



**UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

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Distr.: LIMITED

POP/APC.3/92/Inf.3  
21 September 1992

Original : ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Third African Population Conference

Meeting of Experts

Dakar, Senegal

7-10 December 1992

**DEMOGRAPHIC TRAINING AND RESEARCH IN AFRICA  
REVIEW AND PROSPECTS**

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This paper is intended to provide participants with background information for the discussion of item 4 of the provisional agenda.

This paper has been issued without formal editing.

## DEMOGRAPHIC TRAINING AND RESEARCH IN AFRICA: REVIEW AND PROSPECTS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In many developing countries including those in Africa the importance of demographic training and research has been well recognized. The growing recognition that population variables should be integrated into socio-economic development planning has given impetus to the collection, analysis and publication of population data for effective planning. The perception of rapid population growth as one of the obstacles to the attainment of developmental goals prompted the establishment of institutions for demographic training and research in many parts of the world. In Africa the problem of acute shortage of trained demographers and statisticians who would collect and analyze demographic data underlined the urgent need to establish national and regional facilities for demographic training and research.

There is little doubt that a review of demographic training and research in a large and diverse region as Africa is a herculean task indeed. This is because of the variations in demographic training and research from one country or subregion to another and also between the English-, French- and Portuguese-speaking areas. The wide range of the background of participants in the training and research programme also adds to the difficulty.

This paper does not attempt to give a detailed discussion of the training and research programmes in all the countries concerned because of inaccessibility of information of sufficient details about programmes of training and research in demography in relevant country institutions. It will, however, attempt to provide an overview of the training and research situations in some African countries which, by no means, can be said to be representative of the African situations. The main problems of training and research will also be highlighted.

### 2. DEMOGRAPHIC TRAINING AND RESEARCH IN RETROSPECT IN AFRICA

Before most African countries attained independence there were practically no indigenous African demographers and this meant that Africa had to rely heavily on foreign demographers to carry out demographic work in the continent. The teaching of demography in African universities had not yet developed and this situation was far from being uniform across the continent. For example, North Africa was better off. English-speaking African universities had a relatively more advanced system, while their French and Portuguese counterparts lagged behind.

Demographic training and research in Tropical African universities gathered momentum around the mid-1960s. Caldwell had pointed out that full courses in demography were established earlier in several African countries north of the Equator than further south. Teaching of demography was under way in 15 African universities in the 1965-66 academic year (Caldwell, 1968:425).

Demographic training was not the sole preserve of African universities during the 1960s, for there was some organized demographic training in the continent outside the universities. African training centres offering courses in demography were jointly established by national governments and the United Nations in Cairo, Dakar, Rabat, Addis Ababa, Achimota (Accra), Abidjan, Lagos, Yaounde and Dar-es-Salaam. The Cairo and Dakar

centres offered courses exclusively devoted to demography at the higher level for a minimum of one academic year, while the Addis Ababa and Dar-es-Salaam centres offered a statistical course at the middle level, within which demography was taught as field-applied statistics.

The decade of the 1970s was a turning point as far as demographic training was concerned. This period was characterized by intensive efforts to train demographers and this culminated in the establishment of two regional institutes: Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPs) in Accra in 1971 for Anglophone countries and Institut de Formation et de Recherche Demographiques (IFORD) in Yaounde in 1972 for Francophone countries. As indicated earlier, Cairo Demographic Centre (CDC) had already been established in 1963.

Whereas before 1970 there were only for universities teaching demography, thereafter a total of nine universities mostly english-speaking, were teaching the subject. These were the Universities of Dar-es-Salaam, Ghana, Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo), Ibadan, Lagos, Nairobi, Nigeria (Nsukka), Oran and Zaire (Jain, 1986).

The 1980s witnessed increased participation of international organizations and private foundations in funding the establishment of demographic training and research centres and activities in African countries. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), International Development Research Centre (IDRC) are the major sponsors. Although this welcome development has led to the building of institutional capacity in individual countries, it has also given rise to duplication of projects (Tabutin, 1988). The most recent national training programmes in demography have been established in the Universities of Zimbabwe, Uganda and Tanzania. One possible consequence of this is that the proliferation of national centres will affect the volume and quality of training and research in demography in the three regional institutes in Accra, Cairo and Yaounde.

### 3. LEVEL AND TYPE OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRAINING

Although middle level training in demography is still being offered in a few African countries such as Cameroon and Tanzania, in most countries, demographic training is offered at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the latter being the predominant type. In French-speaking Africa, the universities of Oran and Kinshasa offer a four year B.A. degree course in demography, while the Universities of Botswana and Obafemi Awolowo in Ife, Nigeria offer a combined major in economics and demography or in statistics and demography (Tabutin, 1988).

As already indicated graduate training in demography is more pervasive and it is mounted for persons who already possess a bachelor's or first degree or its equivalent in another discipline. Masters degree programmes in demography are now being offered in many countries. A few demographic training centres offer Ph.D degree programmes.

There are differences in the programmes of the various demographic training centres in the continent. In general, the two main components of graduate training in demography consist of technical demography and substantive demography. Technical demography which is largely quantitative aims at training demographers to be capable of collecting analyzing data and using the results for socio-economic development planning. Substantive demography does not only explain the pattern and behaviour of basic population and development data, but more importantly attempts an interpretation of the interrelationship between population variables and socio-economic phenomena. A number of critical areas in

economics, sociology, geography and physical planning, medicine and health are covered to enable a perceptive appreciation of the interrelationships entailed in substantive demographic studies.

A comparison of the two components of graduate training in demography in French- and English-speaking Africa shows that the quantitative aspect is dominant in the former. English-speaking African countries have adopted a more interdisciplinary approach to graduate training in demography. Although there has been some change there is still plenty of room to satisfactorily marry the types especially in the former.

In spite of the unavailability of statistics on output of trained personnel from the various demographic training centres in Africa it can from ordinary observations be said that more demographers are being produced now than at any time before. RIPS, CDC and IFORD, the three regional demographic training institutes are in the lead among producers. Although RIPS cannot be said to be representative of demographic training centres in English-speaking Africa its statistics on trained personnel gives a rough indication of the contribution of demographic training centres to demographic training in Africa. Between 1971-72 and 1990-91 academic sessions, RIPS produced 682 trained personnel in population studies. Some 327 and 95 students were trained for the postgraduate diploma and M.A. degrees by thesis work respectively between 1972 and 1985, while from 1985 to 1991 235 students trained for the 12-month M.A. degree by course work, 22 for M.Phil and three for Ph.D. It has been estimated that in French-speaking Africa, IFORD was probably training between 70 and 80 per cent of the demographers in Francophone Africa (Tabutin, 1988). However, such regional training achievement might diminish in scope to the extent that the role of various national demographic training centres compete for training at the same level. This development obviously has cost and other implications for demographic training and research in Africa given that regional training is less expensive and more enriching in terms of interregional experience, cooperation and integration of development efforts.

#### 4. DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Like demographic training, research has evolved greatly during the last 12 years. Needless to say that research is an important element in the socio-economic development of any country, more so for countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This region consists of countries with differences in culture, ethnicity, language and colonial history. As already indicated this makes a comprehensive review of demographic research for the whole of sub-Saharan Africa difficult. In order to make the tasks manageable we shall confine ourselves to the English-speaking sub-Saharan African countries. Further, we shall concentrate more on the developments in demographic research during the last decade.

During the early seventies interest in population studies in Africa attracted the attention of governments and other interested international agencies. The 1970 round of censuses marked the beginning of an era of modern data collection and analysis which led to the need for training of demographers to handle these tasks in much of the sub-Saharan region.

#### 5. TRAINING IN RESEARCH AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Many government institutions like statistical bureaus which undertake censuses, surveys and service statistics do sometimes engage in research on their own or in collaboration with the universities or other higher institutions of learning. This type of

collaborative work is one of the most fruitful ways of undertaking demographic research. The regional centres for Population studies (RIPS, IFORD and CDC) have garnered extensive experience in this type of work.

Research in population studies can best be done in conjunction with demographic training which is the practice in many universities and the United Nations sponsored regional demographic centres. The quality of both training and research will be greatly improved by taking them together. However, training should have a head start and the type of training imparted to a large extent determines the quality of research. At RIPS this relationship is well recognised and the training is designed to lead to research. Intensive training is provided in (i) social research methods, (ii) survey sampling (iii) demographic field work (iv) statistical inference (v) computer programming and data processing (vi) research paper writing (vii) research paper presentation and defence (Venkatacharya, 1991). One of the unique features of the RIPS training programme is the importance attached to practical training which lays a firm foundation for research.

Initially in sub-Saharan Africa greater demand for middle level demographers of technicians was felt in the statistical services and various ministries including those for economic planning. During the seventies RIPS and the other two regional institutions catered for this need and by the end of the eighties the need for more advanced level of training was felt. Many governments needed personnel with higher levels of skills to tackle issues connected with socio-economic policy and planning as well. To meet these new demands RIPS and other similar training centres upgraded their programmes to include M.A.; M.Phil and Ph.D. levels.

It should be mentioned also that higher level training with adequate course content to deal with research is also obtained outside the region. Well known universities in the USA., UK and Europe have continued to offer demographic training and research to many candidates from sub-Saharan Africa. However, while this type of training has a number of advantages such as exposure to a high level of academic activity that includes better computer facilities, library, facilities, access to workshops and seminars, it also has some drawbacks. The candidates after returning to their countries find themselves handicapped because their training depended excessively on high technology which is not available yet in some of their home countries.

Good research programmes need a healthy combination of three components:

- (i) financial and material resources
- (ii) competent personnel, and
- (iii) conducive research environment.

Each one of these components is effective if the other two components are also present. Financial resources themselves are of no use without competent personnel and proper research environment. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are gaps at all levels and more so on the financial side.

### 5.1 Financial Resources

Financial and material resources are very essential in any research programme. Unfortunately the economic wellbeing of most of the sub-Saharan African countries has

deteriorated during the last fifteen years and the burden of debt is likely to dampen the growth of research in the future.

The role of international organizations in providing funds for research in sub-Saharan Africa has been very significant in the past and will continue to be needed in the future. Because of scarce resources available for demographic research, it is prudent to use these effectively.

## 5.2 Research Personnel

The second most important element is the availability of competent staff to man research activities. While training programmes in the region have contributed a good deal to providing a pool of demographers, there is still a great need for high level manpower which can take greater responsibility for more meaningful and relevant research focused on drawing up socio-economic plans and population and development policies. While efforts in this direction have begun in the regional centres and some universities, more needs to be done in the future.

Two problems are faced in the developing world in this regard. The first is the placement of persons trained in population studies in departments that work in areas that are not related to their training. Usually persons returning from training are promoted to take up administrative positions where their training finds little use. The second problem, is that of retaining skilled persons in the country. Many senior demographers leave their country for a number of reasons, the most prominent one being the financial reward. It was observed that in 1988 about 36 per cent of all African members of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) were working outside their own countries (Tabutin, 1988, p. 147). Improvement in the national working conditions for research personnel will greatly reduce turn over at higher levels. Simultaneously, increasing the numbers for higher level training in demography also helps in reducing the effect of turn over on national development efforts.

## 5.3 Research Environment

The third factor for the growth of research is the presence of a conducive environment, which consists of many aspects. The most important one is the institutional framework. Research institutions can be located in universities or in governmental or semi-governmental or non-governmental organizations. However, the English-speaking and French-speaking African countries differ in their institutional approaches. Demographic research in the English-speaking African countries of the region occurs both in the government ministries and more often in the universities. The universities of Dar-es-Salaam, Obafemi Owolowu (Ife, Nigeria), Ibadan, Ghana and Nairobi have a long history of demographic training and research. In the French-speaking countries, apart from the regional centre IFORD, almost all demographic training and research is confined to a few universities such as Abidjan, Kinshasa and Lome (Tabutin 1988, p. 150). In recent years, a healthy sign has been that more and more population projects are located in university departments.

The other important element for the development of sound demographic research environment is the access to modern computer facility, including availability of all necessary demographic softwares. Also essential is a library equipped with books, journals, official publications and among other needs, copying and printing facilities. While most of the conventional hardwares are available in the market, such modern facilities are inadequately

provided in most research institutions in the region. In order to improve the situation and promote serious demographic research, national resources of the governments which are not sufficient, should be generously complemented by external funding from the international community.

Last but not the least is the development of active professional organizations, publication of professional journals and holding of periodic meetings and seminars for researchers at the national and regional levels. While several African countries (Nigeria, Kenya, etc.) have active national associations, the establishment of the Union of African Population Studies (UAPS), its publication of journals, books and documents, organisation of seminars and workshops and backstopping of research in universities and demographic centres are encouraging beginnings which should be sustained at all costs.

## 6. PROSPECTS FOR DEMOGRAPHIC TRAINING AND RESEARCH

Before discussing what the future has in store for demographic training and research in Africa, at least, three related problems should be highlighted. The major problem relates to the acute staffing situation in many national training institutions. This has been heightened by the establishment of many national training institutions. Undoubtedly, the acute staffing situation has somewhat affected training and research work. For example, if RIPS had at its disposal, instead of the six teaching and research staff, the full complement of a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 16 teaching and research staff, it should be able to more than double its current output of training and research programmes and activities.

The second problem has been that of insufficient training and research and research facilities like computers, textbooks, journals, audio visual aids, and other supportive materials. Because of lack of resources some training institutions have had to make do with libraries which lack up-to-date documentation and publications, especially demographic journals which facilitate both teaching and research.

The third problem has to do with how to effectively marry theory and practice during the training period. Because of lack of time and training facilities, trainers have not been adequately exposed to practical aspects of computing and field survey techniques. The need for adequate exposure to these areas of specialisation cannot be over-emphasized since the inadequacies can only lead to poor and inefficient execution of training programmes.

Turning to prospects for demographic training in Africa an important issue that crops up is whether the present training programme is still suitable for the needs of African governments. Many African governments have embarked upon the process of decentralization aimed at bringing effective government to the doorsteps of a majority of the people. To achieve this laudable objective availability of demographic and socio-economic data is a *sine qua non*. Demographers are still in short supply in many African countries and there is still plenty of room for training more of them to collect and analyze population and related socio-economic data and to use these objectively in planning development. It should be pointed out that the course content should be modified to include more focused work in population and development and increased work in areas like manpower planning and surveys, computing and cartography.

In the next twenty years or so Africa needs demographers who are well at home in the above specialised areas. Demography should be taught as a complementary subject in undergraduate training in sociology, economics, agriculture, planning or medicine and should

be given more prominence since population issues will occupy a centre stage in the next century. The importance of exposing planners, statisticians, agronomists and economists to the implications of demographic characteristics and rapid population growth in African countries cannot be overemphasized.

The prospects for demographic training in Africa, as elsewhere, are closely linked with availability of financial resources. The problem of inadequate funding will continue to stare demographic training centres squarely in the face. This is because most African governments have failed to accord high priority to funding of population studies and research. The national will and commitment are lacking. Besides, the global economic crisis currently being experienced by most African countries has made it more difficult for African governments to assume full responsibility for the financing of training and research centres and activities. It is becoming increasingly apparent that external funding such as is provided by UNFPA for quite a significant period, will in the normal scheme of things decline as African member States are logically expected to take over gradually the support of training and research activities. In so far as the regional institutes in Accra, Egypt and Yaounde are concerned, only few African governments unfortunately have made financial contributions to the support of the centres. Perhaps it should be mentioned that this inability of member states to contribute their quota to the financing of the regional institutes is not unrelated to the establishment of national demographic centres with similar objectives and programmes. This development has therefore tended to make these countries inward-looking. In view of the financial constraints, the prospects for demographic training are far from being good.

The creation of more Masters degree programmes at the national level has, as already indicated, worsened the acute staffing situation in many countries. In order to maximize scarce resources it would seem feasible to develop a few good Masters degree programmes at the sub-regional level, while the regional institutes still continue to play the leading role in teaching and research. In view of shortage of demography lecturers to go round the prospects for more collaboration among existing institutes look good, for intensive collaboration will go a long way in strengthening such existing structures. To be able specifically to improve the level of demographic research in sub-Saharan Africa some serious efforts are to be made by the countries in the region to undertake collaborative ventures with the support of international donor organizations.

Although data situation in the region has improved with the success of recent rounds of population censuses in the 1970s and 1980s and the series of surveys under the World Fertility Survey and the Demographic and Health Survey programmes, still more effort has to be put to greater data collection and more importantly to more detailed and meaningful analysis and evaluation as well as appropriate utilisation of the results in development planning. Thus data analysis, dissemination and utilization levels in the region have to be raised. Often a researcher working in a country of the region finds it easier to get the national data tape from U.K. or U.S.A. rather than from an office a few blocks away in the same country. This sorry state of affairs can be corrected if adequate trained personnel were at hand to process and analyze the data locally. The red tape and bureaucratic procedures in acquiring tapes from both within the country and abroad can be quite disturbing.

Attention should be focused on many important demographic issues which are not well researched into. These include the demographic interrelations between mortality, fertility and migration; the impact of individual and community variables on fertility and mortality levels and differentials; and the relationship between population and development variables and basic needs for survival.

It is also important to review the demographic training and research of the past and make necessary adjustments to meet the future demands. In this connection, as already noted, it is useful to maintain a good number of excellent demographic institutions and to avoid dissipating the meagre resources available on building many institutions which may in the end be ineffectual. Adjustment of existing training and research programmes must take into account the objective needs of the region and its proper development. Such adjustments must not run counter to the essential and fundamental goals of established institutions so long as these are valid. Change should improve and not destroy established foundations. The baby should not be thrown away with the bath water.

There is a need for dialogue and exchange of ideas between demographers from the French-speaking and English-speaking African countries. In the past much has been talked about this but little has been achieved.

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