



## POPULATION DYNAMICS, SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper juxtaposes data on Nigeria's demographics, insecurity and human development indices to illustrate their connection. Population, security and development are intricately connected. However, the nature of their relationship is sometimes non-linear or even ambiguous. Nigeria is faced with population explosion, spate of insecurity and worsening human development indices. In other words, in the face of rapid population growth and rising insecurity, the country's human development indices are below the global and sub-Saharan African averages.*

*The paper uses secondary sources to generate data on Nigeria's demographics, insecurity and human development indices. Changes in size and structure of the Nigeria's population have translated into youth bulge, growth of urban population and competition over access to increasingly scarce natural resources (specifically wetland for farming and grazing) in rural areas. These demographic dynamics are not accompanied with increased investment in social services or human capital. Consequently, youth unemployment, poverty, livelihood displacement and hopelessness have become prevalent. The preponderance of these stress factors (youth bulge, urban population growth and growing scarcity of land) and declined investment in social services have resulted in different forms of insecurity — youth gangs, insurgency, farmer-herder conflict, militancy, ethno-religious clashes and rural banditry. The paper argues that widening ungoverned space, ecological crisis, poor economic policies and mobilization of primordial identities in Nigeria may have further confounded the association between demographic changes and security, and together they slow its pace of development. The country requires a robust population policy and massive investment in social services to leverage its demographic dividends.*

**Key words:** Population Dynamics, Security, Development, Youth Bulge

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is faced with population explosion, spate of insecurity and worsening human development indices. The country's population keeps changing over time in terms of size, structure and composition. Ideally, adequate arrangement needs to be made to provide the required social services in order to produce a better environment. However, the rate at which the population increases, evidently, surpasses the rate at which governments provide essential services to meet the need of the growing population. For instance, Nigeria has an estimated population of 200million people and an annual growth rate of 3.2% (National Population Commission, 2019). With this rapid population growth and declined investment in social provisioning, — essential services —such as healthcare, education, housing, electricity supply, portable drinking water, access roads and indeed security —are overstretched. This combines with increased ungoverned space, ecological

crisis, poor economic policies, high cost of living, occupational displacement, identity politics, poverty and widening inequality to aggravate insecurity and, by extension, undermines the country's development.

Studies, such as Sibte Ali *et al.* (2019), Sayar (2012) and International Peace Academy (2004) have shown that population, security and development are inseparably connected. In other words, they do interact in a symbiotic or mutually reinforcing manner. However, such connection may be mediated by other factors — which determine its magnitude and direction. Today, with unchecked population explosion, Nigeria is enmeshed in security crises that threaten its development and corporate existence. While some of these crises have a long history, they have recently assumed somewhat more complex forms or dimensions. Since the return to civil rule, Nigeria has been struggling to address numerous security challenges (ethno-religious clashes, militancy, insurgency, farmer-herder conflict, and rural banditry), often with little success.

The spate of insecurity in Nigeria has in recent time escalated and spread to various parts of the country. Presently, soldiers have been deployed to over 30 of the country's 36 states to contain internal security threats which ought to be tackled by Nigeria Police Force (Ibrahim,2019). Despite this, the country has continued to witness heightened attacks by insurgents, bandits, neighborhood gangs, ritual killers, armed robbers and kidnappers. This seems to suggest that Nigeria security apparatuses have been overstretched and overwhelmed by the rising security threats. The trajectories and dynamics of these challenges and how they hamper the country's development have called for a renewed scholarly interest. It is in view of this that this paper uses secondary data to examine the connection between population dynamics, security and development. In so doing, it juxtaposes data on Nigeria's demographics, insecurity and human development indices with a view to draw inferences.

### The Population-Security-Development Nexus

There have been longstanding and yet unfolding debates on the exact nature of population-security-development nexus. Since pre-modern time starting from the Chinese School of Confucius (500 BC) to Plato (360 BC), Aristotle (340 BC), Cicero (100 BC), AbdulRahaman Ibn Khaldun (1380 AD) up to mercantilist era (1500-1800), the nexus had been a debatable topic. The controversy has remained unresolved even in the modern era as evident in the proliferation of competing articulations, from Malthus (1798) to Marx and Engels (1844) and beyond. The debate revolves around whether or not population dynamics threaten social order and, in doing so, undermine society's path to development. Interests on population-security-development nexus have become more pronounced in the post-Cold War era. Since then, there have been growing revisionist tendency and clamour for return to orthodox perspectives.

There is a symbiotic connection between population changes, security and development. In other words, they do interact in a mutually reinforcing manner. Explaining this mutuality, the Swedish Policy for Global Development (2005/6) avers that security and development are intricately connected and together form the basis for a dignified life. Some studies have shown that countries' demographic characteristics influence, to a reasonable extent, their susceptibility to civil unrest, which in turn determines their pace of development. For instance, Weiner and Stanton (2001) argue that demographic changes are associated with increased risks of both violent and non-violent threats to human well-being. Similarly, Homer-Dixon et al (1998) identify a number of demographic factors that interact to confound national security, viz: size, density, age structure and growth of a population; rate of internal migration; proportion of the population living in urban areas and its growth; and compositional diversity of the population. Analyzing data from 180 countries, Population Action International (2003) found, among others, that:

- a. Countries in the late phases of demographic transition were less likely to experience outbreaks of civil conflicts than those still in the transition's early or middle phases.
- b. The demographic factors most closely associated with the likelihood of an outbreak of civil conflict were a high proportion of young adults (aged 15-29)

and a rapid rate of urban population growth.

- c. Countries with low-availability categories of cropland and/or renewable fresh water were 1.5 times as likely to experience civil conflict as those in other categories.
- d. Key demographic characteristics that increase the risk of civil conflict interact with each other and with non-demographic factors.

The above views suggest that demographic changes often portend security challenges, and development cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of insecurity. Among the potential sources of insecurity in any nation is change in its population size, structure and composition. This is the case especially when appropriate measures that need to be taken to manage the population are not administered. Put in another way, unchecked population growth invariably leads to overstretching of the existing healthcare services, educational institutions, job opportunities, housing and other essential services. Worse still, the security formations may be challenged or threatened due to idleness, redundancy, and limited opportunities. Naturally, the by-product of this kind of situation is slowing down the pace of a country's development. Swedish Policy Platform for Development (2013/14) aptly argues that violent/armed conflict constitutes a serious barrier to poverty reduction. Freedom from violence, on the other hand, is a necessary condition for the other forms of freedom and right to thrive and, consequently, a necessary factor for development.

Demographic changes profoundly affect security through three fundamental mechanisms: youth bulge, growth of urban population and increased demand/competition over land and water resource. In a rapidly growing population, the proportion of young adults is invariably large, and this increases the risk of violent conflicts, militancy and other forms of criminalities. Schomaker (2013) argues that countries that simultaneously experience youth bulge and limited resources and opportunities for the young adult are prone to different forms of insecurity. Thus, lack of human security adversely effects economic growth and, consequently, slow down the pace of development. In the words of Population Action International (2003), the preponderance of young adults in country's population constitutes social and political hazards. This situation becomes more pronounced in the context of scarce employment opportunities.

Studies have also shown that the growth of urban population, if not accompanied with increased social provisioning and employment opportunities, becomes a harbinger of insecurity. This is so because it results in overstretching and, consequently, paucity of social services, proliferation of slums and squatter settlement, poverty, idleness, unemployment and, eventually, the surge of neighborhood gangs and social turbulence. According to Patel *et al.* (2012), slum neighborhoods in many cities are a refuge for youth gangs and arms traffickers, which constitute security threats with attendant social and economic costs. Besides, growth of urban population in developing nations (which is partly induced by internal migration) changes the religious and ethnic composition of cities and turns them into an arena of inter-ethnic/religious conflicts.

Scarcity of natural resources (particularly land and water), which is substantially occasioned by demographic and ecological changes, has been a driver of insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa. Quite a number of studies have revealed that heightened competition over land resource and consequent displacement of livelihood deepen the longstanding acrimonies between ethnic/religious groups. This has created a condition for incessant violent clashes between and among resource user-groups with potency of undermining development. PAI (2003, p.57) argues more succinctly that:

...acute and potentially explosive threats to rural livelihoods – such as eviction from farmlands, loss of traditional access to natural resources, and impoverishment – typically have emerged in the context of a tangled web of historic inequities that collided with changes occurring in the local economic, ecological and political environments.

Contrarily, Seter *et al.* (2018) in their comparative case studies found that scarcity of resources neither crucially predict the risk of conflict nor account for the difference in conflict intensity. The most crucial predictor of the risk and intensity of conflict, according to them, is perceived political exclusion or mobilization of primordial identities. There are quite a number of revisionist narratives on population, security and development nexus. These narratives argue that the nexus is more complex and malleable than the traditional unilineal perspectives assume. For instance, Goldstone *et al.* (2000) argues that demographic factors (population size, density, growth and structure) are not important determinants of the incidents of internal insecurity when regime type, participation in international trade and proximity to crisis-ridden neighbor are control for. Liddle (1998) also opines that although countries with lower populations tend to have higher per capita incomes, the effect of population growth on sustained increase in per capita income is mediated by human capital and technology levels. This suggests that though population dynamics may have confounding effect on internal security, there is no direct connection between them. The capacity of the elites to develop functional institutions and mobilize the teeming population for a positive purpose moderates the effect of population growth on security.

Studies have also found that population-development nexus is often ambiguous (Liddle, 1998 and Kelly, n.d.). Kelly suggests that:

- i. Population growth and size have both positive and negative effects on development;
- ii. The impact of these effects are both direct and indirect and vary over the time horizon used; and
- iii. These impacts include feedbacks within economic, political and social system

### **Population Dynamics, Security and Development: The Nigerian Experience**

Nigeria has experienced population explosion in recent time. The country has an estimated population of 200million people (World Population Review, 2019). With annual population growth rate of 3.2%, Nigeria ranks seventh most populous country in the world and is projected to be the third by the year 2050 (United Nations Department of Economic

and Social Affairs, 2017). The rapid population growth in the country is largely driven by high fertility. The National Population Commission (2019) put the total fertility rate at 5.3 children per woman. It also reveals that the contraceptive prevalence rate among currently married women stood at 17% (12% use modern method, 5% use traditional) and the median age at first marriage was 19.1 years. The NPC further disclosed that 43% of Nigerian women get married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. These demographic changes have not been accompanied with increased investment in social services, such as education, health, water and other employment generating sectors. Consequently, they have translated into youth bulge, growth of urban population and scarcity of natural resources. These (youth bulge, growth of urban population and scarcity of natural) constitute a security threat with attendant consequences on Nigeria's development.

### **Youth Bulge**

A review of the age structure of the country's population from the last census data reveals that young adults constituted 49.6% of the total adult population. More frighteningly, the proportion of those aged 0-14, which is the predictor of future youth bulge, to the total population was 41.8%. UNDP (2018) projected that Nigeria would witness a steady growth in the population aged below 25 years between 2020 and 2050. Therefore, it is expected to experience a sustained youth bulge within this period. Multi-countries level studies also indicate that large proportion of youth in a population presents enormous security threats. For instance, PIA (2003) found that countries where young adults constituted more than 40 percent of the adult population were twice more prone to civil conflict than those with lower proportions.

Nigeria is faced with steady rise in the population of young adults and consequent increase in demand for, and paucity of, social services and gainful jobs. That is to say that the country has not been able to effectively harness the growing number of its youth population through right policy choices. To the UNDP (2018), unemployment and lack of decent income breed desperation and hopelessness among youth and thus turn the youth bulge into a demographic time bomb. This demographic category has certain attributes (fearlessness, volatility, vigour and inspiration to take risk) that make them receptive to radical views, prone to political manipulation and violent behavior.

Commenting on the nexus between demography and conflict, Ibrahim (2014) posits that the danger of youth bulge in Nigeria is aggravated by double self-inflicted incapacity: inability to educate the youth and limited job opportunities for those who were lucky to go to school. This has made social mobility very difficult and portends a security threat. Schomaker (2013) reveals that youth bulge is an important predictor of most (though not all) social unrest (civil war, terrorism and genocide) in human history. Unsurprisingly, Nigeria is held to ransom by militancy, insurgency, banditry, ritual killings and neighborhood gangs.

### **Growth of Urban Population**

Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented and unplanned growth of its urban population. The UNDESA (2018), for example, reveals that the percentage of mid-year population

residing in urban areas has been increasing steadily since 1950. In the last 10 years, it has grown from 34.8% to 52% and is expected to reach 69.9% by the year 2050. The growth of cities in Nigeria, which is occasioned by both rural-urban migration and fertility, is another driver of insecurity. According to the International Organization for Migration (2016), 60% of internal migrants in Nigeria reside in urban areas. Job opportunities and social amenities make cities attractive and increases propensity of migration to these cities. But the rapid growth of urban population puts strains on available resources and makes job opportunities very scarce. Population Action International (2003) succinctly argues that rapid urban growth leads to saturation of labour markets; alters the ethnic composition of the urban population and intensifies inter-ethnic competition; and stresses the existing social services and city budgets.

Urban population growth in Nigeria overstretchers the limited social services and job opportunities. This in turn increases the rate of poverty, unemployment, idleness and social exclusion. These, coupled with diminished social bond and anonymity that characterized the urban areas, deepen the risk of insecurity. Godwin (2018) shows that insecurity of lives and property is one of the challenges of urbanization Nigeria has been grappling with. Nigerian cities have become a fertile ground for proliferating neighborhood gangs. Homeless young adults form/join cults and violent gangs like the *Awawa* Boys/One Million Boys, who survive on looting of shops or mugging of ordinary people (Democratic Socialist Movement, 2020). Several other studies have also shown that Nigerian cities have become an arena of street crimes (robbery, mugging, political violence, drug abuse, etc), with youth gangs holding sway. Olufemi (2011), for example, found different youth gangs in different cities: *Yandaba* in Kano; the *Ofio* Boys in Port Harcourt; *Agaba* in Cross River; *Yan sara-suka* (Bauchi); *Yan Kalare* (Gombe). He identified rural-urban migration as one of the factors responsible for the rise of these groups.

### Resources Scarcity

Population growth in Nigeria has intensified competition and violent conflicts over access to, and use of, scarce natural resources among user-groups. In other words, population explosion has caused scarcity of wetland and, consequently, increased demands for both farmland and grazing field. Studies have revealed that Nigeria has witnessed increased incidents of violent clashes between sedentary farmers and transhumant pastoralists. For instance, Ali (2020) argues that the scarcity of land resource, which is primarily occasioned by rapid population growth and ecological crisis, has heightened competition for land. This competition often translates into conflict between different resource-user groups as evident in the incessant clashes between farmers and pastoralists. Egwu (2016) also observes that Nigeria has experienced growing spate of conflict between pastoralists and farming communities in recent times, which stems from increasing sedentarization along grazing routes. Similarly, Ibrahim (2019) opines that over the past decade, violent clashes between herders and farmers escalated and constitute a threat to Nigeria's cooperate existence. These conflicts have resulted in loss of lives and property, and livelihood displacement. With heightened attacks and reprisals, what began as a resource-based conflict between farming

communities and pastoralists has escalated into banditry.

The situation is today more endemic in northern Nigeria where scarcity of wet land (induced by population growth and ecological crisis) intersects with widening ungoverned space, declined capacity of the security apparatus to contain the rising tide of conflicts and mobilization of ethno-religious and regional identities to worsen the security condition (Ibrahim, 2019). The Amnesty International 2020 report reveals that more than a thousand villagers were killed and hundreds of thousands displaced in the first-half of the year in this region. It further reports that thousands of farmers could not cultivate their farms due to the growing incidents of attack on farming communities. This situation has the potency of causing livelihood displacement and food insecurity, with evident adverse effect on development. Resource based conflicts between farmers and pastoralists have turned Nigeria's rural areas into a space of banditry: kidnapping, attack on communities, rape, looting, arson, among other forms of criminality.

Youth bulge, growth of urban population and scarcity/competition over natural resources have resulted in seething social unrest, increased crime rate with attendant consequences on the country's development. These are met with growing rates of unemployment (especially among youth) and poverty, limited opportunities for employment and social mobility, hopelessness, decreased access to education, widening ungoverned space and poor policy framework. These invariably increase the risk of social unrest with trickle down effects on development. This has become more severe given the apparent lack of state capacity to adequately respond to the population crisis ravaging the country and deficit in social provisioning.

The growing insecurity in Nigeria is telling on its rate of development. For example, the UNDP in its 2019 Human Development Report listed Nigeria among countries with low human development. The country's human development index stands at 0.534. This, according to the Report, is below both the global and Sub-Saharan African averages, which stand at 0.731 and 0.0.541, respectively. Worse still, Nigeria's performance in all the three key components of the index is below the global average. For instance, the life expectancy – a crucial indicator of quality of life – stands at 54.3 years, which is far below the global average of 72.6 years. Also, Nigeria's Gross National Income per capita of \$5,086 falls short of the world average (\$15,745). Overall the Human Development Report indicates that the country ranks 157 out of 189.

It is worth noting that when inequality in the three components of the HDI is taken into account, it falls by 34.6% (from 0.534 to 0.349). This percentage decline is higher than those of low HDI countries (31.1%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (30.5%), indicating preponderance of inequality in Nigeria. Analysis of the trends of Nigeria's performance in human development reveals that the steady but marginal increase in the HDI values since 2010 is not evenly enjoyed by Nigerians, as it has been characterized by fundamental inequality in all the three dimensions of the index (a long and healthy life, knowledge and decent standard of living).

According to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (2019), 40.1% of the country's population lived below poverty line. Put slightly differently, four-tenth of Nigerians (or 82.9m) had real per capita expenditure below N137,430 (\$) and are, by the national standard, classified as poor. The Bureau also reveals, in a separate report, that the unemployment rate stands at 23.1% and is likely to reach 33.5% by 2020. Demographic changes and deficit in social provisioning have translated into poor performance in key health outcomes. For instance, Nigeria's child and maternal mortality rates, which are crucial indicators of economic wellbeing and quality of life, signify the enormous developmental challenges facing the country. According to the National Population Commission (2019), infant mortality and under-5 mortality rates stood at 67 per 1,000 and 132 per 1,000 live births, respectively. The maternal mortality ratio stood at 556 per 100,000 live births.

## Conclusion

The position of this paper is that population dynamics, security and development are inseparably intertwined. Changes in the size and structure of Nigeria's population have profoundly affected its security condition and path and rate of development. In other words, the country is faced with population explosion, spate of insecurity and worsening human development indices. The rapid growth of the Nigeria's population has put strain on the existing social services as efforts made by successive governments in the area of social provisioning do not seem to match the increase in the population size. Consequently, it has led to poor access to social services, very limited opportunities, and misery, which invariably increase the risks of social unrest with trickle down effects on development.

This paper further argues that population dynamics in Nigeria affect security and, by extension, development in three fundamental ways: youth bulge, growth of urban population and scarcity of natural resources (land and water) in rural areas. These stress factors lead to, or combine with, growing rates of unemployment (especially among youth) and poverty, limited opportunities for employment, education and social mobility, idleness, hopelessness, ecological crisis, widening ungoverned space and poor policy framework. This has become more severe given the apparent lack of state capacity to adequately respond to the population crisis ravaging the country and deficit in social provisioning. Effective management of population growth produces and sustains peace, improves security situation and enhances development. As such, it is pertinent to effectively manage rapid population growth through a viable population policy, provision of adequate facilities and improved security to foster development.

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