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Nigeria, Overpopulation

A Growing Problem in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country struggling with poverty, where 39.1% of the population lives below the international poverty line of \$1.90 USD per day (World Bank Group, 2021). Lagos is currently Nigeria's largest city with a population of an estimated 21 million people. In this city, entire families will share just one room and more than 50 people can share a single bathroom. This has led to high levels of unemployment among youth, which has, in turn, led to a high crime rate and the rise of militant groups like Boko Haram (The Borgen Project, 2020). These issues and more have resulted from Nigeria's serious problem of overpopulation, indicating that they need help to rectify this situation.

Nigeria is a Western African country bordered by Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and the Atlantic Ocean. It has an area of 923,768 kilometers squared, and its capital is Abuja with a population of about 1 million people. Nigeria is relatively split in terms of religion with 41% being Muslim and 58% being Christian. The country did not receive its independence from Great Britain until 1960, and it did not adopt its current constitution and civilian-run government until 1999. The government has since faced difficulty reforming its petroleum-based economy, which had been corrupted and mismanaged causing revenues to be squandered. This economic difficulty combined with the religious conflict has caused high tension in the country, even causing irregularities and violence during the latest elections. Despite this tension, Nigeria's largest problem is its rapidly growing population (Kästle, n.d.). The population of Nigeria is about 206 million (2020), and it is currently the 7th most populated country in the world. However, it is predicted that it will become the third most populated country by 2050 ("Nigeria Population (LIVE)", 2020). This is due to its high total fertility rate of 5.42, meaning that the population can basically double every generation. The high total fertility rate of the country can be at least in part attributed to the value of large families in Nigeria, leading to largely impoverished areas surrounding cities. This large and continually grown population has led to economic difficulties and public health problems (Campbell, 2018).

A typical family in Nigeria consists of a mother, father, children, and often includes other family members such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts. In Nigeria, family size varies depending on where the family lives. Urban families tend to have between 3 and 5 children, whereas rural families may have between 7 and 10. Fathers are typically considered the head of the house, they are in charge of decision making and are typically the breadwinner of the family. Women, on the other hand, are usually responsible for household chores and childbearing. Children typically will eat separately from adults. Elders are tremendously respected in families, and children are expected to care for their aging parents. A typical Nigerian diet is very diverse, however, yams, cassava, plantains, and rice are very common. Nigerian meals are traditionally paired with a sauce made with some kind of fish or meat. Diets are also enhanced with a large variety of fruits and vegetables as Nigeria's warm climate is ideal for growing these types of food ("Nigeria", n.d.). As for education, Nigeria offers free and compulsory education, yet, over 10.5 million children (ages 5-14) do not attend school. 49% of children aged 6-11 do not regularly attend school and approximately 74.4% of 3-5-year-olds do not receive any early childhood education. The

situation is even bleaker for young women, with over 52% of young women not attending school (“Education”, 2021). This means more than half of young women do not attend school. Additionally, the healthcare in Nigeria is not sufficient for the growing population, with less than 2 healthcare workers per 1,000 individuals. These healthcare workers are also concentrated in urban areas, meaning there is almost no healthcare in rural areas. (“Nigeria”, 2012). This healthcare would be very beneficial, given that only 39% of Nigerians have access to sanitation and 71% have access to clean drinking water. (“Nigeria”, n.d.). Lack of sanitation and clean drinking water can cause an increase in diseases in a population, as well as contribute to the high infant mortality rate of the country.

Many of the problems faced by Nigeria are a result of the country’s rapid growth and overpopulation. Nigeria has the fastest growing population in the world, and although it has been slowing down slightly, it is still too fast for the country to keep up with. The country’s current total fertility rate is 5.42, which is down from 6.05 in 2005 (“Nigeria Population (LIVE)”, 2020), but still growing rapidly. With a population that is growing this quickly, it is difficult for the adult population to meet the demands of the copious amount of children. This has put a strain on Nigeria for resources and infrastructure.

This growing population has impacted Nigeria in many ways, one of which is in food production and importation. In 2020, Nigeria was considered to be ‘seriously’ food insecure on the Global Hunger Index (“Appendix E - Global Hunger Index 2020: Scores and Change Since 2000”, 2020), despite being a large importer of food. Nigeria imports about \$10 billion worth of food annually from all over the world, principally consisting of consumer-oriented foods such as wheat, rice, and poultry (“Nigeria - Agriculture Sector, 2020). This is especially interesting considering the fact that more than 70% of the Nigerian labor force is in the agricultural sector. Agriculture is concentrated in rural areas, and it is responsible for 2/5ths of the country's Gross Domestic Product (Oshabohein et al., 2018). Nigeria has even been known to be among the world’s largest producers of many crops such as groundnut, yam, cassava, and other crops, but it is now food insecure because it relies on imports to feed its rapidly growing population.

Nigeria’s rapidly growing population has also caused an astronomical dependency ratio within the country. As of 2019, the dependency ratio in Nigeria was almost 87% (“Age dependency ratio (% of working-age population) - Nigeria”, n.d.), meaning only 13% of the population is working and supporting the rest. High dependency ratios mean that each worker is responsible for more children or elderly family members, and causes greater dependency on the small working population. This creates a social burden and economic liability that the working member of the family must tend to, leaving less of their income for investing in commodities to grow the country’s economy. It also means that the worker is not saving as much money, which creates a cycle of poverty that is hard to break.

This problem is impounded when considering how the increase in demand for goods and services without an increase in production and supply will dramatically drive up prices. There are many people who need goods and services, however, there are not many people to provide them, especially in urban areas such as Lagos and Abuja, two large cities within Nigeria. This population pressure has led to an increase in the cost of living, which means that families must spend a large percentage of their income on these necessities that come with raising a family.

Additionally, these large families with little income, decrease the level of income and resources per head, which leads to a lower standard of living. The consumption of goods and services will lower as the family size increases, and those goods that are consumed will be inferior goods. This low amount of resources per person causes people to flee to highly compact and populated areas where the cost of living is often low, which is often referred to as a ghetto or slum area. These areas create hot zones for contagious disease, pollution, and other problems.

The rapidly growing population is also causing problems relating to government and social services, as they are misused and overused by the population. Examples of this overuse can be seen in housing, schools, roads, healthcare facilities, clean water supply, and more. This will require that the government spend more money fixing old facilities and building new ones because they will be forced to meet the demands of the ever-growing population. Nigeria has already begun experiencing these effects in ways such as power outages and shortages of water. This means that the government cannot use this money to invest in the local and global economy, and therefore the country will be unable to develop properly or quickly (Oduşina, n.d.).

It is estimated that Nigeria will need to create between 40 and 50 million jobs by 2030 in order to keep up with the population boom in Nigeria. The jobs also need to increase in productivity and pay as currently many Nigerians are stuck in low income and low productivity jobs. Currently, more than half of citizens work in agriculture in one way or another and another 30% own micro household businesses, neither of these jobs are enough to lift people out of poverty or rise to the middle class for their households. The jobs currently available for Nigerians are not ideal for maintaining a high standard of living, nor are there enough of them to employ the upcoming generation. This will lead to a high rate of unemployment, which will only continue the cycle of poverty experienced by many Nigerians (“Nigeria’s Booming Population Requires More and Better Jobs”, 2016).

In order to break the cycle of poverty and avoid/solve many of Nigeria’s problems, slowing population growth is crucial. In order to achieve this goal of lowering population growth, education levels must increase. Education is crucial to slowing the rapid population growth that Nigeria is experiencing. Education for both males and females is important, however, it is especially important for young women. Research has consistently shown that women who have higher education tend to have fewer children than their lesser-educated counterparts (Fitzgerald, 2021). They also have children later in life, as they are caught up in education, instead of sitting at home. When these women eventually do have children, the children tend to be healthier and raise healthier children. These children also typically stay in school longer, and this will allow the cycle to continue. When women are educated, they also contribute to the workforce and will earn money to support their family which will also help stimulate the economic growth of the country (Fitzgerald, 2021).

This trend has been shown in many countries including Kenya, Ethiopia, and Ghana. All 3 countries showed that with an increase in education, TFR declined, cutting it in half in many cases. In Ghana the TFR for uneducated women is about 6, however, when a woman has a high school education the TFR dropped to less than 3. Ethiopia saw an even more drastic change when the TFR of women with high school education dropped to 1.3, from a TFR of between 5 and 6 (Pradhan, 2015). In fact, there was even

a study done in Nigeria that showed increasing a women's education by only 1 year would reduce her early fertility by .26 (Osili et al. 2007).

These shifts in TFR were the result of both small and large changes to the education system. For example, a study done in Kenya showed that something as simple as reducing the cost of school uniforms could reduce not only drop out rates but also decrease the rate of teen childbearing and marriage (Ngatia et al., 2019). In Ethiopia, 61% of women will have a child before the age of 20 if they have no schooling, but that number drops to 16% if the woman has 8 years of schooling (Pradhan, 2015). In 1994, Ethiopia ended school fees, added school lunch programs, and increased the education budget. These changes resulted in an increase of .8 years of schooling on average. It is estimated that an extra year of schooling would reduce the probability of teenage birth by 7% and reduce the probability of marriage by 6%. Although these effects seem very small, they suggest that 8 years of schooling would decrease the fertility rate by 53% compared to women with no schooling, which is in line with data from other countries that implicated similar programs. (Pradhan, 2015)

In order to increase school attendance in Nigeria, schools should consider adding school meal programs, similar to those implemented in Ethiopia and other countries. Currently, schooling in Nigeria is compulsory, however, as previously stated, more than half of young women do not attend school. This is at least in part due to the fact that they are considered to be caretakers of the family, so they are expected to stay home and work. So, when a girl goes to school it not only costs the family the price of tuition but also takes away a source of labor from the family. Having free meals available at schools would help to offset these losses, and could encourage higher attendance. The government could also consider adding a system where the students could take home meals, so the cost would be even further offset. Having this offset cost would also encourage all students, but especially young women, to continue attending school for many years. The country could also consider starting a scholarship program for both women and men to help pay for school uniforms and other costs that come with education.

Due to the countries history of corruption, it could also be wise to have an outside organization come in and help with the facilitation of education and its costs. This could be done through the United Nations (UN), specifically, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which has already been in communications with Nigeria about improving its systems for science, technology, and innovation (UNESCO, n.d.). Other organizations such as Room to Read, Education Development Center (EDC), and more could also come to help fill in this education gap.

Education is also important because it allows women to go after their own dreams and desires, rather than just finding a husband and creating a family. Having better healthcare and healthcare education would also help decrease this rate of population growth in Nigeria. Healthcare, in general, can decrease fertility rates, but family planning services specifically can exponentially decrease fertility rates. Natural family planning can be effective, however, it is difficult in countries where wives are expected to be submissive to the wishes of their husbands. So, what could be more effective is contraceptive use. Contraceptive use can help families decide if and when to have children much easier and much more effectively than without it. An example of contraceptive effectiveness can be seen in El Salvador. El Salvador experienced a decrease in the total fertility rate from 5.44 to 2.72 in 25 years (1978-2005), with only a 33% increase in contraceptive use (28% to 61%). The decrease in fertility rate was almost consistent with an increase in

contraceptive prevalence, so it can be assumed that contraceptive use was at the very least a major factor in this decrease (Eckart, 2020).

Due to Nigeria's already struggling infrastructure, it is likely outside organizations would need to be brought in to help solve this lack of access to contraceptives and reproductive healthcare. Many organizations such as Pathfinder International, Engender Health, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and more are aimed at providing these services to countries where contraceptives and family planning services are not available. These organizations and others could be used to help pay for, distribute and educate the public on contraceptives.

However, due to Nigeria's large religious population, it is likely a system of natural family planning would be more readily adhered to than these other forms of contraceptives. Natural family planning (NFP) is endorsed by all major religions including Christianity and Islam, the 2 major religions of Nigeria, so it would be much easier to integrate into the culture than unnatural forms of contraception. While many people are skeptical as to its effectiveness, when it is properly adhered to, NFP can be just as effective or more effective than contraceptives. A study by the British Medical Journal in 1993 found that NFP could have "a pregnancy rate approaching zero" (Ryder, 1993) even in a study of almost 20,000 women. In Calcutta, a very poor town in India, it was found that the pregnancy rate using NFP was approximately .2 pregnancies per 100 women, about in line with other unnatural forms of contraception. In Germany, a very similar pregnancy rate was achieved at .8 pregnancies per 100 women. The reason for this small disparity is most likely due to the predominantly poor women in India being more likely to follow their plans strictly, as compared to the more well-off women in Germany to whom an extra child would not be as detrimental (Ryder, 1993).

In Calcutta, the increased use of NFP was primarily the result of the work of the Missionaries of Charity, led by Mother Teresa, who taught this method to the women in the town to help them out of poverty. A similar program could be adopted, whereby churches and local communities lead the charge of this cultural shift towards family planning. If this method is taught by local churches or religious groups as being acceptable, it is much more likely that it would be adopted by families than if the assistance is just coming in the form of free contraceptives from the nation's government. This method can be taught to poor and even illiterate women and still have a high success rate, it is also cheap and without side effects, which makes it great for women and families in Nigeria who are looking to have fewer children (Ryder, 1993).

Contraceptives or natural family planning should be normalized in Nigeria with the intent of preventing the explosive population growth the country is currently experiencing. This could be encouraged by subsidizing healthcare in general, and specifically, reproductive healthcare for young women. However, this may require help from other countries or outside organizations as Nigeria may not have the resources necessary to implement this type of incentive. An easier incentive may be tax benefits or increased social services for families with fewer children. This type of benefit would also be accessible to those who would choose NFP over contraceptives, meaning it is more likely to incentivize women and families.

Policies should also be enacted that help protect women from abuse and rape within a marriage. Currently, Section 55(1)(d) of the Nigerian Penal Code states that a husband may "correct his wife" so

long as the correction does not cause “grievous hurt”. Grievous hurt is later defined in Section 241 as, “(a) emasculation; (b) permanent deprivation of the sight of an eye, of the hearing of an ear or the power of speech; (c) deprivation of any member or joint; (d) destruction or permanent impairing of the powers of any member or joint; (e) permanent disfiguration of the head or face; (f) fracture or dislocation of a bone or tooth; (g) any hurt which endangers life or which causes the sufferer to be during the space of twenty days in severe bodily pain or unable to follow his ordinary pursuits” (“Nigeria | Women and Justice”, n.d.). Compared to most developed countries, this would seem very extreme for limits to ‘corrections’, however, this is significant because spousal rape is not classified as a crime. Sexual intercourse by a man and his wife is not considered rape if she has gone through puberty, meaning that a wife cannot refuse her husband. This in combination with the culture of submission and male dominance can lead to a woman having more children than she desires (“Nigeria | Women and Justice”, n.d.).

Rectifying this issue is crucial not only for slowing population growth but also for helping women gain equality. Spousal rape is illegal in many countries, especially in developed countries, and it is prosecuted as such. However, in Nigeria and other countries, it is not even seen as a crime. In order to change this, laws will need to be enacted which will need to come from international pressure as well as internal pressure. This should be spearheaded by church and local communities within Nigeria as well as international groups such as the UN. This pressure both internally and externally would also help change the culture within Nigeria, so consent would be expected even in marriage. This would allow women to have more of a say of if and when to have children because the husband would not have full control over their wife’s body, as is the case with the current laws. This could ultimately help decrease the number of children a woman would have, and thus decrease the TFR of the country as a whole.

Ultimately, policy and cultural changes regarding access to healthcare and education would decrease fertility in Nigeria by empowering women and allowing them to make more of their own decisions. Decreasing the fertility rate is crucial to Nigeria’s long-term success. Decreasing the population growth would allow Nigeria to have sufficient resources and infrastructure for its current and future generations. It would also help the world and country’s future by not putting as much strain on the world’s already limited and diminishing resources, especially the resources of food and water.

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