

Population Dynamics in Africa: Setting priorities for demographic and health policies

Abstract

Population policies are pivotal in achieving the developmental outcomes particularly in the developing world. With Africa experiencing demographic transition it displays the unique feature of being overpopulated and under-populated concurrently, hence the problem of population growth and control in Africa is somewhat complicated. This paper studies the trends of population growth in the region with an aim to build a policy framework so as to achieve the developmental goals. Based on the data from world bank the paper shows the trends and pattern of rising population growth rates in the region and their implicit consequences. A population policy framework has been framed to study the policy model which can be applied to the countries going through the phase of demographic shift. We found that eastern Africa is the most populous region in continent and due to its vulnerability and increasing socio-political instability there is growing concern of demographic and economic challenges. Therefore the framework set can be implemented to achieve the path of development by reaping out the benefits of population dynamics also broader population policies need to be designed and implemented in the region towards to reap out the benefits due to spur in population growth in the region.

Introduction

The pace of population growth rates has slowed for the world as a whole but the scenario of developing countries, especially in Africa is entirely different with population growth rates still rising rapidly. Total population figure for Africa is now around 1 billion and it appears that while the continent covers 25% of the world's land area, it is sharing about 15% of total world population. However, Africa has a relatively high population growth rate; something in the range of 4.8% per annum in 2013, up from 3.4% in 2011. According to UNICEF, by 2050, it is projected that one out of every three children born in the world will be an African. Today, Africa has the youngest population in the world and around 200 million Africans are between 15 and 24 years old. This young population is expected to be more than double by 2050 and expected to provoke a dramatic shift in the working population of the world replacing china and India. According to these projections, by 2050, one out of every four workers in the world is likely to be an African thus providing bulk of young and cheap labour force. With many countries in Africa particularly east African regions at the verge of demographic transition population growth accelerates, and the share of children in the population can increase dramatically, therefore the actual impact of reduction in population growth as well as the improvement of human well being depends upon the way education, health and economic policies are formulated and implemented in a country. Therefore the study tries to understand the demographic behaviour of the east African countries by analysing the trend and pattern of population growth rates and understand the policy behaviour which can be used to reap out the benefits as well as gaining the benefits from increasing population burden.

Statement of the problem

Influencing demographic dynamics in order to improve the welfare of the population is the fundamental objective of a population policy. The efficacy of a population policy cannot be

satisfactorily evaluated without referring to the objectives of the overall development strategy, of which the population policy is an important component. The threat posed by population growth in Africa is evident from two dimensions with on the one hand population growth leading to increasing dependency ratios and low investment in the human capital of children and young adults where as on the other hand high rates of population growth also hinder investment in both human and physical capital formation, and exert pressure on the environment and often fragile resource base. It is recognized that fertility regulation and improvement of mortality rates through better health, education and employment opportunities can stimulate household saving and investment but the scenario of Africa is entirely different particularly with these current population trends. Hence synergetic relationship is one of the main arguments for a population policy as an integral component of achieving developmental outcome, better health standard and reducing poverty in the east African region

Objectives

The broad objectives of the study is to identify the key policy framework through which the dynamics between population growth and economic development can be understood in the region to achieve the developmental goals as well as to avoid the loss of demographic boom. The study also aims to identify the trends and pattern of demographic scenario in eastern Africa and its impact on economic development in the region . Also a policy model will be framed based on empirical analysis which can help in coming out the hindrances that occur because of the increasing population boom in the region.

Methodology and Data

Based on the data from world bank and other national and international sources the study will focus on current state and likely future directions of population policy in SUB SAHARAN Africa countries with particular importance on achieving population stability development goals and better health standards constrained due to the impact of growing population dynamics and socio-political situations in the region. The study will be using the different demographic and socio economic indicators to assess the policy outcome. Hence a thorough theoretical approach will be used followed by empirical analysis based on the multimodal approach to analyse the study objectives

Discussion

Population polices for sustainable development should move away from a narrow focus on fertility rates and reproductive health services and focus more comprehensively on human capital, including education and health. Though the decline in population growth rates has been found to be a boost for economic development through demographic dividend because lower growth rates will create better opportunities as well as declining population pressure with better education of women directly leading to lower birth rates and at the same time a better educated work force leads to higher productivity. Another major point as highlighted by the traditional population policies has been access to contraceptives and family planning. Around the world, many women say that they want fewer children, but do not use contraceptives but while access to contraceptives is clearly important as the research suggests that access is often not sufficient to change behaviour.

Trends of Population growth in Africa

The figure at the end shows the trend and pattern of population growth rates in the Africa with largest growth rates . Though the growth rates has started declined but it is still higher as compared to the

other regions of the world particularly in the middle and east African regions of the continent. Therefore it becomes pertinent to understand the population dynamics of the region and understand the policy behaviour.

Population Growth and Policy Concern

Africa displays the unique feature of being overpopulated and under-populated concurrently, therefore the problem of population growth and control in Africa is somewhat complicated. The pie chart at the end shows population percentage based on data provided by the world bank. While there are too many people in some areas of the continent, there are too few in others. To a large extent, this peculiarity has been a function of such factors as the slave trade, ethnic wars, migratory movements and indiscriminate balkanisation of Africa by colonial powers. While as in some areas, the choice is between increased starvation and effective population control, in others it is between positive population increase and increased starvation. In some cases, population control appears to be detrimental to economic growth. In others, population control is crucial to economic growth. Granted, a generalised treatment of the dynamics of population growth and control in African cannot but belie the inherent divergences meaning that Africa's population boom offers great opportunities for its future economic transformation. This can happen, provided Africa's human capital is harnessed productively, and channelled towards appropriate sectors of the economy, in response to changes in the international economic system. However, at the same time, Africa's population boom poses grave threats to the region's political stability and social cohesion if sufficient economic and employment opportunities remain unavailable for expected newcomers. For this reason, in the short-term, unchecked population growth in many African country has important implications for social and economic development which cannot be justified on the simplistic basis of the need to promote rapid industrialisation through the creation of economies of scale. Therefore the economies must run faster merely in order to stand still; with an increase in total output providing only the meagre same as opposed to improved living standards. In many African countries, sustained population growth at the present rate cannot possibly be absorbed in the small, albeit expanding, segment of modern or modernising industries which, as a matter of fact, tend to be basically capital-intensive. Since fertility remains generally high while infant mortality rates appear to be declining gradually, the number of children is on the increase, with a concomitant drop in the proportion of the adult and economically productive population. With over 400 million Africans currently under the age of 15 as shown in the figures at the end. This means a large proportion of the national income in African countries is devoted to feeding, clothing and housing "non-producers," with a consequent proportionately less availability of funds for investment.

Framing a Policy Framework

The most prevalent and severe problems today occur in sub-Saharan Africa from the development perspective in the world. By the year 2050, the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa may double and by the end of the century it may quadruple. Thus several risks and development obstacles arise from high population growth like, lack of food security, pressure on the health and education systems, overburdening of the infrastructure or scarcity of resources resulting in larger conflict potential as well hunger and poverty. Thus the magnitude of the population increase poses a challenge to African governments in the near future, especially in terms of their existing resources and planning capacities. The majority of African countries that are developing population policies are influenced by the economic realities facing them. (Lacey 1990: 137) as the time has elapsed since Independence, many African governments have come to accept that control over their own destinies involves slowing their rates of population growth. (Nassim and Sai 1990: 522). Therefore the policy

making must consider the impact of demographic trends and indicators on major development goals, including poverty reduction, old age and health security, and provision of public services and infrastructure (Nugent and Seligman, 2008). Thus a framework need to be formulated which can target the socio-demographic indicators that are creating challenges for the long run economic growth and prosperity in the region .A framework at the end has been build to address the policy concern which will be processed further in formulation of empirical model for policy concern.

Conclusion

Africa’s demographic trends hold a potential in the coming decades for economic and social development. Demographic indicators including population growth, fertility and mortality rates are declining however, these countries must need to take advantage of this demographic opportunity by developing appropriate policy frameworks. Good governance, solid macroeconomic management, good trade policy, efficient infrastructure, and effective investments in health and education must all be taken into consideration so as to build a effective policy framework so as to achieve the long run development in the region and reap out the population benefits.

Figure 1.1:Trend of population growth rates in Africa and World

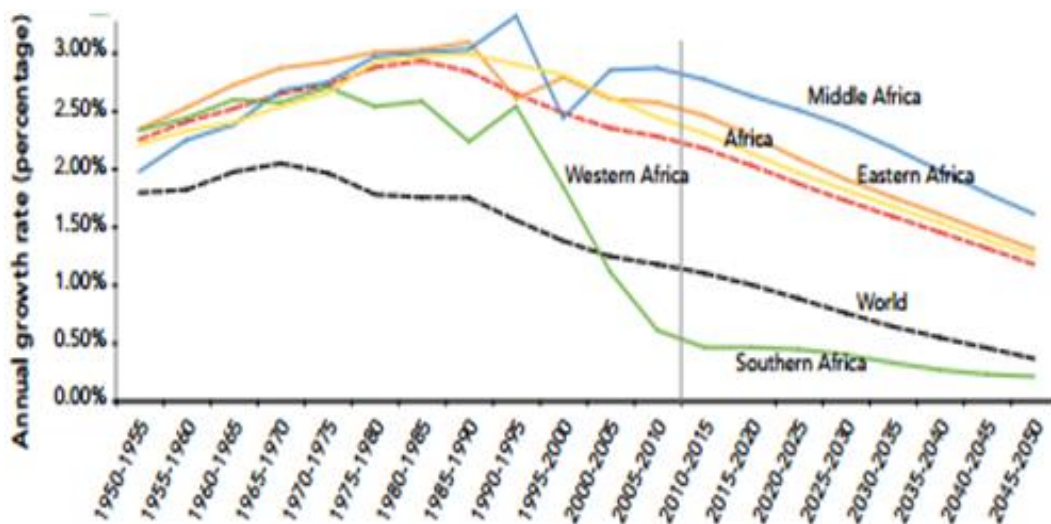
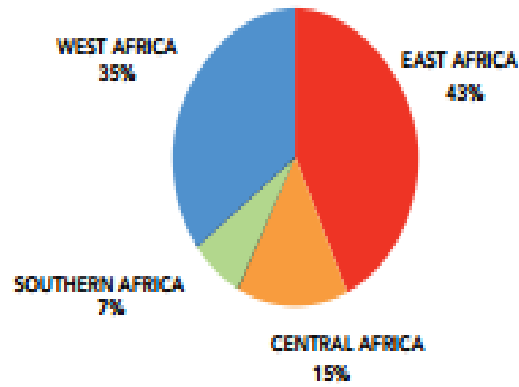


Figure:1.2; Pie Chart showing the region wise percentage of population



Population Policy framework for East African Region

