

Is Population Growth the Reason for the Poor Socioeconomic Development in Nigeria?

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Abstract

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the 7th most populous country in the world, and with a growth rate of 2.6%, the population of Nigeria is expected to double in 27 years. Despite the abundance of human and natural resources, Nigeria has been dubbed the poverty capital of the world. Some have argued that this state of affair is linked to the high population growth rate which exerts pressure on available resources. The argument is further made plausible by the fact that most countries with poor economies have high population growth rate. This paper, however, argues that this explanation is insufficient and further distracts from other important issues that contributes to her current development state. There are historical, political, social and economic factors that must be captured to fully grasp the reason for the poor socioeconomic development of Nigeria.

Keywords: *Nigeria, population growth, socioeconomic development, corruption, poverty, ethnic tension, oil.*

1. Introduction

Nigeria's level of socioeconomic development has been a cause for concern to the government, the citizens, pundits, economic analysts, and international observers. This is because the nation has abundant resources that ordinarily should make her one of the most prosperous country. Instead, standard of living is high, electricity supply is unstable, unemployment rate is high, and of course many are living below the poverty line. Indeed, this state of affair is viewed to be exacerbated by the population of Nigeria that continues to grow thereby

placing more demands on government to feed, provide employment, basic social amenities for this teeming population.

This situation is not unique to Nigeria alone, in fact, most African countries are faced with the challenge of population growth and at the same time, poor socioeconomic development. This predicament has led to debate on the relationship between population growth and economic development [1]. There have been arguments that the population of these countries exerts pressure on their resources such that it becomes difficult for the government to fully cater for the needs of every member of the population.

The position appears plausible when the resources and organization of some of these countries are put into consideration. Mostly, however, it is not always the case. In fact, for a country like Nigeria, population could hardly be pointed to as the reason for her level of socioeconomic development. This work argues that inasmuch as there appears to be some complex relationship between population growth and level of socioeconomic development, it is not sufficient to conclude that it is the major cause of Nigeria's poor level of socioeconomic development. This is even more glaring when other factors are x-rayed and their roles in Nigeria's socioeconomic state of affair is made bare.

2. Nigeria's Growing Population

The population of Nigeria helps put her on the map of Africa as well as around the world. Nigeria, with the population of 186,053,386, is not just the most populated country in Africa but also the 7th most

populous country in the world [2]. With a population growth rate currently put at 2.6% it is projected that by 2050, the population of Nigeria would bypass that of United States before mid-century. According to the U.N. agency forecasts, by 2050 half the world's population growth will be concentrated in just nine countries — India, Nigeria, Congo, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, United States, Uganda and Indonesia [3]. This is in respect to these nations contribution to total population.



Figure 1: Map of Nigeria. Source: CIA world factbook

The population of Nigeria has been on the high for some time now as shown in table 1, and it is even projected to continue growing exponentially. This has been blamed on fertility which in spite of various programmes put in place to lower it have only recorded minimal amount of success and as such, it is still considered to be high [4]. As shown in table 1, fertility was at 6.60 in 1990 and only declined to 5.67 in 2016 and estimated to remain the same for some time.

Table 1: Population of Nigeria (2008 and Historical)

Year	Population	Yearly % Change	Fertility Rate	Density (P/Km ²)	Nigeria Global Rank
2018	195,875,237	2.61 %	5.67	215	7
2017	190,886,311	2.63 %	5.67	210	7
2016	185,989,640	2.65 %	5.67	204	7
2015	181,181,744	2.70 %	5.74	199	7
2010	158,578,261	2.68 %	5.91	174	7
2005	138,939,478	2.58 %	6.05	153	9
2000	122,352,009	2.52 %	6.17	134	10
1995	108,011,465	2.54 %	6.37	119	10
1990	95,269,988	2.64 %	6.60	105	10

Source: Worldometers (www.Worldometers.info). Elaboration of data by United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision. (Medium-fertility variant).

3. Nigeria's Socioeconomic Development

Socioeconomic development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It includes: the degree of economic growth; the level of education; the level of health services; the level of modernization; the degree of gender equality or status of women; the nutrition levels; availability of adequate housing; access to communication; and distribution of goods and services [5]. Most of these features in Nigeria are either lacking or poorly distributed. For example, people in metropolitan areas such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port-Harcourt can boast of having better access to healthcare, nutrition, electricity, people in rural areas suffer the lack of it. Meanwhile, greater population of Nigerians are concentrated in rural areas where there is poor or lack of electricity supply, bad road, poor health services, poor nutrition level, poor or lack of access to communication, housing, etc. This high disparity in socioeconomic development results in high urban drift that not only creates problem in urban areas but leaves the rural areas lacking proper manpower that helps facilitate development.

Table 2: List of African countries by GDP (nominal)

2016 rank: Country	Nominal GDP (\$ Billions)	Nominal GDP per capita (US \$)
Nigeria	537.966	2,929.525
Egypt	330.765	3,740.249
South Africa	266.213	4,768.235
Algeria	165.974	4,082.572
Morocco	108.096	3,195.564
Sudan	93.729	2,366.970
Angola	81.497	3,150.476
Ethiopia	67.435	739.444
Kenya	64.688	1,422.411
Tanzania	45.899	943.797

Source: IMF World Economic Outlook (WEO), October 2016.

Nigeria has indeed made some progress as one of Africa's leading economy. Looking at table 2, the list shows that Nigeria is leading African countries by GDP. This however does not translate into better standard of living as indicated by the fact that many of her population are still living below the poverty line. According to UNICEF [6], 54% of her population lives below the poverty line (43% in the urban area while 64% is in the rural). This is clearly an antithesis, considering the fact that aside from being filled with abundant human resources, Nigeria is also filled with enough natural, mineral and agricultural resources that could be used to make meaningful contributions to the life of her citizenries. Omotola [7] posits that the cause of this poor level of socioeconomic development is because these resources are untapped and mismanaged from the first four decades of her independence. Also, the oil sector has been the major focus with less attention on other sectors.

United Nation's report revealed that there is an increase in Nigeria's poverty line, which classified her as one of the poorest nations of the world with over 80 million or 64% of her population living below poverty line [8]. Moreover, the report revealed that the situation is worsening as poverty and hunger remains high in rural areas, remote communities and among female-headed households, cutting across the six geo-political zones in the country. More recently, according to report by Brookings Institution, on data from world poverty clock, Nigeria is now the world poverty capital with 87 million extremely poor people, having overtaken India that has 71.5 million [9]. This therefore puts sustainable development goal of ending poverty by 2030 at risk.

Alternatively, a more composite measure of the level of development known as the Human Development Index (HDI) can be used to assess the level of development in Nigeria. The HDI, developed by Indian Economist Amartya Sen and Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq is often framed in terms of whether people are able to "be" and "do" desirable things in their life [10]. It captures composite statistic (composite index) of life expectancy, education, and per capita income indicators, which are used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. For a country to score higher HDI, the lifespan, level of education and GDP per capita is expected to be high.

According to UNDP [10], Nigeria's HDI value for 2015 is put at 0.527, putting her among countries with low human development category. In fact, Nigeria is 152 out of 188 countries and territories ranked for HDI. Moreover, the figure is smaller when the value is discounted for inequality, resulting in a fall to 0.328. In addition, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of 2013 also revealed that 50.9 percent of the population (88,018 thousand people) are multidimensional poor while an additional 18.4 percent (31,854 thousand people) live near multidimensional poverty. This is in spite of the fact that Nigeria is endowed with natural gas, petroleum, tin, iron ore, coal, limestone, niobium, lead, zinc, arable land, etc. [11].

4. Population Growth and Development: is there a Connection?

The debate on the connection between population growth and development is not a recent one. Earlier views held by development economists and theorists were that a complex relationship exists between population growth and development because the former is a drag upon the later [1]. The major argument is, according to Clausen [12], that rapid population growth slows development because it exacerbates the difficult choice between higher consumption in the present and the investment needed to bring higher consumption in the future. Therefore, as populations grow, larger investments are needed just to maintain current capital/person. Population growth also threatens the balance between natural resources and people, and creates severe economic and social problems in urban areas. There is also the burden of providing for the teeming population that need jobs, foods, clothing and shelters. This position appears to be justified by the fact that most countries in sub-Saharan African have high growth rate and at the same time, are poorly developed.

On the other hand, another way of looking at the relationship between population growth and socioeconomic development is that they complement each other. The argument is that population growth leads to economies of scale and specialization; moreover, it is connected with urbanization which concentrates development in certain areas. Therefore, sustained growth is achievable because large urban centres allow for innovation and increase economies of scale [13]. However, Atanda, Aminu and Alimi [14] argued that the evidence between the two leading to a specific conclusion is inconclusive though the true relationship may be obscured in a simple two-variable comparison. This does not mean that the way per capita income growth is and use to be would have been the same if population growth rates had been in any way higher or lower [15]. This marked situation does not warrant any form of generalization that population growth is always the reason for poor economic growth and development.

Moreover, many of the so called big economy countries are densely populated. In Western Europe for instance, there are on average 170 people living on each square km; meanwhile, in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are only 70 today. This gap will narrow in the next decades but even by 2050, Western Europe is expected to be more densely populated than Africa [13]. Other countries, as shown in table 3, that are densely populated and still doing well economically includes China, Japan, United Kingdom, Italy, India and France.

Table 3: World biggest economies and their population densities

S/N	Country	Density (pop./km ²)
1.	United State	35
2.	China	147
3.	Japan	348
4.	Germany	237
5.	United Kingdom	271
6.	France	122
7.	India	445
8.	Italy	206
9.	Brazil	25
10.	Canada	4

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization and World Bank population estimates. (2016)

5. Tracing the Major Causes of Nigeria's Poor Socioeconomic challenges

Nigeria, with over 180 million people is one of the most populated countries in the world. Currently, the country is saddled with major socioeconomic problems resulting in poor development in all sectors [16]. Many have attributed the poor development witnessed in Nigeria as resulting from the high population growth. For instance, Okpala [17] argued that high population growth results in little or no significant growth in per capita income. While this appears likely, it is insufficient and nonetheless distracts from the immediate causes of Nigeria's poor socioeconomic development. This section presents major historical, economic, social, etc. factors that could be held accountable.

5.1 The Economic Impact of the Civil War

The country called Nigeria is purely a British creation. Prior to the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorate in 1914, the entity currently referred to as Nigeria was made up of kingdoms, communities and villages that hardly share the same history. The unification, which was majorly for administrative convenience, therefore brought together more than 240 ethnic groups under the banner of a country called Nigeria.

Nigeria's movement for independence from British colonial rule was achieved in the year 1960. This was through the efforts of people like Herbert Macaulay who is considered the founder of Nigerian nationalism [18]. The movement was founded on the belief that it is necessary for the people living in the British colony of Nigeria of multiple backgrounds to unite as one people in order to be able to resist colonialism [19]. After independence, the Nigerian government moved to unify the region with different ethnic group, language, history towards the path of nation building.

The process was halted by the first military coup in Nigeria that took place in 1966 when Nigerian military officers overthrow the democratically elected government of Tafawa Balewa who along with the Northern Premier, Ahmadu Bello and others were assassinated [20]. This led to a counter coup that metamorphosed into a civil war that would later ravage the country for 3 years. This was because the killing of Hausa/Fulani politicians enraged northerners and it resulted in violence

against the Igbo people. The military government that took over power after the coup sought to end the ethnic unrest by dismantling the federal system of government and replacing it with a unitary system of government, however, the reform was not permitted to last long as the military government led by Major Aguiyi Ironsi, the highest ranking officer was short-lived in another coup by Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon.

In 1967, the Nigeria-Biafra civil war broke out. The major cause of the war was the military coup, the counter military coup, but the imminent cause of the war was the killing of Igbo people living in Northern Nigeria and the resultant declaration of Biafra. This period was marked by growing suspicion of the Hausa/Fulani group and the loss of faith in the Nigerian nationalism [20]. Following this development, the republic of Biafra was declared on May 30 1967 after Gowon proclaimed the division of eastern region, mostly dominated by Igbo people, into three regions. Officially, the war broke out on 6th July 1967 when the Nigerian federal troop moved to retake the secessionist group.

In January 1970, Biafra declared an unconditional ceasefire that ended the war. As a way to plead mutual trust, the Gowon led administration declared “no victor no vanquished” with the intent to move everyone through nation building. Also, years afterward, he declared another policy known as the three Rs’ (Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation) in order to keep the fragile nation together. Years later, Nigeria is still grappling with the problem of nation building [21], and as such, nationalism consciousness is still a mirage making the entity called Nigeria, in the words of Awolowo, a “mere geographical expression.” thus, the clamour for self-governance is even louder than it ever was making mockery the pursuit of nation building.

Ever since the end of the civil war, Nigeria’s nationalism has been threatened by continual ethnic and religious crises, demand for secession, cries of marginalization, etc. that appears to threaten the peaceful coexistence of the country.

The end of the civil war left a significant amount of destruction that halted the socioeconomic development of Nigeria. War is costly especially to a country that has just gained independence. At the end of the war, lives were lost, money was lost, and the image of Nigeria in the world was shattered. We must not also forget that image plays a critical role in attracting investors. During the war, there were 100,000 military casualties and between 500,000

and two million civilians’ deaths from starvation; it has been estimated that up to three million people died in the conflict mostly due to hunger and disease [22].

According to CIA [23], the economy of Nigeria appears to be growing fairly steadily from 151 through 1965, before the civil war. Estimates showed that GDP increased at an average annual rate of about 4 percent through 1960 and perhaps 5 percent per year thereafter. It must also be added that at this period, the oil industry’s contribution to the economy of Nigeria was not that significant. In fact, the economy was largely dependent on cash crop. The war led to a halt in oil production, and the economy fell into a lot of budget deficit that led to borrowing of all sorts to climb out of. Subsequently, it recorded a decline in per capital income.

5.2 The Discovery of Oil

At the end of the war, the increase in oil price brought in more money to the federal government. One would have thought that this development would ultimately sped up development, especially after the devastating effect of the war. Regrettably, since the discovery of oil in Nigeria in 1956 and the country’s rise to the tenth largest oil-producing nation in the world, the country has been tortured by incessant political unrest, social disorder and economic instability that could be traced to “the dark nectar” of Africa [24].

Moreover, Nigeria has relied heavily on oil as the mainstay of her economy. This dire act has its consequences. Not only did other sectors get abandoned, the price of oil is not static and when the price of oil fell, one of the result was Nigerian plunging into recession in 2016. More recently, however, the Furthermore, the discovery of oil caused serious environmental challenge such as oil spillage that affected agriculture production in the Niger–delta region.

5.3 Ethnic and Religious Tension

Ethnic and religious tensions in Nigeria have negatively contributed to the development of Nigeria. From the moment Nigeria got her independence, the country has been marred by incessant cases of tensions that are most times ethnic or religious oriented. As aforementioned, Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state with the highest being Hausa/Fulani 29%, followed by Yoruba 21%, Igbo 18%, Ijaw 10%, Kanuri 4%, Ibibio 3.5%, Tiv 2.5%,

etc. Also, there are three major religions starting from Muslim, practiced by about 50% of the population, to Christian 40%, and indigenous beliefs 10%. As a result of this diversity, there are constant cases of tension that leads to crises. Examples of such ethno-religious conflicts are the Kafanchan-Kaduna crisis that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, the Kaduna Sharia riots of 2000 and the Jos riots of 2001 [25]. Several hundred lives were lost during the Kaduna crisis of 2000 and the Jos insurrection of 2001. The crises caused violent ripple effects that spread beyond Kaduna and Jos [26].

Incessant ethno-religious crises in Nigeria poses enormous challenges, such as making the country a fragile state where government finds it difficult to deliver its core functions and responsibilities to the people [27]. Moreover, ethno-religious crises scare away investors and leads to government channelling resources as reliefs to displaced people as currently witnessed in the case of Boko Haram crises in North-east Nigeria.

5.4 Corruption

This is by far the most cited cause of Nigeria's poor socioeconomic level. From the military coup in Nigeria down to civilian, there have been incessant cases of looting, bribery, extortion, diversion, etc. of public treasury. Many writers [28, 29] have connected the link between Nigeria's poor socioeconomic development and corruption.

According to Faboyede [30], the history of corruption in Nigeria is rooted in the years of military rule in the country. This period witnessed a subdue of the rule of law, facilitated wanton looting of public treasury, decapitated public institutions and free speech

and instituted a secret and opaque culture in the running of government business. Regardless of the size and wealth of the Nigerian society and economy, corruption is so destructive that it makes lingers in the doldrums perpetually and makes it stagnant [31]. Also, the country is economically plundered and mismanaged. There is therefore, a general rapid deterioration in the living conditions of Nigerians due to wanton corruption in government on an unimaginable scale. Corruption reduces the cost doing business, it brings mediocre to positions they are not qualified to hold, it drives out investors and institutes a culture of laxity, laziness, and indiscipline that halts progress and of course leads to poor socioeconomic development in Nigeria.

6 Conclusion

From the forgoing, it is obvious that the cause of Nigeria's poor level of socioeconomic development cannot be reduced to one single factor, population growth. Rather, factors such as the economic impact of the civil war that stagnated the nations growth, ethnic and religious tension that discourages foreign investments, corruption starting from the military to the present administration, weak leadership, etc. are all factors that interplays to keep Nigeria in an almost stagnant state, despite abundant resources. In addition, high population growth clearly can be seen as indices of poor socioeconomic development. As most developed countries have showcased, population soon starts falling as soon as modernization sets in.

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