

WHY NATIONAL POPULATION POLICIES FAIL: NIGERIA AS A CASE STUDY.

INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations' World Population Prospects in 2017, Nigeria is the world's seventh largest country. Population growth rate in Nigeria remains steady at over 2% throughout the years with a current total population exceeding 190 million. The National Development Health Survey taken over the years revealed that the total fertility rates in Nigeria has assumed a downward trend from 6 children per woman in 1990 to 5.5 children in 2013. Nonetheless, Nigeria still tops countries with high fertility in Africa and the world. High fertility rates in a growing population, if not catered for, gives rise to poor economic and living conditions as there is increased pressure on the resources. The effects of a growing Nigerian population is seen in the high rate of illiteracy, high unemployment rate, low life expectancy of citizens, and societal unrest. The Human Development Index of 0.532 has ranked Nigeria as the 156th country out of 189 countries and territories (UNDP 2018). This places the country in the low category in terms of standard of living and human development.

During 1984 conference that held in Arusha Tanzania, a framework was provided for population policy programs across Africa. The Nigerian government formulated its first national population policy in 1988, titled the "National Policy on Population for Development, Unity, Progress and Self Reliance". The ineffectiveness of this policy with the need to incorporate the sustainable development concept into population led to the formulation of the second population policy in 2004.

The National Policy on Population for Sustainable Development (2004) was the second of its kind adopted in Nigeria. This policy, according to its implementation assessment report, "*has a 2015 end date for most targets, and aims to improve standards of living and quality of life for Nigeria's people by addressing the complex interrelationships between population and development.*" (NPP Assessment Report 2004, Page VI).

However, the continued high population growth, poor school enrollment and high mortality rates questioned the viability of the second National Population Policy (*hereafter referred to as NPP*). Hence, the need of this study. The paper seeks to address major two research questions:

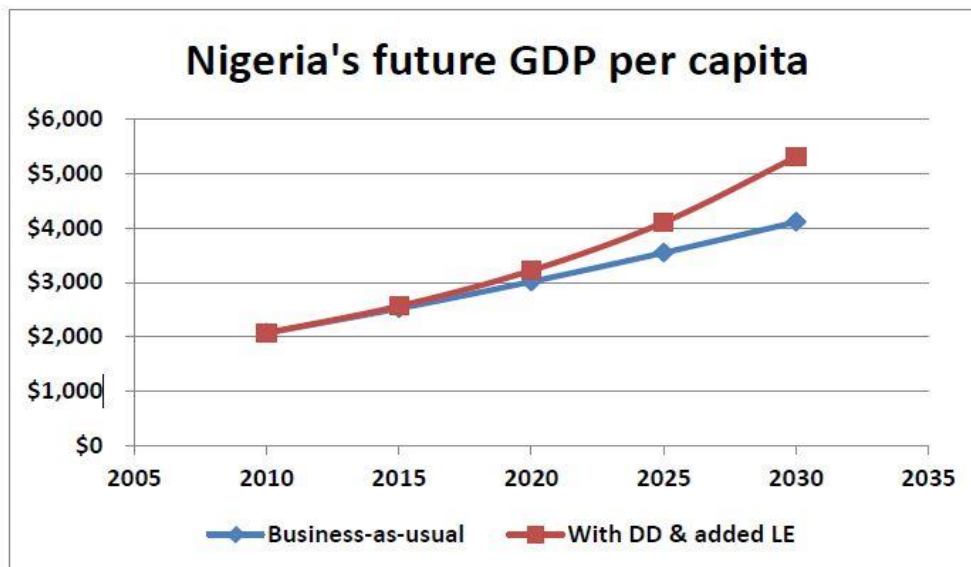
- What are reasons for the National Population Policy's failure in Nigeria?
- What measures can be used to promote the effectiveness of NPP implementation in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the existing literature is of the opinion that fertility rates negatively affect the economic growth and development of Nigeria. Aidi Hakeem et al. (2016) investigated the causal relationship between population growth and economic growth in Nigeria between 1970 and 2013. The objective of the study was captured by the use of the Granger-Causality technique. The results supported the population neutralists as the study showed that population growth does not influence economic growth in any way.

However, later that year (2016), they carried out a time series data study to show the relationship between population dynamics and economic growth in Nigeria between 1970 and 2014. Total Fertility rate was used amongst others as the variable for population dynamics. This is an improvement to their previous study because according to Lutz and Qiang (2002), fertility has the most significant effect on population growth. Using the OLS estimation technique, it was found that the fertility rate had a significant negative relationship with real GDP (a measure of economic growth). From this study, it was implied that for every 1% increase in fertility, economic growth reduces by approximately 9.2% holding all other variables constant.

Fertility rates determine the actualization of economic development during demographic transition stages. Holly Reed et al. (2014) posits that there is an economic growth potential posed by the demographic transition in the second stage. The advent of reduced mortality and increased fertility, often known as a demographic boost period, will inevitably lead to a working age bulge or a potential demographic dividend when this large cohort of children grows up. Bloom, Olaniyan, et al (2015) considered this demographic phenomenon in Nigeria. Using a five-year panel data between 1965 and 2005, they estimated a window of opportunity awaiting Nigeria when fertility rates drop.



Source: Bloom et al (2015). Prospects for Economic Growth in Nigeria: A Demographic Perspective.

As seen from the graph, if this demographic dividend is utilized, it could increase per capita incomes by over thirty per cent and end poverty for 27 million additional people by 2030. A case study by the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on population growth also buttressed this empirical evidence.

Fertility levels must be reduced for demographic dividends to be realized. Qing Feng, Amy and Li (2018) used the cohort component qualitative method to estimate the projections and the impact of fertility decline to demographic dividend (i.e. potentials for economic growth) using a time series of 1960 to 2015 in 201 countries. They showed that had a fertility decline not occurred, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Sub Sahara Africa will be \$321 billion lesser than it is now and child dependency ratio will be higher by 16. There is a great need, according to Qing Feng, to reduce fertility in order to utilize the demographic dividends optimally.

This critical review has established the need for the Nigerian society to keep population growth in check for sustainable development. This must be done in a conducive policy environment. As the World Bank puts it, "policies to reduce population growth can make an important contribution to development (especially in the long run), but their beneficial effects will be greatly diminished if they are not supported by the right macroeconomic and sectoral policies."(World Bank 1984:105)

The 2004 NPP was an improvement to the first population policy formulated in 1988. It encompasses the health, education, and other links of population and development. The targets included reduced population growth to less than 2%, minimize total fertility rate to 4.38, reduce infant mortality rate to 35 per 1000, and eradicate illiteracy for males and females. According to the policy's assessment report in 2015, the increased population growth of 3.18, high total fertility rate of 5.5, high infant mortality rate of 69per 1000live births and 53% literacy for females and 75% for males as at the end of the year 2014 called the policy's effectiveness into question.

METHODOLOGY

This study makes use of the qualitative evaluation (direct data interpretation approach) method as the research goal centers on knowing the underlying causes of policy failure. Six in-depth video interviews (5 recorded and 1 unrecorded) were conducted with civil society leaders and National Population Commission (*hereafter referred to as NPC*) officials from different geopolitical zones of Nigeria. This helped to comprehensively capture the demographic situation in all regions of the country.

Salmons (2015) explained that online interview is a better research method to capture both verbal and non-verbal communication almost just as in a face-to-face interview. She stated that human qualities vital for interview communication are kept and can be observed in online interviews. Furthermore, she revealed that in cases where the interviewees are geographically dispersed, online interview is the most convenient way to get data from the respondents. Lacono et al. (2016) explained that online video interviews help to build a healthy rapport which makes the interviewee

comfortable to give unbiased opinions about the subject matter being discussed. Therefore, the author is confident of the research method used in addressing the inquiry of the study.

The interview's aim is to basically capture opinions of the different stakeholders on the successful implementation of the NPP. The interviews were carried out between May and June 2019. The following respondents were interviewed: 2 civil society organization leaders in the Northern Nigeria, 1 religious leader in the Northern Nigeria, 1 civil society organization (*hereafter referred to as "CSO"*) leader in the Southwestern region, and 2 NPC officials in the Federal Capital Territory.

The questions asked in the interview majorly centered on the

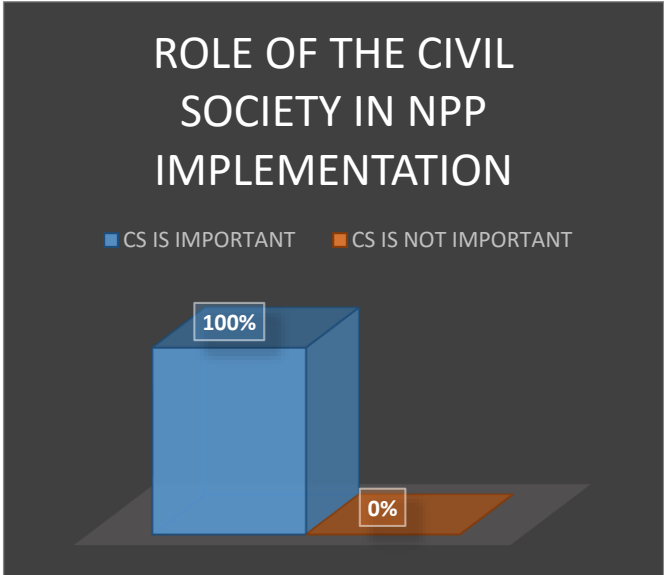
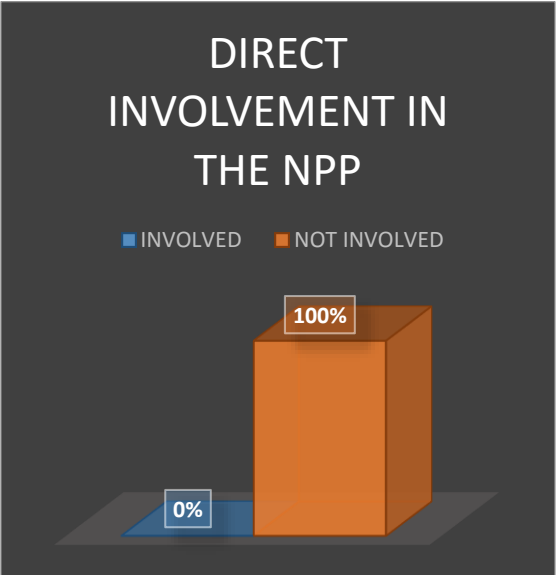
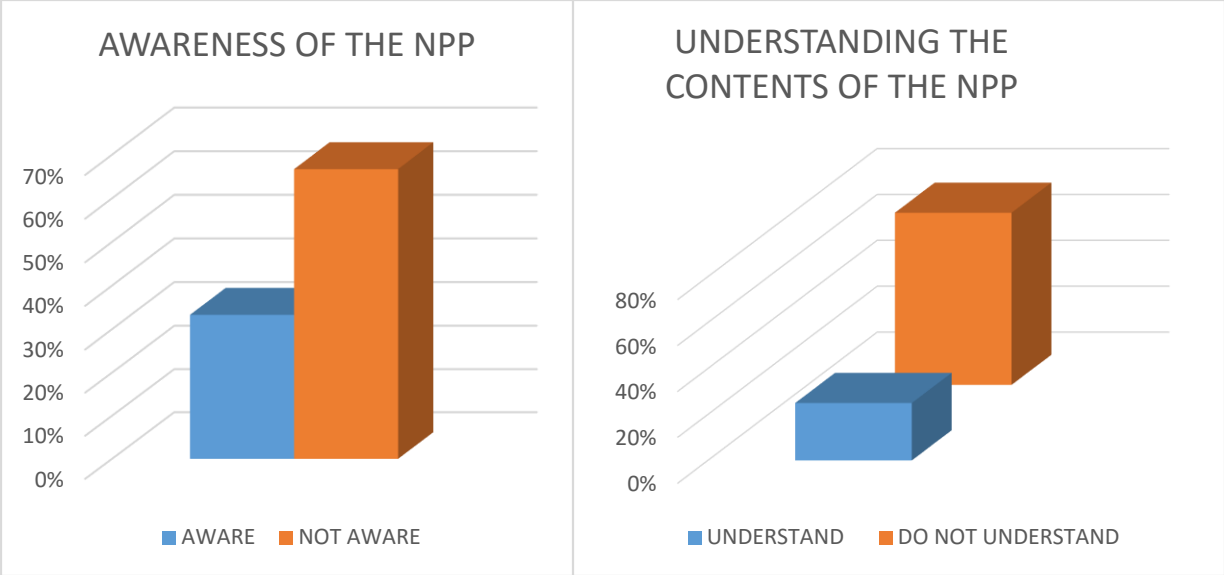
- Challenges mitigating against NPP in Nigeria
- Role of the civil society in population policies' implementation
- Measures to be taken by the government to make NPP implementation effective.

The views of the experts gotten during the interviews were grouped into the above headings during data analysis in order to ease interpretation of results. The respondents are anonymous as part of the agreement stated on the consent form.

RESULTS

From the interviews conducted, the following findings were made:

- Out of 6 respondents, 4 of them are not aware of the NPP. Those who are aware happen to be officials of the NPC, the official organization in charge of the policy formulation itself.
- When it comes to understanding the contents of the NPP, almost 2 respondents, the NPC officials, understood its contents. It is less than 2 because one of those who claim to understand does not really have much idea as the respondent claim the policy formulation and implementation is not in her jurisdiction.
- None of the respondents are directly involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the NPP.
- All of the 6 respondents believe the civil society is very relevant in an effective NPP implementation. This emphasizes the role of the civil society in policy making.



Source: Author computation.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

One of the major issues affecting effective implementation is the **lack of awareness and concrete understanding of the NPP**. From the research, it was seen that all the respondents except Respondent 2, a NPC official, do not fully understand the contents of the NPP. 75% of the respondents are not aware of the NPP and 100% of the respondents are not involved in its formulation. This incapacitates the necessary stakeholders from implementing the NPP successfully as there is limited knowledge of the policy itself.

An important thing noted from the research which limits the involvement of the necessary stakeholders is the **lack of political will of the government** to implement proposed projects. Respondent 1, a religious leader in the North, made this known. In his words,

I was not involved nor carried along. It was just a passing information. Because they just pass these bills and they don't enforce it. This thing we hear of it and that's all. Nothing is done to ensure it is being enforced. So on that note, I think, we are lacking.

Respondent 3, a CSO leader in the Northern Region of Nigeria, further talked about this inaction of the government as regards policy implementation.

When the policy is being launched, there is so much fanfare in the first week, it is everywhere in the news, and two weeks, three weeks later, everything fizzles out again, no follow up, nothing is being done; even when you want to assess some information, you know, as a media person or as a CSO, you will find lots of block walls, everywhere.

This limited political will towards the implementation of developmental projects by the government is a major challenge which discourages the civil society from getting familiar with the contents of the population policy. Better still, it hampers the necessary stakeholders in their involvement in the NPP implementation.

Another major challenge is **self-centeredness**. The selfish interests on the part of the government, policymakers, and other stakeholders impede the success of the NPP. Once the parties are not benefiting from the policy implementation directly, they do not consider it as a priority.

Corruption and self-centeredness...these people, our leaders, most of these things do not affect them directly. So they don't really see the point. As in they are not seeing the danger in it because it is not affecting them directly. Their families are not here to suffer the health facilities and the poor education and the joblessness. So it's not really affecting them directly.

(Respondent 2, NPC Official, FCT, Abuja)

This stance highlights the self-centeredness of the Nigerian leaders which is an obstacle to not just population policies' implementation but several developmental projects as a whole.

A unique concept noted during the course of the research was **the regional peculiarities** as regards population policy implementation. 80% of the respondents affirm that the social structure of the Northern region of Nigeria makes it more difficult to curb their fertility rates and even successfully implement population policies. Looking at the poor situation in the Northern Nigeria as regards education and socio cultural values, below are some of the respondents' comments:

I think the issue here in the North is poor educational system and high rate of illiteracy. People marry too and give birth anyhow and they don't care how the children will be fed or fended for.

(Respondent 1, Religious leader, Northern Region, Niger state)

According to one of the respondents, child marriage is predominantly existent in the Northern region and proper education is a vital way to reduce child marriage to the barest minimum.

We may not ask them to put a stop to early marriage but then when we press for the education of the girl child, we are also pushing against early marriage so to speak technically, because like I said before in a cultural notation, it is still a norm for them to have children get married early....

(Respondent 3, CSO Leader, Northern Region, Kano state).

Comparing the Northern region of Nigeria, to the southwest, it is seen that the fertility rates within the regions are in high disparity due to different **socio-cultural values** and religious beliefs.

Comparing southwestern part to the northwestern part, there is a difference and this case is culturally and religiously sensitive. For instance, in the south western here, one or two children and they are well-to-do, people see it as fine, and you are successful. But in northern part, it is something they see as prestige to have lots of wives and lots of children. So from that perspective, it is not just about the standard of living but what the culture and their religion is saying about the population growth.

(Respondent 4, CSO Leader, Northern and Southwestern Regions, Niger and Oyo states)

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the reproductive behavior of the regions are different and this also affects the development rate of these regions.

These regional differences made the NPP too difficult to implement as the policy did not give room for these peculiarities observed. The NPP was formulated to serve the whole of the Nigerian society without considering uniqueness and differences, hence, a major reason for its failure.

To answer the **first research question** on the reasons for the NPP's failure, it can be gathered from the interviews that the non-awareness and involvement of the civil society coupled with the lack of political will, corruption and self-centeredness, and regional differences are the reasons why the NPP failed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendation from this study centers on the fact that the government should incorporate the civil society and the general public more in policymaking and implementation. In the words of Respondent 2, an NPC official, *“the civil society is already involved but I think probably they are not doing enough”*. Therefore, there is a need to look for strategies that will make the civil society more actively involved in policy implementation. From the expert interviews, additional measures are recommended below:

- There should be a strong engagement of the citizens in policy awareness. Discussion forums, town hall meetings and sensitization programs should be organized in order to make the populace familiar with the policy and understand its contents.
- One thing also to note is that when programs and projects are being planned as regards population and reproductive health, the men should not be left out. *“From the grassroots*

thing I have been doing, the men are always left out, you know, especially when it comes to the northern sphere, the men must be carried along...”

(Respondent 3, CSO Leader, Northern Region, Kano state)

Due to the patriarchal system of the country, men are central to every decision and this includes the number of children to give birth to. Therefore, they must be well carried along for a visible change to be noticed.

- The government should actively involve the religious leaders and hold consultations with them. The religious and traditional leaders are major influencers for the Nigerian citizens especially the northerners. In Respondent 4’s view, *“the best way to educate anybody in the north is to firstly get to their leaders. Now, education of these leaders or gathering of these cultural leaders or religious leaders and educating them about this national population policy will actually help to achieve what Nigeria hopes to see in the future”*. Therefore, if the leaders are well informed, it will surely spread to the masses and a sustainable change can be achieved.”
- Self-interests should be done away with on the part of concerned stakeholders especially the policy makers. Speaking about this, a NPC official, Respondent 2 stated that *“one thing in the country is, even in the office, sometimes you pass a project to the commission and they are looking at what comes to their pocket from it; how does it benefit me? If it doesn’t benefit me directly, nobody is talking about it strongly.”* This implies that selflessness in governance and public administration promotes effective implementation of policies.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examines the reasons for the failure of the NPP using expert interviews as a methodical tool for inquiry. The paper contributes to the existing literature through the bridging of time gap in assessing the NPP in Nigeria as the last assessment was done by the NPC in September 2015. It also provides practical recommendations which are given by the important stakeholders in the NPP. The findings of this study are highly relevant to the federal government and policymakers when formulating the revised NPP which is to kick off in the coming year, 2020.

The limitation to this research was the busy schedule of the CSO leaders. 10 invitations were sent to different stakeholders for the expert interview and 4 of them could not grant an interview due to time constraints from their part. However, this limitation do not influence the results of the research significantly because the 6 experts gave educative and interesting opinions on the research theme.

Lastly, it can be inferred that the role of the civil society cannot be underestimated in every developing society. They help as the middleman between the government and the masses in societal issues. There is therefore an urgent need to incorporate them into the demographic policymaking and implementation for sustainable results to be achieved.

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