

Demographic Transition and Rural Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The discourse on population growth has generally given a picture that the increase in the population of any society will negatively affect the utilisation of resources and ultimately overall development. A school of thought gave the impression that the more the population increases, the greater is the poverty, leading to underdevelopment, especially for countries in transition. This argument led to various suggestions and attempts at population control and huge budgetary spending, neglecting positive aspects of population size, particularly in the period of demographic transition, and stressing that growth in population size, especially at certain periods, could not lead to and promote development. But can population growth not be a blessing to growth, especially for the rural areas? This paper was anchored in demographic dividend and labour force models. Utilising some theoretical expositions and drawing from the lessons of countries that have transformed from underdevelopment to developed nations, the paper argued that demographic dividend can be harnessed for the development of especially rural areas in transitional countries like Nigeria. The paper concluded with the submission that, in order to tackle the pervasive poverty in Nigeria, disjointed and inconsistent rural development policies should be jettisoned and the utilization of rural population for the supply of economic goods and services for the overall development of the country embraced.

Keywords: Demographic dividend; rural poverty; labour force framework; rural areas; unemployment.

1.0 Introduction

Issue of population growth has been of great concern across societies and globally. This is because the size of the population of any society affects the utility of resources and most importantly overall development. Classical views on population are based on the foundational works of Malthus and Marx, on whose views the Neo-Malthusians and Neo-Marxists have continued to build their cases in explaining population patterns and trends. The beginning of the modern approach to demographic theorizing dates back to 1798, when Thomas Malthus first published his seminal work entitled *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Critical of the optimistic views prominent among other Enlightenment Scholars, Malthus produced a provocative account of the role of population in human society. Painting a deliberately bleak picture of humanity's future, Malthus agreed that societies may experience considerable technological and social progress, but maintained that population growth would always overwhelm the means of sustenance (Isuigo-Abanihe, 2009).

Among the earliest and most forceful critics of Malthus was Karl Marx, who did not directly argue with Malthus on the point of why and how population grew, but was sceptical of the eternal laws of nature as Malthus saw it. Marx preferred instead to view human activity as the product of a particular social and economic environment. The basic Marxist perspective is that each society at each point in history has its own law of population that determines the consequences of population growth. For capitalism, the consequences are overpopulation and poverty; whereas, for socialism, population growth is readily absorbed by the economy with no side effects (Isuigo-Abanihe, 2009). For Marx, the cause of poverty and population problem could not be that the poor are producing many children, as Malthus saw it, but poverty should be blamed on the inherently oppressive character of capitalist societies. To Marx, only a social order built on socialist principles would eliminate unemployment and the so-called population problems, in a well-organized society, if there were more people, there ought to be more wealth, not more poverty. Discussions in this paper will be divided into two major areas: theoretical expositions and relating demographic transition to rural development in Nigeria.

1.2 Objectives

The general objective of this paper is to posit, contrary to the generally held belief, that greater population can lead to greater development. In addition, it is argued that a strategic development policy to tackle the demographic challenge in the rural areas is what is required to truly harvest the dividends of high population. The position of this paper is that population growth can be a blessing if the dividend of some population growth is properly harnessed. First, the pursuit of this position discussion will be divided into two major areas: theoretical expositions and relating demographic transition to rural development in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Demographic Transition Theory

Demographers have generally examined trends in the population with the attendant postulation of demographic

transition theory. According to Isuigo-Abanihe (2009), in the works of Thompson (2003) and Notestein (1945), a distinct explanation of these phenomenal changes, as well as the large changes among world regions, stemmed from the demographic transition theory, which was built on the experience of currently developed societies, and suggests that societies pass through five stages in the process of change. The five transition stages are explained as follows:

- In stage one, in pre-industrial society, death rates, and birth rates are high and roughly in balance (fluctuated rapidly according to natural events, such as famine, drought, and disease). All human populations are believed to have had this balance until the late 18th century, when this balance ended in Western Europe. During this agricultural revolution, birth and death rates both tend to be very high in this stage and because both rates are approximately in balance, population growth is typically very slow in stage one.
- In stage two, that of a developing country, the death rates drop rapidly owing to improvements in food supply and sanitation, which increase life spans and reduce disease. The improvements specific to food supply typically include selective breeding and crop rotation and farming techniques. Other improvements generally include access to technology, basic health care, and education. For example, numerous improvements in public health reduce mortality, especially childhood mortality. Prior to the mid-20th century, these improvements in public health were primarily in the areas of food handling, water supply, sewage, and personal hygiene. Interestingly, one of the variables often cited is the increase in female literacy combined with public health education programmes which emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The death rate decline without a corresponding fall in birth rates which produces an imbalance and the countries in this stage experience a large increase in population.
- In stage three, birth rates fall owing to access to contraception, increases in wages, urbanization, a reduction in subsistence agriculture, an increase in the status and education of women, a reduction in the value of children's work, an increase in parental investment in the education of children and other social changes. Population growth begins to level off. The birth rate decline in developed countries started when contraception improvement played a role in birth rate decline. Notwithstanding, contraceptives were not generally available nor widely used in the 19th century and, then, it did not play a significant role in the decline. Birth rate decline was caused by a transition in values and not just because of the availability of contraceptives.
- In stage four, there are both low birth rates and low death rates. Birth rates drop to well below replacement level, as it is happening in countries like Germany, Italy, and Japan, leading to a shrinking population, a threat to many industries that rely on population growth. As the large group born during stage two ages, it creates an economic burden on the shrinking working population. Death rates may remain consistently low or increase slightly as a result of increases in lifestyle diseases arising from low exercise levels, high obesity, and an aging population in developed countries. However, by the late 20th century, birth rates and death rates in developed countries levelled off at lower rates.
- In stage five, some theorists argue that a fifth stage is needed to represent countries that have sub-replacement fertility (that is, below 2.1 children per woman). Most European and many East Asian countries now have higher death rates than birth rates. In this stage, population aging and population decline will eventually occur to some extent if mass migration does not occur. However, some theorists submitted that there may be a further stage of demographic development. According to Myrskylä, Koller, and Billari (2009), advances in developments reverse fertility declines, showing that previously negative relationship between national wealth (as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI)) and birth rates have become J-shaped. Development promotes fertility decline at low and medium HDI levels, but advanced HDI promotes a rebound in fertility (Myrskylä et al., 2009). In many countries with very high levels of development (around 0.95) fertility rates are now approaching two children per woman, although there are exceptions, notably in Germany and Japan (Myrskylä et al. 2009).

Demographic transition is the window of opportunity for implementation of development-oriented government policies. This one-type gift of the demographic transition is expected to provide lots of opportunities for development and economic gains. During the transition population, growth and changes in the age structure of the population are inevitable, if appropriate policies are pursued (Ingle and Suryawanshi, 2011). The debate on the relationship between population growth and economic development followed from the critics of the theory of Malthus in 18th century. While economists have often focused on the size of the population and the growth of nation, the composition of population age structure has not been considered under most of the studies (Coale and Hoover, 1958). But in recent years, demographers, such as Bloom et al. (1998), have studied the type of composition of age structure of population and its effect on economic growth and the concept of "demographic dividend" emerged.

If mortality and fertility decrease, a young population can become the engine for the national economy. The experience of the Asian Tigers is a proof (Sippel et al., 2011). At the beginning of their impressive development, these countries had a demographic starting point similar to that of many sub-Saharan countries

today and their level of development at that time was just as bad. The development boost of the Asian Tigers was made possible by two fundamental changes. First, a demographic bonus was created because the number of people of working age increased in relation to the number of dependant young and old people. In order to create such a favourable age structure, the children and adolescents have to grow up, mortality in the working age group must decrease, and fertility must decline so that the upcoming young generations (and the related burden) will shrink (Sippel et al., 2011). Second, the demographic bonus could be transformed into a demographic dividend, that is into a gain for the national economy, because the employable people actually had the opportunity to become employed. For this, people must be educated and jobs have to be created. The Asian Tigers have simultaneously invested in education and family planning, and have carried out necessary economic reforms and initiatives (Sippel et al., 2011).

In addition, these countries recognized that the labour participation by women is absolutely necessary for economic progress and that education is a crucial prerequisite for this goal. It was exactly this comprehensive approach which made the successes of the Tiger States possible (Sippel et al., 2011). Even if the concept of demographic dividends cannot simply be transferred from the Asian Tigers to the countries of sub-Saharan Africa owing to cultural, political, and economic differences, the way to the demographic dividend, in principle, is open for the African states. Yet politics have to determine the correct course. As long as mortality, especially child mortality, and fertility remain as high in sub-Saharan Africa as they currently are, a demographic bonus cannot emerge and, therefore, no opportunity for economically favourable development will arise. Investments in health and family planning, as well as in education can be identified as the most important starting points to attain a demographic bonus (Sippel et al., 2011).

Africa currently belongs to those regions experiencing the highest economic and population growth worldwide. At present, the world population has reached seven billion and still continues to grow rapidly – at around 79 million a year. This is equivalent to an increase of about 216,000 people a day (United Nations (UN); Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA); and Population Division (PD), 2009b). This growth largely takes place in the less developed countries. But even within this group, growth varies markedly: the population in developing countries is growing by 1.2 per cent a year, whereas population in the 48 least developed countries is growing by 2.3 per cent, which means the population in these countries will double in only 30 years (UN, DESA and PD, 2009b). The ongoing population growth in poor countries is based on three factors: Firstly, due to improved health care in poor regions, most people live longer. In Asia, for example, average life expectancy has risen from 42 years at the beginning of the 1950s to currently 75 years (UN, DESA and PD, 2009b). Secondly, women in developing countries bear more children than women in the developed regions of the world. On the African continent, women have an average number of 4.5 children, in contrast to Europe where the number is 1.5 per woman (UN, DESA and PD, 2009b). Thirdly, the populations in developing countries are on average very young in age owing to high birth rates. In countries of sub-Saharan Africa alone, 42 per cent of the population is younger than age 15 (UN, DESA and PD, 2009b) – meaning that, in the future, there will be clearly more women of childbearing age. Even if women today had fewer children than their mothers, the population would continue to grow.

Demographic Transition and Dividend

Demographic dividend is defined as a rise in the rate of economic growth owing to a rising share of working age people in a population. This phenomenon occurs with a falling birth rate and the consequent shift in the age structure of the population towards the adult working ages. It is also commonly known as the demographic gift or bonus or demographic window. As cited by Ingle and Suryawanshi (2011), Cyrus and Lee (2000) state that, with many developing countries particularly on the Asian continent, experiencing a rapid decline in fertility, there has been overwhelming optimism that the demographic bonus will take these countries to greater economic heights (Bloom and Williamson, 1998; Mason, 2003). As generally defined, demographic dividend occurs when a falling birth rate changes the age distribution, so that fewer investments are needed to meet the needs of the youngest age groups and resources are released for investments in economic development and family welfare (Ingle and Suryawanshi, 2011).

The period of demographic dividend is an opportunity for overall growth, even though it is not the guarantee for improving the standard of living. This window of opportunity demands from youth, the right skills, and aptitude for employability. Developing nations go through a transition phase in which the economy shifts from agrarian to industrial production and growth of services sector. Industrial countries have largely completed what is called the “demographic transition” – the transition from a largely rural agrarian society with high fertility and mortality rates to a predominantly urban industrial society with low fertility and mortality rates. At an early stage of this transition, fertility rates fall, leading to fewer young mouths to feed (Ingle and Suryawanshi, 2011). During this period, the labour force temporarily grows more rapidly than the population dependent on it, freeing up resources for investment in economic development and family welfare. Other things being equal, per capita income grows more rapidly and this is the first dividend followed by the second dividend, which is asset

accumulation.

Theoretical Framework

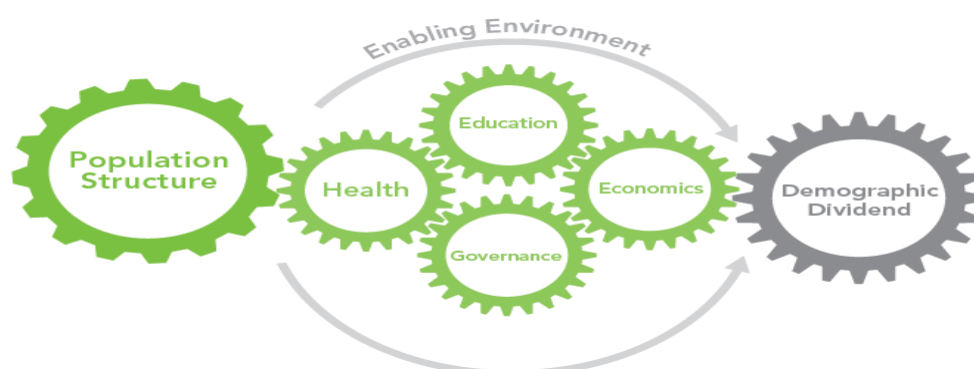
One of the goals of development policies is to create an environment for rapid economic growth towards achieving a demographic dividend of a population of a country. However, a framework of demographic dividend has been built to help explain the experience of certain countries in Asia, and later in successes in Latin America, and is creating a sense of optimism for improving the economic well-being of developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

The demographic dividend refers to the accelerated economic growth that begins with changes in the age structure of a country's population as it transits from high to low birth and death rates. With fewer young people relative to the population of working-age adults, and with the successful implementation of key national policies over the long term, countries will reap many rewards from their demographic dividend. But many policy makers mistakenly think that a demographic dividend results automatically from a large population of young people relative to the population of working-age adults and without the needed population, as well as social and economic policies (Gribble and Bremner, 2012). This is not the case. Nations earning a demographic dividend have invested in human capital (health and education), implemented sound economic and governance policies, and sustained the political commitment necessary to make the most of the opportunity. Carrying out those policies can be challenging for a country's social and governance structures, and not all countries may be able to take advantage of a dividend. Gribble and Bremner (2012) explain the demographic dividend in terms of demographic changes, investments in human capital and economic, and governance policies.

Also, as a country's Total Fertility Rate (TFR – the average number of children per woman) drops, the proportion of the population under age 15 begins to decrease relative to the adult working-age population (generally ages 15 to 64 – the child dependency ratio). The decline in this ratio sets the stage for smaller families, who now have more resources to invest in the health, education, and well-being of each child. And with fewer people to support, a country has a window of opportunity for rapid economic growth if the right social and economic policies are developed and investments are made. As long as the child dependency ratio continues to decrease, the window remains open. Eventually, however, people aged 65 and older begin to represent an increasingly larger proportion of the total population, signalling the end of the first demographic dividend (Gribble and Bremner, 2012). From a demographic perspective, these changes in the population age structure characterize the time frame during which a dividend can take place. But changes in the population age structure do not guarantee accelerated economic growth—the dividend is not automatic and requires a set of investments and policy commitments.

As a first step in changing population structure, countries must go through a demographic transition—from high to low birth and death rates. Although most countries have made significant progress in reducing mortality, the countries that continue to experience sustained high levels of fertility are not poised for a demographic dividend. As long as fertility rates and resulting population growth rates remain high, the size of the child and adolescent population will be larger than the working-age adult population. In these circumstances, families and governments typically will not have the resources to invest in the health and well-being of children and be able to move toward a dividend (Gribble and Bremner, 2012).

1.0 The Demographic Dividend Framework



Adapted from Gribble, J. N. and Bremner, J. (2012: p. 3). Population Reference Bureau

For instance, to achieve a demographic transition, countries must first focus on lowering fertility. One key strategy to achieving this goal is by providing women and men with voluntary family planning information and services. One in four women in developing countries wants to avoid becoming pregnant or delay or space births, but is not using a modern family planning method (Darroch et al., 2011). These women account for almost 80% of unintended pregnancies (WHO and UNICEF, 2012). Other factors, especially education and child

survival, contribute to the uptake of family planning and to lower fertility. When women can choose when and how often to become pregnant, they are more likely to have fewer children and are better able to achieve their desired family size. When women use modern contraception, a country's population age structure can begin to change, setting the stage for a demographic dividend.

Investing in health programmes for children and women is also crucial in achieving demographic dividend. A demographic dividend needs a healthy population, and a way to achieve that is by investing in child survival. Investments in child survival play a key role in sustaining lower levels of fertility; as child survival improves, the desire for a smaller family and demand for family planning will increase. In much of sub-Saharan Africa, couples still desire large families. But these desires are changing. Families will choose to have fewer children when they know that each child has a better chance of surviving (Gribble and Bremner, 2012).

For children to make the most of educational opportunities, they must be healthy and attentive at school. Health programmes that provide immunizations and prevent and treat many common infections will help children to excel in school, and over the long term, to be better-skilled workers. Good nutrition fosters cognitive development among infants and young children and sustains child health. As children grow into adolescents, their health needs evolve. They must have access to reproductive health information and services to avoid unplanned pregnancies and to prevent HIV and sexually transmitted infections—all of which can undermine educational opportunities, especially for girls (Gribble and Bremner, 2012). When youth are developing behaviours that will shape the rest of their lives, health programmes need to address smoking, excessive alcohol use, sedentary lifestyles, and obesity—all of which lead to an increased burden on the health sector.

Appropriate care during pregnancy and delivery plays a key role in reducing maternal and infant deaths. For young women, family planning can help delay their first pregnancy until an age when they are physically, psychologically, and socially prepared for childbearing (Gribble and Bremner, 2012). Delaying at first birth improves health outcomes for both mother and infant. And while programmes that address specific health issues are critical, there is also a need to strengthen health systems so that facilities offer the right combination of services, providers are appropriately trained, and supplies are available. Research demonstrates that good health is linked to strong health systems and programmes. Although, countries are paying attention to the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education, the quality of education remains a challenge. To grow a country's economy, both boys and girls must have access to education. In the case of girls, education—especially at the secondary level—helps delay in marriage and first pregnancy. As countries experience a demographic dividend, they will need to adapt education policies in response to their changing labour market needs (Gribble and Bremner, 2012). The labour force may need training for lower-skilled and labour-intensive work as well as for more efficient and more value-added agricultural production. Then, as the economy grows and diversifies, workers will need a range of skills in business, technology, and other professions.

In addition to health and education, an enabling environment for a demographic dividend needs good governance, which helps attract domestic and foreign investments in local economies. Since the demographic transition results in fewer children to care for, households gradually have more disposable income and savings that they can invest in their own businesses or in others. Similarly, good governance is critical to attracting foreign investments that can create jobs and stimulate economic growth. Established legal systems and the rule of law, especially contract law and financial standards, must be in place for people to be willing to invest in a local economy. If people are not confident that a contract will be honoured or laws enforced, they are not likely to invest in a local economy (Gribble and Bremner, 2012). Other aspects of good governance also contribute, such as reducing corruption and efficiently operating governments.

Good governance promotes gender equality. A gender-equitable environment fosters a demographic transition by allowing women to access and use family planning without many of the barriers they currently face, especially in developing countries (Gribble and Bremner, 2012). Women can, therefore, contribute more to the family's economic well-being by working outside the home. And better-educated women obtain higher-paying jobs and use their earnings to improve the human capital of their children. Other policies that promote gender equality, such as access to credit and the right to inherit property and assets, reflect an environment that empowers women to save and invest.

Furthermore, enacting policies for economic growth is an essential instrument for demographic dividend to be achieved. Contributing to a demographic dividend are economic policies that promote growth. In particular, trade policies can ensure that local products have access to international markets and can create demand (Bloom et al., 2008). Policies are needed to provide incentives for people to save and invest; investments also require banks and other financial institutions to yield a profitable return for investors. A flexible, cross-trained labour force is also important as the size of the working-age population increases and the economy becomes more diversified. At the same time, experts indicate that it is important to be able to adjust salaries—increasing or decreasing them—in response to market conditions. Tax incentives are needed to encourage local and foreign investment, as well as basic infrastructure of ports, roads, transportation, and

communication (Gribble and Bremner, 2012).

Demographic Transition and Development in Nigeria

Demographic transition began in the 18th century in countries that are developed and still continues to date, but, in less developed countries, this demographic transition started later and is still at an earlier stage. However, some trends in communicable diseases, such as water-borne bacteria, malaria, polio, HIV/AIDS and Ebola, have become the leading source of mortality in countries like Malawi, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan and Nigeria. Rural Nigeria is experiencing stages two and three of demographic transition process. The feature of these two stages is that there is an increasingly rapid rise in population growth (population explosion) as the gap between deaths and births grow wider. The factors responsible for the population explosion in the rural areas is, first, improvement in the food supply by higher yields from modernized agricultural practices and government policies and better transportation of these agricultural yields. The second is the significant progress being made in public health and provision of primary health care centres in the rural areas for the reduction of under-five mortality and epidemic of communicable diseases, which entails the increasing survival of children and a growing population in the rural areas. These features of the demographic transition in the rural areas of Nigeria affect rural development positively.

With the increasing population in the rural areas, the age structure (15-24 years) of this population becomes increasingly active and moves to the working age population. However, the positive features of the demographic transition in rural Nigeria is reflected in the continued decline in childhood death as a result of parents realizing that they do not need many children so as to ensure a comfortable old age; and increasing urbanization that changes the traditional values placed upon fertility and the value of children in rural society, that is, urban living, which increases the cost of dependent children to a family. Others are the introduction of compulsory and free education in the rural areas with the provision of free books for them; increasing female literacy and empowerment of women, which lowers the high rate of childbearing and motherhood as measures of the status of women; and substantial progress made in the availability of contraceptive and knowledge of how to use them. Also, there are the resulting changes in the age structure of the population of the rural areas, which include reduction in the youth dependency ratio and eventually population aging. In this period between the decline in youth dependency and rise in old age dependency, there is a demographic window of opportunity that can potentially produce economic growth through an increase in the ration of working age to dependent population, hence the demographic dividend of the population of the rural areas in Nigeria.

Effects of Demographic Transition of Age Structure and Their Implications for Rural Development

Population and development are inextricably linked. Until the last decade, the term development was used mainly in its economic sense. The term was, therefore, used to imply the capacity of a national economy whose initial economic conditions has been more or less static for a long time to generate and sustain an annual increase of its gross national product at rates of, perhaps, 5% to 7% or more. Another conception of development is the use of rates of growth of per capita Gross National Product (GNP) and this is supposed to take into consideration the ability of a nation to expand its output at a rate faster than the growth rate of its population. Development has also been conceived in terms of the planned alteration of the structure of production and employment so that agriculture's share of both declines, whereas that of the manufacturing and service industries increases (Torado, 1979).

However, there is no universally accepted definition of rural development. The term is used in different ways in vastly divergent contexts. As a concept, it connotes the overall development of rural areas with a view to improving the quality of life of the rural people. As a phenomenon, it is the result of various physical, technological, economic, socio-cultural, and institutional factors. As a discipline, it is multi-disciplinary in nature, representing an intersection of agricultural, social, behavioural and management sciences. It is also a process that aims at improving the standard of living of the people living in the rural areas. According to United States Department of Agriculture (2006), rural development is the improvement in overall rural community conditions, including economic and other qualities of life considerations, such as the environment, health, infrastructure, and housing.

The goal of development is the improvement of human dignity and human welfare. Population issues have been of concern to development for several thousands of years and, as such, the general concern was to stabilize the population to an optimum in terms of both the number and the quality of people. According to Morris (1967), as cited by Orubuloye and Oguntimehin (2000), population growth can be an impetus to development. For instance, increase in population can result in an increase in the total demand for goods and services, and the demand could be met by increased productivity (Orubuloye and Oguntimehin, 2000); a growing population will permit a better division of labour—the ratio of labour force to population would be improved; a growing population would afford economy of scale; and the growth of population will act as a challenge that will lead people to increase their efficiency.

However, there has been a relationship between population dynamics and the resources necessary to sustain human existence which has occupied an important position since the beginning of demographic studies. Although the Malthusian ideas have been heavily criticized because technological development has made increase in productivity possible, the problem of the discrepancy between population size and means of subsistence has, in recent years, taken a new dimension (Orubuloye and Oyeneeye, 1983). The main concern has been the impact of population development growth on the rate and level of development. There has been no agreement among the various countries in the world on the nature of the relationship between population and development. Many advanced capitalist countries and some of their scholars believe that developing countries will be unable to move out of the vicious cycle of poverty unless population growth is brought under control. Many developing countries especially those with socialist government, insist on pushing the population issue aside, objecting the fact that the economic exploitation and political domination by the developed countries are the reasons for their relative poverty. In fact, some developing countries believe that population growth should be encouraged as it is beneficial to the development process because of the advantages which are associated with population growth.

The decline in death rate and birth rate that occurs during the demographic transition leads to a radical transformation of the age structure. When the death rate declines during the second stage of the transition, the result is primarily an increase in the child population. The reason is that, when the death rate is high (stage one), the infant mortality rate is very high, often above 200 deaths per 1000 children born. When the death rate falls or improves, this, in general, results in a significantly lower infant mortality rate and, hence, increased child survival. Over time, as this age cohorts (15-24 years), increasing by higher survival rates, get older, there will also be an increase in the number of older children, teenagers, and young adults. This implies that there is an increase in the number of children born. Large cohorts of young adults add to the working-age population of developing economies. Despite much interest in the consequent growth dividend, the size and circumstances of the potential gains remain under-explored. This will further increase the growth of the child population. But the second stage of the demographic transition, therefore, implies a rise in child dependency. If the child dependency ratio is high, it depresses productivity per person and quality of life for both productive and dependent population. Besides child dependency ratio, stage two of the Demographic Transition Theory is characterized by a large number of young adults who, if well-managed, become a strong positive push for economic development. However, the large youthful population in rural Nigeria are constrained by some factors, such as unemployment and underemployment (that is the productive age-group are unemployed and under-employed), ineffective and unfocused government policies.

The CIA World Factbook projection on Nigeria showed that in 2012, Nigeria had 170,123,740 persons. Within the population, the age structure comprised 0-14 years, 15-24 years, 25-54 years, 55-64 years, and 65 years and over. The proportion of the population of the age structure estimates for the 2012 for the age cohort of 0-14 years was 43.9%; 19.3% for the age cohort of 15-24 years; 30% for the age cohort of 25- 54 years; 3.8% for the age cohort of 55-64 years; and 3% for the age cohort of 65 years and over (CIA World Factbook, 2013). The projections for birth rate in Nigeria showed 39.23 births/1,000 population and the death rates showed 13.48 deaths/1,000 population (CIA, 2012). However, 90,346,771 constituted the working age population of Nigeria, while 50% of the total population showed the rural and urban population (85,061,870). According to the CIA 2010-2015 estimates, the rate of urbanization showed 3.5% annual rate of change in Nigeria (CIA, 2010-15 estimates).

Nigeria Age Structure

| Age Structure | | | | |
|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| Age Cohort | Proportion | Male | Female | Total Population |
| 0-14 years | 43.9% | 38,232,053 | 36,483,243 | 74,715,296 |
| 15-24 years | 19.3% | 16,757,436 | 16,018,589 | 32,776,025 |
| 25-54 years | 30% | 25,123,834 | 25,945,571 | 51,069,405 |
| 55-64 years | 3.8% | 2,981,187 | 3,520,154 | 6,501,341 |
| 65 years and Above | 3% | 2325682 | 2735991 | 5061673 |

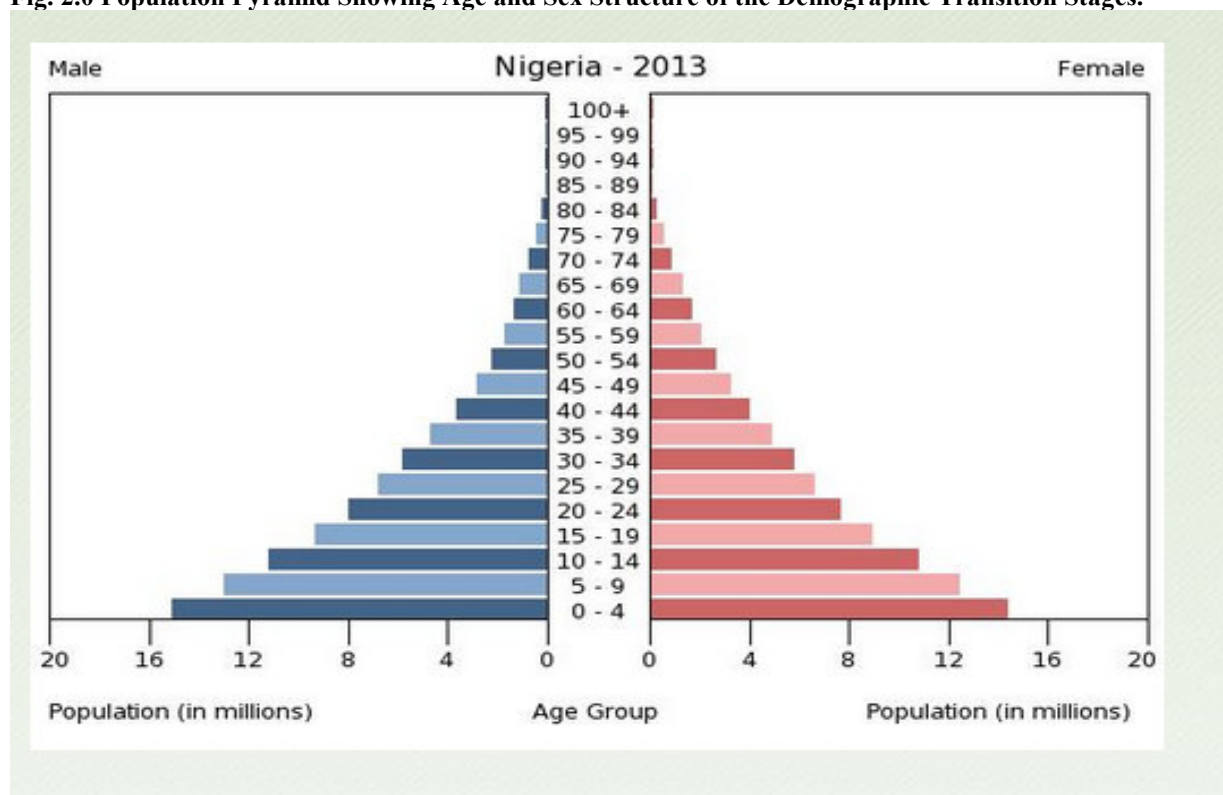
Source: Adapted from CIA World Factbook, (2012: p. 3)

The annual percentage of rural population growth in Nigeria is 1.1% and the percentage of total population is 51.6% (World Bank, 2012). Rural areas with a high proportion of children are likely to devote a high proportion of resources to their care, which tends to depress the pace of economic growth since they have a large proportion of their population in the younger age groups as fertility rates are high and life expectancy is low. Thus, with children more likely to survive into productive adulthood and fewer children being produced, the share of working age populations will increase. An increase in the working age ratio can raise the rate of economic growth, and hence confer a demographic dividend (Aiyar and Mody, 2011). People of working age are

on average more productive than those people outside this age group. Also, because workers save while dependents do not, a bulge in the working age ratio contributes to higher savings rates, increasing domestic resources available for productive investment. In addition, the fertility decline, that is, the source of the changed age structure may act directly to induce greater female labour supply (Bailey, 2006) and increase attention to primary education and health (Joshi and Schultz, 2006). People’s economic behaviour varies at different stages of life and changes in a country’s age structure can have significant effects on its economic performance. The effects are similar if a relatively less productive segment of the elderly needs a large share of resources (Bloom et al. 2007).

This population pyramid for Nigeria provides the distribution of the population according to age and information is included by sex and age group (0-14 years, 15-64 years, 65 years and over). The age structure of a population affects a nation’s key socio-economic issues. Countries with young populations (high percentage under age 15) need to invest more in schools, while countries with older populations (high percentage ages 65 and over) need to invest more in the health sector. The age structure can also be used to help predict potential political issues. For instance, the rapid growth of a young adult population unable to find employment can lead to unrest and insurgency.

Fig. 2.0 Population Pyramid Showing Age and Sex Structure of the Demographic Transition Stages.



Source: CIA World Factbook, (2013: p. 3.)

If most of a nation’s population falls within the working ages output per capita will be high if all other factors being equal. As countries move through the demographic transition from a high fertility and high mortality to a low fertility and low mortality equilibrium, the size of the working age population mechanically increases. This can create virtuous cycles of economic growth commonly referred to as the “demographic dividend.” Bloom, Canning and Sevilla (2003) explore this concept of the demographic dividend in detail and compare the variation in the age distribution across countries and regions. More developed countries have lower fertility rates and higher life expectancy and thus a large proportion of their population is at higher ages. Lee (2003) and Weil (1999) discuss the projected demographic transition and the effect of this transition on economic outcomes, respectively. While most regions around the world are evolving through the demographic transition, Africa stands as an outlier. Fertility rates are high and falling only slightly and life expectancy is actually falling in some countries owing to the impact of HIV/AIDS and Ebola.

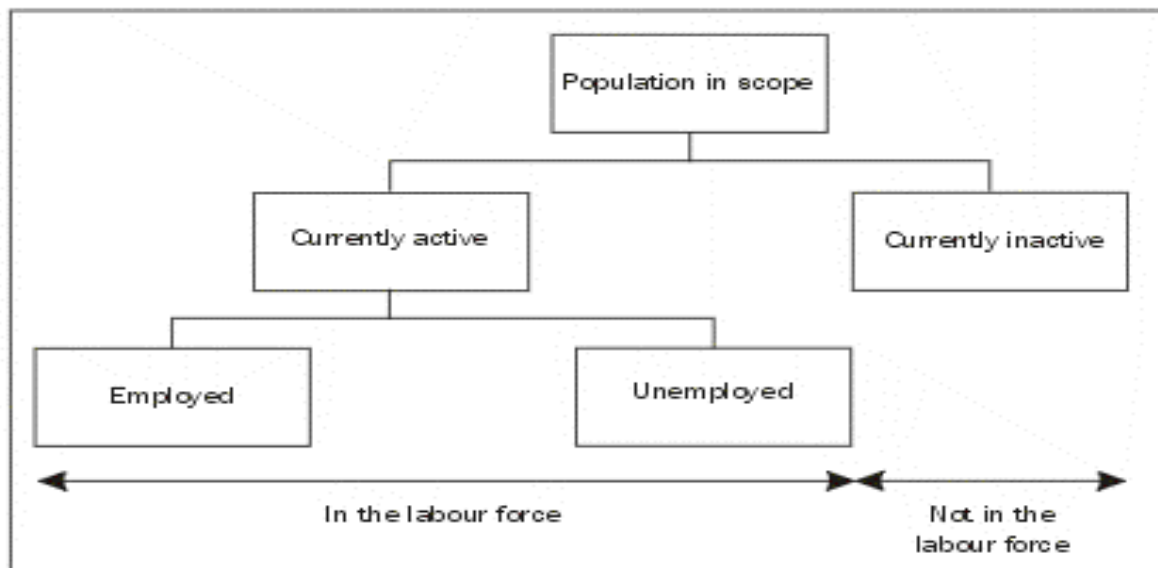
Jua (2003) observes that the economic crisis and the subsequent reforms in the world and Africa, in particular, not only had negative effects on young people’s ability to fulfil their ambition and to live up to the expectations placed upon them, but also impaired their capacity to master the transition “out of youth” into

adulthood (Okunola, 2013). As a result, the working population becomes “stretched out” if the economic and social statuses required for adulthood are unattainable for young adults. The population in the rural areas has become vulnerable to unemployment and under-employment as well as to socio-economic exploitation and deprivations. With little or no formal education resulting in limited chances of gainful employment, the youth become susceptible to crime and other social vices (Nigerian National Youth Policy, 2001). This becomes more damaging in the rural areas where the centre-periphery development strategy has placed the rural areas at developmental disadvantage (Okunola, 2013).

For instance, unemployment is one of the most critical problems Nigeria is facing. The years of corruption, civil war, military rule, and mismanagement have hindered economic growth of the country. Nigeria is endowed with diverse and infinite resources, both human and material. However, years of neglect and adverse policies have led to the under-utilization of these resources (NBS, 2010). These resources have not been effectively utilized in order to yield maximum economic benefits. This is one of the primary causes of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria (NBS, 2010). Statistics from the 2010 National Bureau Survey (NBS) showed that the national unemployment rate was 21.1% of the labour force in 2010. The rate was higher in the rural area (24.2%) than in the urban area (15.2%). Unemployment rate was highest among the youths in the age-group 15-24 years, with a figure of 35.9%; followed by those aged 25-34 years (23.3%) and the age group 35-44 years (16.8%). Also, the unemployment rate by sex (male and female) showed that the rate was higher among the female (35.6%) and the rate of unemployment was high in the age group 15-24 years (NBS, 2010). The analysis by educational status also suggested that the rural people, mainly affected by unemployment were those without basic education.

The currently economically active population is also referred to as the labour force. The labour force is conceptually equivalent to the labour supply available for the production of economic goods and services in a given short reference period. The labour force is the most widely used measure of the economically active population. The term 'labour force', as defined in the international standards, is associated with a particular approach to the measurement of employment and unemployment. Essentially, this approach is the categorization of people according to their activities during a short reference period using a specific set of priority rules. The labour force framework classifies the in-scope population into three mutually exclusive categories, at a given point in time: employed; unemployed; and not in the labour force. The employed and unemployed categories together make up the labour force which gives a measure of the number of people contributing to, or willing to contribute to, the supply of labour at that time. The third category (not in the labour force) represents the currently inactive population. Diagram 2 shows these concepts:

DIAGRAM 2: THE LABOUR FORCE FRAMEWORK



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, (2013: p. 5)

The labour force framework includes rules for sorting the population into the three basic categories. These rules are applied in population surveys through three steps. The first involves identifying the in-scope population. The second involves identifying, within the in-scope population, those people who are engaged in economic activity, defined as either at work or temporarily absent from work. The third step involves identifying, among the remaining people, those people who are actively seeking and available for work, or who are not

seeking work because they were waiting to commence a job that they have already found. The labour force framework classifies people identified in the second step as employed, and those identified in the third step as unemployed. The residual population is classified as 'not in the labour force'. The labour force framework rules have the following features:

- the activity principle, which is used to classify the population into one of the three basic categories in the labour force framework;
- a set of priority rules, which ensures that each person is classified into only one of the three basic categories;
- a short reference period to reflect the labour supply situation at a specified point in time.

The rationale for the treatment of people temporarily absent from work, and of people waiting to start a job they have already found, stems directly from the labour supply perspective. Nigeria is generally endowed with a great deal of resources (both natural and human), which any society needs to transform the socio-economic conditions of its people for the better (Okunola, 2013). According to Salawu (2010) and Falola et al. (2011), as cited by Okunola (2013), among the resources with which Nigeria is blessed are availability of unlimited arable lands, half of which remain fallow; leading agricultural products, such as cocoa, rubber, coffee, groundnuts, cotton, cashew, mangoes, and oranges, which are valuable raw materials for agro-allied industries; and, above all, mineral resources of various types, the most important of which are petroleum oil, bitumen, precious stones and gold (Okunola, 2013). Very important too is the high quality of human resources. The majority of the material resources are located in the rural areas of the country; rural areas serve as the base for the production of food and fibre. Olatunbosun (1975), as cited by Okunola (2013), notes that they are also the major sources of capital formation for the country, and a principal market for domestic manufactures. In general terms, the rural areas engage in primary activities that form the foundation for any economic development (Issa et al., 2012).

However, despite these enormous resources, the socio-economic life in the rural areas is characterized by poverty, hunger, inadequate social amenities, and poor infrastructure, among others. In other words, the alarming increase in the rate of poverty has gone contrary to available natural resources and wealth of the country (Okunola, 2013). According to World Bank (1996) and Falola et al. (2011), as cited by Okunola (2013), the description of Nigeria as a paradox of plenty by the World Bank (1996) has continued to be confirmed by events and official statistics in the country. Rather than record remarkable progress in national socio-economic development, Nigeria retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries at the threshold of twenty-first century, whereas she was among the richest 50 in the early 1970s. The situation has worsened since the late 1990s, to the extent that the country is now considered one of the 20 poorest countries in the world (Okunola, 2013).

The socio-economic situations in most rural areas of Nigeria have always been below the recommended best practices in terms of rural development. This is a clear indication of the adverse effects of many administrative and economic/ development policies designed to improve the status of rural communities in Nigeria (Okunola, 2013). One of the major factors in the political economy of rural Nigeria, is the lack of clear-cut idea of what the issue actually entails. In the real sense, there were no serious efforts towards having a concrete plan on national rural development in Nigeria prior to 1976. What was in vogue during the pre-1976 era was segmented or uncoordinated rural development where it was assumed that new programmes in one community would have ripple effects on other communities and institutions.

Oyaide (1988) as quoted by Okunola (2013), such rural development was established to mobilize the rural people, initiate local projects with local leadership, promote agriculture, and rural development. Community projects were added to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and later replaced with Water Resources. These occurred because Nigeria was not certain about the place of rural development because Nigeria was not certain about the place of rural development in the overall national development strategy (Oyaide, 1988). Most of the efforts to uplift the status of the rural Nigerian lacked a philosophical, ideological, and holistic foundation. It had a body of policy-makers and government functionaries but had no soul to give it life and sense of direction. The usual practice has been to be in office propounding slogans and manifestations for the people below. That was instrumental to the failure of some rural development projects, such as Farm Settlement Scheme, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, and River Basin Scheme for Agriculture, to mention a few. An internal motivating and compelling force or commitment stemming from faith and love of the people in the rural sector and determination to work for their uplift typifies a philosophical base.

The social and cultural dimensions of development are regarded as subordinate to the economic development. Many of the innovations introduced to improve rural communities did not guarantee the cohesiveness of the group and respect for their history and beliefs have little hope of survival (Okunola, 2013). In addition to this, there is always the tendency to rely on official leadership for carrying out rural projects. These official leaders are not prepared to motivate and sustain the enthusiasm of the people in the face of conflicts, depressions, and unfulfilled expectations. The top-down approach to rural development employed by government functionaries whip up enthusiasm among the people, as there is absence of total community

participation. Owing to the approach adopted, people evoke unwilling response as they are regarded as being incapable of standing on their feet.

In addition, there is little or no attempt to allow the rural communities to identify the problems and goals, analyze their own needs, and commit themselves to the achievement of targets (Okunola, 2013). Local experts, chiefs and community leaders are taken for granted in deciding what projects to embark upon, and where and how to execute them. The planners do not consult even the interest groups, the co-operatives, and professional organizations. More importantly, the pattern in Rural Development Programmes in Nigeria centre on the imposition of imported schemes whether or not they are related to the cultural and sociological life of the people. Such examples of these areas mentioned above already exist, not making use of youth organizations, age grades, and women's groups in the initiation and implementation of programmes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, rural poverty has been a subject of concern in Nigeria and there is no doubt that there have been various attempts to improve the conditions in rural areas of Nigeria. Various forms of rural programmes and project development have been initiated in the rural areas but they fail during the implementation stage. The disjoint development course, especially in rural areas of Nigeria, has created a conglomeration of abandoned rural project developments in Nigeria. Although, as a result of inconsistent policies and rural project development framework, rural areas are underdeveloped even when there are developmental projects in them.

The rural areas in Nigeria are going through the stage two of the demographic transition process in which over-population in the rural areas should help in the production and supply of economic goods and services in Nigeria. The main point of those who believe in this line of argument is that population growth in many developing countries or regions is, in fact, desirable to stimulate rapid development. With population growth, labour will be available to develop the resources of the country or region concerned and this will eventually result in the overall development in such areas. One is, therefore, tempted to call for increase in population size in such locations. This is because the increase in size of population for the rural areas should lead to increase in the production of economic activities within the working population age structure. All things being equal, this should lead to greater development of the rural areas if the various rural development projects are properly aligned to study the socio-cultural and economic needs of the rural people and are effectively implemented.

Recommendations

From the discussion so far, it is recommended that the government implement policies that go beyond fertility control aimed at shrinking incoming generation. Energy should be directed at converting the demographic bonus of large population to demographic dividend through an aggressive youth-centred and culture-centred education, and a nationally-oriented mobilisation that will ensure youths become the building blocks of economic development. The extent to which countries are able to capitalize on a demographic dividend depends largely on their responses to these policy areas. In the words of Gribble and Bremner (2012), lowering fertility in order to change the age-structure of the population is a first step, but it is insufficient by itself to accelerate economic growth. Health, education, governance, and economic policies all contribute to an enabling environment for a demographic dividend. A dividend also depends on how a country responds to external factors, such as global economic changes, wars, and technological advances.

Acknowledgement

The authors acknowledge Dr. Adesina B. Sunday for his editorial assistance.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Authors' contributions

The authors all agree on the manuscript.

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