



The dynamics of population growth and government policy response in Nigeria in the fourth republic

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Abstract

Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa witnessed a rapid population growth in the Fourth Republic (1999-present), a phenomenon which has had a profound impact on its socioeconomic development. This paper investigates the dynamics of population growth and Nigerian government responses to this phenomenon, outlining the opportunities and challenges of managing this demographic trend. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from focus groups and interviews with quantitative data from government publications and national polls. The results indicate that the rapid population growth in Nigeria with high fertility, low death rates and rapid urbanisation have put an enormous pressure on public services, infrastructure and natural resources. The National Population Policy (NPP) and family planning programmes have been introduced but their efficacy has been hampered by implementation flaws, cultural opposition and insufficient finance. "Major problems include high unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation and bad governance. The study highlights the critical need for comprehensive strategies that integrate population control with broader development goals including investments in health care, education and employment. The experience of other developing countries shows that to be able to reach population management targets, government commitment, community participation and sustained investments are important. The findings will be of great importance to Nigeria's sustainable development goal by highlighting the need for better governance, more effective policy implementation and greater collaboration between government, civil society and international organisations. This work contributes to the ongoing discourse on sustainable development and population control in Nigeria and other emerging economies faced with similar challenges.

Keywords: Population growth, government policy, fourth republic, sustainable development, family planning, urbanization, demographic dividend

Introduction

With its status as Africa's most populous country, Nigeria's demographics have undergone a remarkable transformation since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. The country is currently facing substantial environmental, political and socioeconomic challenges as demonstrated by its population of more than 200 million and annual growth rate of more than 2.5 percent. Rapid population growth, inadequate infrastructure, scarcity of resources and uneven development have made it challenging for the government to develop and implement sound policies to address these issues. The study explored the nexus between population growth and government reactions in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic. This era witnessed the restoration of democratic rule and efforts to address the country's developmental challenges.

The population growth of Nigeria is affected by a number of factors which include high birth rates, declining death rates, urbanization and cultural factors. Population growth can spur economic development, but it also presents formidable challenges, particularly in a context where governance systems are often dysfunctional and resources are scarce. There have been several policy initiatives to tackle these challenges during the course of the Fourth Republic, including education and healthcare reforms, and family planning programs. But ineffective policies have resulted due to factors such as inadequate funding, poor implementation, and socio-cultural resistance.

This study is significant because it zeroes in on the Fourth Republic, a phase in Nigeria's developmental trajectory that has seen both advances and setbacks. Understanding the population growth dynamics and the policy responses of the government during this period is important as this will help in the formulation of future strategies towards sustainable development. In addition, the study offers an in-depth insight into the total impact of population growth on governance, resource distribution, and socioeconomic development in Nigeria and other developing nations facing similar problems.

Objective of the Study

This research seeks to explore the following questions:

1. What are the key drivers of population growth in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic?
2. How has the government responded to these demographic changes through policy interventions?
3. What are the challenges and constraints in implementing these policies,
4. what lessons can be drawn for future policy formulation?

Literature Review

There have been much investigations on the dynamics of population growth and the responses of government policies in developing countries, Nigeria in particular. This section reviews the existing literature on population growth and

government policies in Nigeria with special focus on the Fourth Republic (1999-Present) and highlights the gaps this study seeks to fill.

Population Growth in Nigeria

Nigeria has one of the fastest growing populations in the world, and over the past decades, it has become the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world (United Nations, 2019). The National Population Commission (NPC) (2018) ^[9] estimates the country's population growth rate of 2.5% per annum resulting from high fertility, low mortality rates and improved health services. However, this growth has been associated with major socioeconomic challenges because of the lack of corresponding improvements in infrastructure, education and health (Adelekan, 2020) ^[1]. Urbanization has also greatly affected Nigeria's demographic landscape. The migration of a larger population to cities in search of better opportunities has led to the overcrowding of urban areas with pressure on housing, transportation, and social services (Ajayi & Otuya, 2020). ^[3] The seriousness of problems like poverty, unemployment and environmental degradation have further complicated the government's efforts to control population growth, aggravated by rapid urbanization.

Population Growth Dynamics in Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world with an estimated population of more than 200 million individuals. This is a result of rapid growth of its population in the recent decades (United Nations, 2019) ^[12]. Various reasons are responsible for this growth like better health care services, declining mortality rates and high fertility rates. The National Population Commission (NPC, 2018) ^[9] states that Nigeria has an annual population growth rate of about 2.5%, one of the highest in the world. However, despite this rapid expansion, the country has struggled with translating its demographic potential into sustained development because of hindrances such as uneven economic growth, inadequate infrastructure and limited resources (Adelekan, 2020). ^[1]

Nigeria's population growth is mainly driven by high fertility rates. The total fertility rate (TFR) is estimated at 5.3 children per woman, which is significantly higher than the global average of 2.4 (NPC, 2018). Social and religious factors, such as the preference for large families and limited access to family planning services, sustain these high fertility rates. In addition, early marriage and low levels of female education contribute to the problem, particularly in rural areas (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2018) ^[6]. Although fertility rates have decreased slightly in urban areas due to increased access to education and healthcare, rural areas continue to experience high fertility rates, contributing to disparities in population growth across regions (Adeyemi *et al.*, 2021). ^[2] The decline in death rates, particularly among infants and children, has played a major role in Nigeria's demographic dynamics. According to the World Bank (2020) ^[13, 14, 15], child mortality has decreased from 213 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 132 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018 as a consequence of improvements in healthcare services, such as immunization programs and maternal health strategies. However, the benefits have not been evenly spread. The rural and northern regions have experienced higher death rates due to the limited access to healthcare facilities and persistent poverty (Eze *et al.*, 2022). ^[5]

Urbanization is another important driver of Nigeria's population. Rural to urban migration in search of better economic opportunities has led to crowded urban centres and increased demand for housing, transportation and social services. Nigeria's urban population has been increasing at an annual rate of 4.3% which is one of the highest in the world (Ajayi & Otuya, 2020). ^[3] This rapid urbanization has led to the emergence of informal settlements, poor infrastructure, and environmental degradation, thus compounding the government's challenge of handling population growth.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to achieve a thorough comprehension of the dynamics of population growth and policymakers' responses in Nigeria. This design was used in the study to essentially triangulate findings from a variety of data sources to improve the validity and reliability of the original research. The quantitative aspect was based on the collection and analysis of secondary data obtained from national surveys, government reports and international databases such as the publications of the National Population Commission, National Bureau of Statistics, United Nations and the World Bank. These datasets provided key statistical evidence on indicators such as fertility rates, mortality trends, urbanization and poverty levels. Additionally, the study used a comparative case study analysis, leveraging documented experiences from Ethiopia and Bangladesh to contextualize Nigeria's demographic challenges and lessons to be drawn for application.

For the qualitative part, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with purposively selected stakeholders at different levels of society and governance were used in the research. The participants included policy makers, health care providers, religious and traditional leaders, civil society representatives and program beneficiaries. Separate focus group discussions were conducted among men and women in urban and rural settings to investigate gender-differentiated perspectives on family planning and policy awareness. The qualitative data were transcribed and analysed using *NVivo* software for thematic analysis to identify recurrent patterns and contextual nuances. Finally, the convergent parallel design facilitated the integration of both quantitative and qualitative strands, allowing for the independent analysis and subsequent synthesis of findings to draw holistic conclusions, all while strictly adhering to ethical research protocols.

Findings

5.1 Nigeria: Key Indicators of Population

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with a population of over 200 million people, and the seventh most populous country in the world (United Nations, 2019) ^[12]. The country's population growth rate of around 2.5 per cent per year is one of the highest in the world, and is an indication of a rapidly expanding demographic structure that poses both opportunities and challenges for the national development (NPC, 2018) ^[9]. This continued growth creates added pressure on infrastructure, health care systems, educational institutions, housing and job opportunities making sustainable development more challenging

(Adelekan, 2020).^[1] One of the most critical pointers to the population dynamics of Nigeria is the high Total Fertility Rate (TFR) which is put at 5.3 children per woman as against the global average of 2.4 children per woman (NPC, 2018). High fertility rates are attributed to cultural preferences for large families, early marriage, low levels of female education and poor access to family planning services especially in rural communities (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2018^[6]; Adeyemi *et al.*, 2021).^[2] Moreover, the delivery of health care has improved, and rates of mortality, especially among children, have declined. The child mortality decreased from 213 deaths/1,000 live births in 1990 to 132 deaths/1,000 live births in 2018, which is an indication of progress in immunization programs and maternal health interventions (World Bank, 2020)^[13,14,15]. Another important demographic indicator in Nigeria is

urbanization. The urban population is estimated to be increasing annually by 4.3% mainly because of rural-urban migration in search of economic opportunities (Ajayi & Otuya, 2020).^[3] The rapid growth of urban population has increased pressure on housing, transportation, sanitation and other social services resulting in proliferation of informal settlements and environmental issues. Furthermore, socioeconomic indices point to continued development challenges, with more than 40 per cent of Nigerians living below the poverty line and youth unemployment of more than 40 per cent (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021; World Bank, 2020)^[13,14,15]. Together they demand the formulation of effective population management policies integrated with broader development strategies for improving the standards of living and harnessing the country's demographic potential

Table 1: Key Population Indicators

Indicator	Value / Detail	Source
Population size	Over 200 million — Africa's most populous nation	UN, 2019
Global rank	7th most populous country in the world	UN, 2019
Annual growth rate	~2.5% — one of the highest globally	NPC, 2018
Total fertility rate (TFR)	5.3 children per woman vs global average of 2.4	NPC, 2018
Urban population growth rate	4.3% annually — one of the highest in the world	Ajayi & Otuya, 2020 ^[3,14,15]
Child mortality (1990)	213 deaths per 1,000 live births	World Bank, 2020 ^[13,14,15]
Child mortality (2018)	132 deaths per 1,000 live births (↓ 38%)	World Bank, 2020 ^[13,14,15]
Poverty rate	Over 40% of population below the poverty line	World Bank, 2020 ^[13,14,15]
Youth unemployment rate	Over 40%	NBS, 2021
Fourth Republic start	1999 — return to democratic governance	—

Table 1 consolidates all the key statistics (200M+ population, 2.5% annual growth, TFR of 5.3, 40%+ youth unemployment, child mortality trends) and their sources so that readers can quickly get a sense of the scale of the problem.

Drivers of Population Growth in Nigeria

The rapid population growth in Nigeria is the outcome of the interaction between demographic, social, cultural and economic factors. The country still has a high birth rate, one of the highest in the world. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is at 5.3 children per woman which is higher than the world average of 2.4 children per woman (National Population Commission [NPC], 2018)^[9]. The high level of fertility is affected by cultural preferences for large families especially in rural areas where children are seen as economic assets and social security providers. Religious beliefs and cultural practices are among the reasons for resistance to family planning programmes and contraceptive use, thereby maintaining high birth rates in many parts of the country (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2018)^[6]. Early marriage and poor female educational attainment also continue to drive high fertility rates, particularly in northern Nigeria (Adeyemi *et al.*, 2021).^[2]

Another important reason for Nigeria's population growth is the decline in mortality rates achieved due to the improvement of healthcare services. In the past three decades, infant and child mortality rates have been reduced substantially due to the expanded availability of maternal healthcare services, disease prevention initiatives and immunization programs. According to the World Bank (2020)^[13,14,15], child mortality rate has declined from 213 child mortality per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 132 child mortality per 1,000 live births in 2018. While mortality rates remain relatively high by world standards, these

developments have led to increased life expectancy and population survival rates, contributing to overall population growth. However, socioeconomic inequalities and unequal access to healthcare facilities have led to disparities between urban and rural, and northern and southern parts of the country (Eze *et al.*, 2022).^[5]

Nigeria's population dynamics are also significantly influenced by rapid urbanization. The urban population of the country is expanding at an annual rate of approximately 4.3%, primarily due to rural-to-urban migration in pursuit of employment opportunities, education, and improved living conditions (Ajayi & Otuya, 2020).^[3] The expansion of major cities, including Lagos, Abuja, and Kano, as a result of this migration, has resulted in a heightened demand for housing, transportation, healthcare, and social amenities. Urbanization is frequently linked to economic development; however, its rapid progression has also led to overcrowding, informal settlements, environmental degradation, and increased strain on public infrastructure. As a result, urbanization in Nigeria both mirrors and reinforces the broader population growth trends (Ajayi & Otuya, 2020).^[3] Low levels of female education are another important factor in population growth. Studies have consistently shown a strong negative correlation between female education and fertility rates. Women with limited access to education tend to marry early, have larger families, and have lower levels of knowledge regarding reproductive health and family planning options (Adeyemi *et al.*, 2021).^[2] Educational opportunities for girls in many rural communities remain constrained by poverty, cultural practices, and poor educational infrastructure. Thus, improving female literacy and educational attainment is widely acknowledged as an important aspect of population management strategies and sustainable development programs in Nigeria (Okeke, 2020)^[10]

Table 2: Drivers of Population Growth

Driver	Explanation	Status
High fertility rates	TFR of 5.3 vs global 2.4. Influenced by preference for large families, limited family planning access, early marriage, low female education — especially in rural areas.	High
Declining mortality rates	Immunization programs and maternal health initiatives have cut child mortality from 213 (1990) to 132 per 1,000 live births (2018). Gains unevenly distributed.	Improving
Rapid urbanization	4.3% annual urban growth rate. Rural-urban migration strains housing, transport, and social services; leads to informal settlements and environmental degradation.	Accelerating
Cultural & religious norms	Strong preference for large families and religious beliefs act as barriers to family planning uptake, particularly in rural and northern regions.	Persistent
Low female education	Limited access to education, especially for women in rural areas, correlates with higher fertility rates and lower family planning use.	Ongoing

Table 2 breaks down the five main forces, high fertility, declining mortality, urbanisation, cultural norms, and low female education, with a severity rating for each.

Government Policy Response on Population Growth

The Nigerian government has introduced several policy measures to address the issues related to rapid population growth, particularly in the Fourth Republic (1999-present). The National Population Policy (NPP), first introduced in 1988 and amended in 2004, lies at the heart of these endeavours to connect population management goals with long-term development aims. The strategy is to reduce fertility rates, improve mother and child health, increase access to family planning services and improve the general quality of life of Nigerians (National Population Commission [NPC], 2004).^[8] The NPP acknowledged the necessity for a balance between population growth, the resources available and socioeconomic development. However, the policy has been poorly implemented due to lack of funds, weak institutional capacity and low public awareness thus reducing its overall efficacy (Oluwafemi 2019)^[11].

A further important aspect of governmental reactions to population growth has been family planning programmes.

The aim of these programs is to increase awareness of the benefits of smaller families, and to increase access to reproductive health services and contraceptives. Many programs have been implemented in partnership with international development partners and non-governmental organizations to improve reproductive health outcomes and reduce unintended pregnancies. However, the uptake of family planning services remains low, especially in rural and northern areas, due to cultural and religious opposition, misinformation, and poor healthcare infrastructure (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2018^[6]; Adeyemi *et al.*, 2021).^[2]

Therefore, these programs have limited the fertility rates, despite the persistent efforts of the government. The government has strengthened health care interventions through the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), immunization campaigns and maternal and child health programs. These policies have brought about significant improvements in health outcomes, including greater access to health services and lower rates of infant and child mortality (World Bank, 2020)^[13,14,15]. However, the effectiveness of these interventions has been limited by ongoing challenges such as insufficient healthcare funding, lack of medical personnel, poor coverage of rural healthcare, and governance issues (Eze *et al.*, 2022).^[5]

Table 3: Government Policy Responses

Policy / Programme	Objective & Key Features	Effectiveness
National Population Policy (NPP) — 1988, revised 2004 ^[8]	Promote sustainable development by addressing high fertility, maternal & child health, and family planning access across all regions.	Limited
Family planning programmes	Increase access to contraceptives and reproductive health services. Uptake remains low, especially in rural areas, due to cultural & religious resistance.	Low uptake
Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme	Improve access to quality education for all Nigerians, targeting school enrolment and reducing illiteracy, indirectly reducing fertility through female education.	Partial
National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)	Enhance healthcare delivery and extend coverage, including maternal and child health services, across urban and rural areas.	Limited
Immunization & maternal health initiatives	Reduce child and maternal mortality through vaccines and antenatal programmes. Child mortality fell from 213 to 132 per 1,000 live births between 1990 and 2018.	Notable gains
Employment & job creation initiatives	Broader efforts to address 40%+ youth unemployment as part of the socioeconomic response to rapid population growth.	Insufficient

Table 3 maps each intervention (NPP, family planning, UBE, NHIS, etc.) to its stated objective and how effective the document judges it to have been.

Challenges of Policy Implementation

Despite the formulation of various policies and programmes aimed at managing population growth in Nigeria, their implementation has been constrained by numerous

institutional, socioeconomic, and cultural challenges. One of the most significant obstacles is inadequate funding. Population management programmes, including family planning initiatives, healthcare interventions, and educational reforms, often receive insufficient financial support to achieve their intended objectives. Limited budgetary allocations have resulted in shortages of essential resources, inadequate infrastructure, and poor service

delivery, particularly in rural and underserved communities (Oluwafemi, 2019) ^[11]. Consequently, many policies that are well-designed on paper fail to produce the desired outcomes due to weak implementation capacity.

Weak governance structures and corruption also pose major challenges to effective policy implementation. The success of population-related policies depends on strong coordination among federal, state, and local government institutions. However, bureaucratic inefficiencies, poor accountability mechanisms, and corruption often divert resources away from critical programmes and undermine policy effectiveness (Eze *et al.*, 2022). ^[5] In many instances, inconsistencies in policy execution across different levels of government have created significant gaps between policy formulation and actual implementation. These governance deficiencies have reduced public confidence in government interventions and limited the overall impact of population management initiatives.

Cultural and religious factors are another important barrier to the adoption of population policies, particularly family planning programs. In many societies, and particularly in the northern and rural areas of Nigeria, large family size is regarded as a source of social prestige, economic security and cultural continuity (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2018) ^[6]. Religious beliefs and traditional values often dissuade the use of contraceptives and modern reproductive health services, leading to low uptake of family planning. So often the local populations resist the efforts of the government to reduce fertility rates through reproductive health programs and awareness campaigns. Adeyemi *et al.* (2021). ^[2] have observed that these socio-cultural dynamics have greatly hindered the massive investment and advocacy efforts that have been made towards population control measures.

The rapid pace of urbanization and the absence of healthcare infrastructure further complicate policy implementation. While Nigeria has made significant strides in the expansion of healthcare services, many rural communities are still facing shortages of essential drugs, medical personnel, and healthcare facilities (World Bank, 2020) ^[13,14,15]. These deficiencies decrease access to reproductive healthcare and impede the delivery of maternal and child health services. Meanwhile, the exponential increase in the urban population has not been matched by the supply of housing, transportation, water supply, sanitation facilities and other public services, thereby increasing the burden on government resources (Ajayi & Otuya, 2020). ^[3] Security challenges such as insurgency, banditry and communal conflicts have led to disruption of development programmes and diversion of government attention and resources from population management initiatives. The challenges above highlight the need for better policy coordination, increased investment, stronger governance, and more community engagement for more effective population policies in Nigeria.

Comparative Insight

A comparative review of population management strategies in other developing countries provides useful lessons for Nigeria to address the challenges of rapid population growth. Countries like Bangladesh and Ethiopia have managed to effect policies that have resulted in decreases in fertility rates, better health outcomes, and more socioeconomic development even when they have undergone demographic pressures like that of Nigeria. Their

experiences show that effective population management needs a combination of political commitment, continuous investment, community participation and integrated development strategies, and not isolated policy interventions (United Nations, 2019) ^[12].

Bangladesh is often cited as a successful example of population management among developing countries. The country saw a dramatic decline in fertility rates over the last several decades through sustained investments in female education, community-based family planning programmes, and reproductive healthcare services. Government agencies partnered with non-governmental organizations to increase awareness of family planning and improve access to contraceptives, especially in rural communities. The Bangladeshi experience emphasizes the necessity of empowering women through education and providing family planning services that are accessible and culturally acceptable to local populations (United Nations, 2019) ^[12].

Similarly, Ethiopia has made great progress in population control because of strong political will and investments in primary health care. The country implemented comprehensive community health programs, with trained health extension workers delivering reproductive health services, maternal health care and health education at the grass-root level. These efforts resulted in major reductions in fertility rates and child mortality and in improved health outcomes overall. The Ethiopian case shows the advantages of decentralising the delivery of health services and of involving local communities in the implementation of policies. It highlights the necessity of integrating population policies with broader health and development objectives for sustainable results (United Nations, 2019) ^[12].

Bangladesh and Ethiopia show that Nigeria can improve the effectiveness of its population management policies by taking a more comprehensive and coordinated approach. Instead of focusing only on reducing fertility, population policies should be integrated with investments in education, healthcare, job creation, and poverty reduction. Effective policy implementation requires stronger political commitment, increased financial resources, community engagement, and collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners (United Nations, 2019 ^[12]; Oluwafemi, 2019) ^[11].

Discussion

The findings of this study provide insight into the complicated and multi-dimensional nature of population growth dynamics in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic (1999–present), revealing an intricate interplay between demographic trends, socio-economic pressures, and the ability of government institutions to respond effectively. The analysis confirms that Nigeria's rapid population expansion, marked by a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 5.3 children per woman, an annual growth rate of about 2.5 per cent, and an urban population growing at 4.3 per cent per annum, is one of the most critical developmental challenges facing the country today (NPC, 2018; Ajayi & Otuya, 2020). ^[13] The figures above are far above the world average and point to the need to urgently incorporate population management into the overall sustainable development agenda of Nigeria.

One of the key findings of this study is that the drivers of population growth in Nigeria are deeply embedded in cultural, social and structural conditions that resist

superficial policy interventions. The lack of family planning services is not the only reason for high fertility rates to be sustained, big family sizes still hold cultural and economic values especially in the rural and northern communities where children are considered as sources of Labour and social security (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2018) ^[6]. The findings support the existing literature that socio-cultural resistance is one of the major impediments to demographic transition in sub-Saharan Africa (Adeyemi *et al.*, 2021). ^[2] Policy therefore needs to engage with and seek to transform underlying cultural norms, rather than simply expanding service delivery.

While a great success in public health, the decrease in mortality rates has also made it possible for population growth by increasing the proportion of people that reach reproductive age. This major progress in immunization programs, maternal health care and disease prevention efforts is reflected in the decline in child mortality from 213 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 132 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018 (World Bank, 2020) ^[13,14,15]. However, ongoing regional differences in healthcare access indicate that these gains have not been equally distributed. Consistently, rural areas and northern parts of the country experience much higher mortality rates than urban and southern areas, highlighting persistent structural inequities in resource allocation and service delivery (Eze *et al.*, 2022). ^[5]

The findings on the government's policy response show a continuing gap between policy formulation and effective implementation. The National Population Policy (NPP) first formulated in 1988 and revised in 2004 ^[8] offers a thorough framework for population management. Unfortunately, its implementation has been hampered by inadequate funding, weak institutional capacity and lack of coordinated efforts across government levels (Oluwafemi, 2019) ^[11]. This deficit of implementation is not peculiar to population policy; it is an indication of a broader governance problem that has undermined development efforts in diverse sectors in Nigeria. The findings are consistent with the theoretical models of policy failure in developing countries that stress the importance of the quality of the implementation infrastructure as well as the quality of policy design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). ^[4]

Rapid urbanization poses a dual challenge that the findings highlight distinctly. Urban environments are typically linked to reduced fertility rates and enhanced access to reproductive health services. Conversely, Nigeria's urbanization rate of 4.3 percent per annum has surpassed the ability of municipal authorities to deliver sufficient housing, sanitation, transportation, and social services (Ajayi & Otuya, 2020). ^[3] The outcome is the expansion of informal settlements and declining urban living conditions that undermine rather than promote human capital development. Population policy must be meticulously aligned with urban planning frameworks to guarantee that urban growth positively impacts both fertility reduction and socioeconomic advancement.

The results show the socioeconomic consequences of unrestrained population growth, especially the persistently high poverty levels and youth unemployment that is more than 40 percent (NBS, 2021; World Bank, 2020) ^[13,14,15]. Such indicators reflect an increasing gap between the growth of the working-age population and the economy's ability to productively absorb the additional workers. If

investments in education, health and job creation do not keep pace with population growth, Nigeria risks a "demographic burden" rather than a "demographic dividend" - the potential for economic growth arising from a youthful and growing labour force. This finding suggests the inadequacy of population policies that focus only on reducing fertility, without addressing the structural economic conditions that render large families economically feasible for many households. Poverty reduction, economic empowerment and reproductive health services are needed for a real demographic transition.

The comparative analysis with Bangladesh and Ethiopia provides important insights which reinforce many of the main findings of the study. (United Nations, 2019) ^[12] The long-term political commitment, community-based health care delivery and the integration of population control with education and poverty reduction programs contributed to substantial declines in fertility rates in both countries. These experiences show that demographic transition can occur even in resource-constrained settings, if governments prioritize population management as a part of the development objective, and not as a separate sector problem.

Pervasive challenges affecting all aspects of the implementation of population policies are identified as corruption and weak governance structures. Corruption, which is the diversion of resources meant for healthcare, education and social services, severely impedes the implementation of population-related programmes at the community level (Eze *et al.*, 2022). ^[5] Furthermore, the differential implementation of policies across the federal, state and local government levels leads to huge gaps and erodes the public confidence in government initiatives. It is therefore essential to strengthen accountability mechanisms, increase fiscal transparency and build institutional capacity at all government levels as prerequisites for improving the effectiveness of population policies in Nigeria. Governance reform is not a peripheral issue to population management; it is fundamental to it.

Conclusion

The main finding of the study is that Nigeria is on a demographic course of critical urgency: with a population of more than 200 million, an annual growth rate of about 2.5 percent, a Total Fertility Rate of 5.3 children per woman, and an urban population growing at 4.3 percent annually, the country is experiencing stresses on infrastructure, public services, and natural resources that its current governance and policy structures have been found to be insufficient to address (NPC, 2018; United Nations, 2019; Ajayi & Otuya, 2020) ^[3, 12].

The study identified five main drivers of Nigeria's rapid population growth: high fertility rates tied to cultural and religious preferences for large families; declining death rates due to improved immunization and maternal health services; rapid but poorly managed urbanization; low levels of education among women; and limited access to family planning in rural and northern regions.

There is evidence that the Fourth Republic government recognised the demographic challenge and was committed to tackling the problem comprehensively through its policy response which included the National Population Policy (NPP), family planning, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, the National Health Insurance Scheme

(NHIS) and myriad maternal and child health programmes. Inadequate funding, weak institutional capacity, bureaucratic fragmentation, corruption and socio-cultural resistance in the community have been a consistent factor undermining the effectiveness of these interventions (Oluwafemi, 2019; Eze *et al.*, 2022).^[5, 11]

Comparative analysis of Bangladesh and Ethiopia indicates that demographic transition can be achieved in developing countries if there is strong political will, sustained investment, community participation and population management is integrated in the broader socio-economic development frameworks (United Nations, 2019)^[12]. The experiences provide a constructive counterpoint to the Nigerian context, showing what can happen when governments consider population management a national imperative rather than a marginal policy issue. The socioeconomic implications of the rapid population growth, with poverty rates above 40 percent and youth unemployment above 40 percent, highlight the urgency of converting Nigeria's demographic opportunity into a real advantage (NBS, 2021; World Bank, 2020)^[13, 14, 15].

Recommendations

Enhance political commitment and improve financial resources for population management: There is a need to renew and sustain population management as a political commitment of the federal and state governments and place it on the national development agenda. This requires a significant increase in the share of funds devoted to population-related programmes, including family planning, reproductive health, maternal and child health services and female education programmes. Nigeria should seek to improve partnerships with international development agencies such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank and bilateral donors to get additional resources and technical assistance for population management programmes. The National Population Policy (NPP), last updated in 2004^[8], is now largely obsolete given the demographic, technological and socio-economic changes in the last twenty years.

Expand Community-Based Family Planning and Reproductive Healthcare Services The government should scale up community-based family planning programs that use trained community health workers, similar to Ethiopia's successful health extension worker program, to provide reproductive health education and services at the community level (United Nations, 2019)^[12]. There is substantial empirical evidence that investment in female education is one of the most effective mechanisms for reducing fertility rates and stabilizing populations. The government should strengthen the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme with clear targets for increasing girls' enrolment and completion rates in schools, especially in the northern states where the gender gap in education is the widest.

Strengthen the Healthcare Infrastructure and Reduce Regional Disparities: Nigeria's healthcare system needs to be greatly strengthened to support population management objectives, with special attention to reducing the huge gap between urban and rural healthcare delivery. The government is expected to increase public health expenditure to meet the Abuja Declaration target of allocating at least 15 per cent of the national budget to health, a commitment that has remained unfulfilled since its adoption in 2001. Urban and metropolitan governments should develop and enforce comprehensive spatial plans that

anticipate population growth and provide adequate housing, sanitation, transportation, schools and healthcare facilities in both existing and newly urbanising areas

It is only through the active and sustained involvement of civil society organisations, religious institutions, traditional rulers, the private sector and international development partners that the government can ensure effective population management. The government should develop formal multi-stakeholder platforms at the federal, state and local government levels to coordinate population management activities, share data and harmonise interventions across sectors. Religious and traditional leaders who have a major influence on attitudes and behaviours in the community must be engaged as champions of family planning and female education.

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