureau, 2000).

Environment according to Buchanan (1974) refers to the conditions or surrounding that play a part in determining the growth and development of living organisms. This includes both the physical and social phenomena.

Population and the Social Environment

Both the social activities and demographic processes through which population increases or decreases, are influenced by the physical and social environment. The

demographic characteristics of a population, which include its size, density, health, and life expectancy among others, are essential in the understanding of a peoples' way of life. Thus, the demographic composition of human groups varies with both their social and their physical environment. In order words, in between demographic factors – fertility and migration – there are economic, social, cultural and political factors that influences population growth.

Until recently, societies including those of Nigeria had very little significant control over fertility and mortality. The little control over fertility was practiced by women alone in the form of traditional family planning, which aimed at minimizing the incidence of pregnancy (William, 1983). Nigeria is made up of different socio-cultural groups of people. Thus there are various forms of traditional birth control methods which include:

(1) The use of local herbs or plants.

(2) The behavioural patterns in the form of abstinence from sex which is enhanced by custom to ensure virginity prior to marriage. Also, female circumcision is practiced to reduce sexual promiscuity. Post partum

(3) The use of sacrification

(4) The use of amulets (onde) and rings, which range from talisman, padlock and key (Akaraba), "Ifunpa", "Teso", "Igbadi" and sponge insertion into virginal soaked with alum or table salt.

All these traditional birth control methods; apart from post partum, were however aimed at ensuring virginity of females before marriage. The socio-cultural practice of birth control or family planning method basically encouraged virginity before marriage. Hence fertility and mortality remained high in the Nigerian societies. Infact, the infant mortality averaged 84%, child mortality 140% and maternal mortality 647% and life expectancy was 50 years (Population Reference Bureau 2002). The total fertility remained high as 6.3 up till 1990 and declined relatively to 5.7 in 2002 (NDHS 2003). This scenario enhanced a continued rapid population growth.

Demographic process operates through the interplay of the vital rates (fertility and mortality) and the population structure. Thus, decades of rapid population growth resulted in more young men and women of child bearing age than ever before, and also large generation of children (46% under age 15) who will enter child bearing which has an in – built momentum for continued population growth well into the next decade. A young population structure increases government expenditure on education and health services. In other words, the burden of dependency increases to the detriment of resources that could be devoted to raising the standard of living. This will in turn lower savings, less investment in other sectors of the economy, slow economic growth and ultimately greater poverty.

Rapid population growth hampers development especially in developing countries because it threatens the environment and put pressure on the government to meet escalating needs for such social services like housing, education, health care as well as employment opportunities.

Population and the Physical Environment

There is need to understand how demographic factors such as the size, rate of growth and distribution of population affects natural resource use and the environment. That is, more people would consume more resources and do more harm to the environment. Some people have far more impact on the environment than others due to the difference in consumption pattern. With only 22% of the world's population, the developed nations account for two-third of all resources consumed and generate 75% of all pollutants and waste products. Thus, developed nations contribute adversely to environmental degradation (Ashford, 2002). Links between environmental change, agriculture and fertility can be initiated by a number of factors. For example, the prolonged cool period in England between 16th and 19th centuries declined grain yield and reduced family size because of the fear of inadequate food supply. Also in Ethiopia in 1980s net out-migration increased due to the extended drought in agricultural communities which encourage men to move to adjoining agricultural regions or cities leaving their wives behind. Similarly periods between 13th and 19th centuries have been linked to the simultaneous increase in population growth (Buchanan, 1974).

Study Aim and Objectives

The study aims at highlighting the link between population, environment and family planning programmes.

This aim will be achieved in pursuance of the following objectives:

a. To examine the trend in fertility in Nigeria.
b. Evaluate the family planning programme in Nigeria.
c. Highlight the factors influencing fertility behaviour in the country and
d. Propose an appropriate practice of family planning from the findings of the study.

Methodology:

Data required for the Study

Data required for this study include information on the fertility behaviour in terms of age at first marriage, age at first sexual intercourse and contraceptive use as well as family planning implementation in Nigeria.

Sources of Data

This study relies essentially on secondary data in which the Nigeria demographic and Health survey (NDHS) report was prominent. Other sources include relevant literature and unpublished documents. The NDHS report focused on married men and women aged between 15 – 44 years. The assumption for the choice of these set of people was that they are at risk of reproduction. Married people were selected because marriage institution was the only means through which process of reproduction should occur.

Analytical Framework

Since the study was an exploratory type, simple percentage techniques of analysis

were used to summarize the data. What is really crucial in the application of these analytical tools relates to their abilities to clearly summarize datasets into a manageable proportion. Also, such summaries reveal the inherent information desired in the data for the conduct of a research of this type.

Results and Discussion:

Modern Family Planning in Nigeria

Governments in developing countries including Nigeria recognizes that high fertility result in rapid population increase, adopted policies and programme to encourage smaller family size of 4 children per family. Family planning programme particularly birth control is believed to be the panacea to slowing down population and promote healthy life or increase the quality of life. Therefore, considerable resources were put in place to implement family planning programme in Nigeria.

Family planning combined with social and economic changes dramatically reduce fertility rates worldwide within the last three decades, such that total fertility rate declined from 6.1 (1960) to 3.6 (1994). However the sub-Saharan Africa especially Nigeria was an exception with total fertility rate pulsating between 6.7 (1960) to 6.4 (1994) (Population Bulletin, 1995). In Nigeria, government effort at family planning between 1990 and 1999 further reduced fertility to 5.1 and later to 5.7 in 2003 from 6.0 in 1990 (Table 1). These figures however vary within the country see Table 2.

Table 1: Trends in fertility Rates 1981-2000

Surveys	Year	Rate
NDHS	1990	6.0
Census	1991	5.9
Sentinel survey	1994	5.4
NDHS	1999	5.2
Sentinel survey	2000	5.1
NDHS	2003	5.7

Sources: 1991 NDHS, 1991 census, 1994 sentinel survey, 1999 NDHS, 2000 sentinel survey, 2003 NDHS preliminary report.

Table 2: Total Fertility Rate by Demographic Health Zones in Nigeria

National Health Zone	Total Fertility Rate (TFR)	
	1990	1999
Northeast	5.9	6.8
Northwest	7.0	6.5
Southeast	5.8	4.6
Southwest	5.9	4.5
Central	7.1	4.5
Nigeria	6.0	5.1

Source: NDHS, 1999

The general TFR of 5.2 is still high for a period of 9 years. Past family planning efforts did not meet the desired target of 2.8 TFR because men's role in reproductive behaviour was down-played by focusing on women alone. In effect, fertility analysts who

should inform policy makers, concentrated on fecundity of women rather than their fertility. This could be attributed to the believe that women alone bear the physical and emotional stress of pregnancies and childbearing. Where as men play a key role in deciding the family size and when to have the next child.

Reproductive choice, a focus of family planning, is however a function of the culture of the society, which determines male and female status and power relations not only in the family but society at large. The reproductive decisions cannot therefore be based strictly on a national weighing of the consequence of child bearing because it is a strongly influenced by cultural and normative context (Mason 1985). And since Nigeria is made up of different cultural groups, the pattern of reproduction is conditioned by the diversity of culture.

The pro-natality attitudes and policies have often prevailed among both government and religious leaders. Government on one hand was interested in population size for military might. For instance, the Babangida Administration put in place a one woman, four children population policy. This policy can only work to reduce population growth rate where only monogamous type of marriage is practiced. Unfortunately, the African society is on the high side of polygamy with about 98% of its married men in polygamous marriages (Olawoye, 1998). Thus, if a man has four wives he can safely have sixteen children born to him. The traditional injunctions of many of the world religions of "be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth" made Roman Catholic to eulogize large family size (Williams 1970). As such, a predominantly Catholic Southeastern Nigeria has relatively high fertility rate of 4.6. The Islamic religion also encourages polygamy, which enhances large family size. Hence, the Muslim dominated region of northeast and northwestern Nigeria experienced high TFR of 6.8 and 6.5 respectively compared to the national average of 5.2 in 1999 (NDHS 1999).

Female aged 15 years and above form the bulk of the illiterate 53% compared to 33% for men in Nigeria (Todaro 2001). Primary school enrolment is 54% compared to 58% for male. These two conditions reduced the status of women and facilities early entry into marriage (William 1953). Thus the median age at first marriage is 17.9 at national level. However, it is 15.0 in Northeast, 14.8 in Northwest 20.2 southeast, 20.2 southeast and 17.9 central (Table 3). Blakie (1975) argued that age at first marriage is one of the most important factors which determine fertility because early marriage is known to enhance early child bearing. Thus the early age at the first marriage in northeast and northwest complements the lower medium age at first birth of 18.2 and 18.6 respectively. Also, the low median age at first marriage in these two regions resulted in high teenage pregnancies of 54.7 and 51.3% compared to the national average 21.9% (Table 3). This resulted in high maternal mortality rate of 40.60% because of reproductive hazards like complicated labour and obstructed labour (Population Reference Bureau 2002).

The existing system in many African societies places women in a position where by many of them have very little control over their reproductive roles or their health and that of the children (Robson, 1993). Thus only 14.0% of women in reproductive age group are using contraceptive as approved by their husbands (NPC, 2002).

The family structure in Nigeria is child-centred and the only way women could raise

their status is through having more children in order to boost her husbands' social status (Caldwell, 1993). This assertion is confirmed by the social ceremony in the southeastern Nigeria where the birth of a 10th child (all living) is celebrated with the slaughtering of a goat to be consumed by the woman alone for a job well done (Ogunleye, 1995). Children serve not only as sources of labour but security during old age. Table 3 shows the different fertility behaviour within Nigeria.

Table 3: Fertility Indicators

National Health Zone	Teenage pregnancy women aged 15 – 19yrs (In percentage)	Median age at first intercourse (in years)	Median age at first marriage (in years)	Mean ideal number of children per woman
North East	51.3	15.1	15	8.2
North West	54.7	14.9	14.6	8.2
South East	8	18.8	20.2	5.8
South West	8	19.2	20.2	5.1
Central	18	18.2	17.9	5.8
National	21.9	17.8	17.9	6.2

Source: NDHS, 1999

The kinship system in the country encourages the adoption of children by relatives, whether parents are living or dead. This makes it easier for people to have more children whether or not they have the means of taking care of such children. This coupled with the patrilinear descent group belief about the values of many children particularly sons for the continuation of the family name and inheritance enhanced high fertility rate in Nigeria (Blake, 1978).

Conclusion

In conclusion tradition, cultural beliefs, religion and social status influences fertility behaviour in Nigeria and Africa as a whole.

Since men play key role in the decision of family size and child spacing, men should be educated on the positive benefits of family planning for them and their children.

Women should be empowered economically not only through giving out of loans to trade or purchase implement to minimize the labour intensive enterprises. Rather women should be educated on health matters such as child survival strategies in the market place, hygienic living (cleanliness of the body, household utensils, clothing etc). Efforts should be made to improve the status of women educationally, in order to increase the number of women in the formal sector labour force. This is needful because formal sector kind of work discourages frequent pregnancies and childbirth.

Therefore, the social institution in which females are forced into early marriage will change. All of these will go a long way to change the social environment in favour of modern family planning which is hoped to slow the population growth and therefore minimize the stress of population on the physical environment.

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