EDUCATION AND FERTILITY : POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

By

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Political and other events since 1960 have exposed the degree of ethnic, linguistic and religious heterogeneity among the people of Nigeria and other developing countries of Africa. Divisions along the various religious, ethnic and linguistic lines have led to national strife, violent changes of government, civil wars and large scale political unrest in many of the countries. Hence, national policies are by implication guided and influenced by the national character of the population (1). This paper will examine the following (a) the current status of national population policies affecting the level of fertility and rate of growth of the population, (b) reasons why majority of the countries are silent over the issue of fertility control, and (c) how the adoption of a policy of mass education can be used to achieve lower birth rates among the population.

The countries of Africa can be divided into three groups according to the nature of their population policies: the antinatalists, the laissez faire countries and the pro-natalists. Among the two countries that have clearly expressed antinatalist policies, only Ghana appear to be actively involved with vigorous state supported programmes. The other country in the antinatalist group, Kenya, has not embarked on any aggressive fertility control programme. Most of the pro-natalist countries are the former French colonies. Some of these countries have expressed the desire to double their population within a decade or two (2). The majority of the countries in Africa however belong to the third group i.e. the laissez faire group. These countries appear to recognise the implications of uncontrolled birth rates on economic development but for various reasons prefer to remain neutral. Nigeria belongs to the laissez faire group. For example, Nigeria's population policy as incorporated into the Third National Development Plan states as follows:

> Although Nigeria has (by world standard) a large and rapidly growing population, these demographic factors do not appear as yet to constitute a significant or serious obstacle to domestic economic progress. The country is fortunate in possessing a large land area well endowed with

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> naturel resources, which if carefully exploited should provide a basis for building a viable economy which would ensure a steadily rising standard of living for the population within the forseeable future and especially during the current phase of the country's demographic transition which is characterised by rapid growth. Emphasis of policy is therefore being deliberately placed on accelerating the rate of growth of the economy rather than on a direct action to achieve a drastic or immediate reduction in overall birth rate. (3)

It is clear from the above that Nigeria is aware that the birth rate and the rate of growth of the population judged by world standard are both high but Nigeria believes that these rates do not constitute *significant* or *serious* obstacle to economic progress. In the case of Nigeria, the laissez faire policy has been influenced by the vast amount of wealth derived from crude oil, the huge size of uncultivated land available in the country and the heterogeneous nature of the population.

In the other countries where there are no sizeable amount of naturel resources to sustain the rate of population growth, the governments have not been able to adopt antinatalist policies because of the fear of disturbing the minorities who are usually haunted by the fear of domination. At the international scene, many of the small countries do not wish to remain small while their neighbours continue to grow and most of the countries including Nigeria have continued to develop deep suspicion for the programmes backed, funded and aggressively supported by the developed countries. For example, representatives of the African countries overwhelmingly opposed the notion of population control at the population conference held in Bucharest (4).

It is very clear that efforts at getting national support for fertility control programmes in many countries will continue to yield if any, very little positive results. The emphasis have to shift from getting government support for policies and programmes aimed directly at reducing birth rates to encouraging these governments to pursue population responsive policies such as mass education of the citizens.

In this paper, a simple diagramatic framework showing the linkages between formal education and fertility is presented. Our aim is to show how, through these linkages, education can be used to achieve a gradual reduction in fertility rates especially in countries where socio-political climate do not appear to permit direct actions by government. The choice is based on the notion that education is universally accepted as a fundamental right in all countries.

The Framework

As will be seen in fugure 1, the framework is subdivided into three main parts: (A) the Demographic (B) the Socio cultural, and (C) the Economic. Relevant supporting evidence are presented where available.

(A) *The demographic influence (figure 2)*

The first demographic influence is exerted through the age variable. Staying in school or institution of higher learning generally implies the postponement of age at marriage. For women, staying in school means that the number of years to be spent in reproductive life span diminishes as the length of training increases. Physiologically, a healthy female has a good chance of being pregnant about age 15 all other things being equal. Since women reach menopause about age 45, it is assumed that a heathy woman has a period of thirty years for reproduction. But if we assume that a woman stays in an institution of learning up to age 20 and marries at about age 25, then she has only 20 years of exposure to pregnancy and reproduction.

For males, entry into marital union will depend on type of occupation or carreer chosen. A man who chooses to be a farmer example may wish to marry young since he does not have to undergo any lengthy period of training or apprenticeship in an institution. He learns his farming techniques on the job and therefore, he can decide to marry and raise a family of his own. This partially accounts for the reason why the fertility level of farm populations are generally high all over the world.

The second demographic influence is exerted through a general reduction in infant mortality rate of children born to educated couples. (see table) Educated couples are known to utilize modern methods of health care more than the uneducated couples in developing countries (5). This leads to a reduction in the urge among the educated couples to have more children as insurance against low survival rates common among the children of uneducated couples.

(B) *Socio Cultural Influence (see figure 3)*

The educated person has a higher chance of migrating to an urban centre than the uneducated. Urban centres tend to be much more heterogeneous in composition than the rural areas where migrants were raised. The urban centre exposes the new migrant to new ways of life, new values and new tastes. Also, the migrant becomes partially free from the rigid cultural constraints of the rural environment. When he becomes gainfully employed, he joins the rank of workers seeking stable future career opportunities and becomes actively involved in a struggle to achieve higher status in the chosen. The upward mobility aspiration conflicts with the desire for large family size. Furthermore, in addition to the cost of caring for children in the city, it is very difficult to provide the needed emotional support and loving care to a large number of children since parents inter-act with children only for brief moments daily. This development aids the acceptance of fertility control Practices (FCP) by educated couples.

(C) *Economic Influence (see figure 4)*

As stated in the previous section, the educated person has a higher chance of migrating to the urban centre in search of paid employment. The uneducated migrants become absorbed as labourers and petty traders in the cities. Since the educated migrant becomes an employee, he, unlike the self employed person ceases to have a complete control over the allocation of his time. Office hours are rigid and official rules and regulations add to the emerging problems in the new environment. The family of the educated person employed on a fixed wage ceases to be a production unit and all members of the family will depend on the wage earned. This contrasts with the situation of the self employed farmer or shop owner who also relies on the contributions of members of the family to the functioning of the enterprise. In this connection, the fertility of self employed persons will tend to be higher than the fertility level of employees. While the self employed person requires the services of children for old age support and for the continuity of the enterprise, the employee in a firm or government service is covered by both pension and retirement schemes as insurance against old age. The employee may also subscribe to personal comprehensive insurance coverage as an additional insurance against old age.

Discussion

The focus of the framework is on the individual i.e. how formal education acts as a constraint as well as a motivating factor affecting individual behaviour. Efforts to alter fertility behaviour of people in any country must begin with factors influencing individual behaviour. Education, as shown in the framework produces changes in individual behaviour which will in turn produce the desired aggregative change in fertility rate in the country as a whole. Countries which have experienced the fertility transition from high levels to moderate or low levels have high literacy rates, are highly urbanised and all have a high proportion of their labour force classified as employees who earn wages and salaries. Evidence in the demographic literature have generally supported the traditional inverse relationship between educational level and family size. In cases where this traditional inverse relationship have not been confirmed, methodological problems and inconsistency in definitions have been found as possible causes of the lack of support. For example findings of studies which classify education into only two categories i.e. no education and primary school level and above will differ from findings of studies which utilize varying degrees of educational levels.

Since most of the studies have confirmed the inverse relationship between educational level and family size, data from these studies should be combined with arguments based on the linkages shown in the framework presented in this paper to seek national support for policies aimed

at providing mass education for the citizens. Mass education will enhance the speed of economic development, change the position of women and alter people's values. Organisations interested in the reduction of levels of fertility in countries where ethnic, religious and political climate do not permit the leaders to adopt policies and pursue programmes aimed at reducing fertility rates should seek to influence policies which will guarantee mass education.

Level of Education, number of Children Born alive, number of Children living and Child wastage.

Level of Education	Children Born Alive	Children Living	Child Wastage
Illiterate	5.29	4.32	0.97
Primary	4.68	4.07	0.61
Secondary	3.89	3.49	0.40
Higher	4.02	3.70	0.32

Source : Acsadi G.T., A., and Johnson, G., survey of fertility, family and family Planning in Nigeria, University of Ife, 1972.

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RESUME

Pour beaucoup de pays Africains le taux élevé de natalité ne constitue guère un problème bien que son implication surtout dans les pays en voie de développement y soit bien comprise. Dans beaucoup de ces pays, des différences d'ordre socio-politique n'encouragent pas une action directe tendant à la limitation des naissances. Sur le plan international, la plupart des pays se méfient des programmes de planning familial financés et encouragés par les organismes étrangers de planification, les organisations internationales et les gouvernements. Il faut donc trouver une alternative à la croisade pour le planning familial.

Dans l'article qui précède, l'hypothèse est que toute action qui doit influer sur le taux de natalité doit d'abord commencer au niveau individuel. L'education formelle est considerée comme l'instrument qui a le plus de chance de créer des changements dans le comportement de l'individu. Un tableau simple et schématique montrant les liens entre l'education formelle et les modifications dans le comportement envers la fécondité est produit. En conclusion, les Instituts et Organisations Internationaux qui s'intéressent au contrôle du taux de natalité en particulier dans les pays où des problèmes socio-politiques empêchent une action directe des autorités gouvernementales sont invités a supporter les politiques et programmes de l'éducation des masses.