

Dangerous Awakening: Population Battles in Sub-Saharan Africa

Africa south of the Sahara, that huge region of vast geographical and cultural diversity is home to what was estimated for mid-1984 as at least 434million of the world's inhabitants. Birth rates are collectively the world's highest and unlike the rates of other developing regions, show no signs of falling. Death rates however, are falling, though still high. As a result, population growth at over 3 percent a year - is the highest of any region on earth, and rising. The most likely course of events, according to United nations projection is that more than a billion persons will be added from 1980 to 2025.

Along with this tremendous population growth, recent development trends have been bleak. Public attention in early 1985 was focused on emergency food relief to stem the hunger and famine spreading across the region, largely attributed to four years of drought and crop failure. But the drought is only the triggering event in sub-Saharan Africa's current food crisis. With rapid population growth combined with degradation of arable and pasture land, political upheaval, and government's failure to give agriculture that support it needs, per capita agricultural production has been falling since the 1960's. Because agriculture is by far the region's largest economic activity, this in turn has contributed to economic decline in an already impoverished region. Gross domestic product which grew faster than production during the 1970's, has fallen each year since 1980. As far as the actual number of hungry people is concern, the overall improvement in per capita food supplies in developing countries has been largely offset by population increase.

Over half of the total population in sub-Saharan Africa today is under 19 years old. The projections are that this ratio will continue for a number of decades unless our reproductive behaviour and practices change and until Africans accept that a fast growing population might be detrimental to our development and welfare.

The annual rate of population growth in sub-Saharan African has been a major cause of concern for population experts and policy makers for some time. It has been argued that, even if sub-Saharan's population size were lower than it is now, policy makers still have cause to worry as long as the rate of population growth exceeds the rate of growth of the economy. With an estimated doubling period of 24-25 years at the current rate of population growth, the current level of consumption can only be maintained if production of goods and provision of services will also double every 24 to 25 years. Thus in order to experience economic development, production of goods and services will have to double less than 24 years. Unfortunately, this is almost impossible to achieve as all available evidence indicate that the rate of growth of the economy has been lower than the rate of growth of population. Standards of living tends to worsen when the rate of population growth exceeds the rate of economic growth.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The objectives are set in order to explore the following questions:

1. What are the current trend of sexual related behaviour of adolescent, culturally formed rooted views, pre-marital sexual intercourse, age at marriage and first birth, knowledge and availability of contraceptive and use?
2. Parents attitudes toward sex and birth control and their effects on adolescents likelihood of engaging in sexual intercourse or using contraceptives.
3. What are the unmet needs for family planning services?
4. How do laws and policies help or hinder efforts to meet the needs of population control?

METRODOLOGY

The data for this study were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Data collection was done with the use of structured questionnaires on the sampled population. The questionnaire was divided into demographic and family planning aspects. The administration of the questionnaire lasted for a period of six months in year 2000.

Questionnaires were developed using four aspects of population studies. A stratified random sampling procedure was used to select cities and villages in urban and rural areas respectively. The data from the survey covered males and females from aged 9 - 48. The survey covered 35 ethnic groups from five countries in Africa. These are Nigeria, Liberia, Cameroon, Niger and Benin Republic. Information also came from the relevant health agencies, population and census bureau and office of statistics and demography. Altogether, a total of 800 males and females were interviewed. The data collected for this research were analyzed using simple statistics and descriptive analysis.

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