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**THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION AND POPULATION TREND IN AFRICA, 1958-1978**

**A. INTRODUCTION**

1. Prior to the attainment of political independence around 1960, information on population for all but a few African countries was based on unreliable estimates. Census taking and research in Demography were not established practice in most African countries. Much of the scanty data that were available on the population characteristics of African countries were obtained from colonial administrative "head counts". The principal objectives of these counts had been to estimate available labour force and taxable persons for the colonial economy. Thus at independence few African countries had a reasonable estimate of the size of their total population. Consequently many of these countries undertook demographic sample surveys in the 1960s to obtain some reasonably acceptable indices of their populations. Although these surveys provided a rudimentary data base in these countries, demographic data on Africa remained scanty, inadequate and inaccurate.

2. In addition to national efforts during the 1960s, concerted action through the African Census Programme (ACP) which was mounted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) with financial assistance from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and with the co-operation of the United Nations Headquarters, New York, enabled most African countries to undertake national censuses. For most of these countries, however, analysis of census data has not been given equal attention for a number of reasons especially difficulties and delays in data processing and the lack of trained national personnel.

3. Since its establishment in 1958 the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has stimulated research effort on the continent and population data from censuses and demographic surveys undertaken in most African countries have been adjusted using analytical techniques developed by a number of scholars and institutions. These techniques have been used to obtain reasonable estimates of population parameters required for socio-economic planning and research on the African continent.

**B. THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION IN AFRICA, 1958-1978**

**(a) General Pattern**

4. The continent of Africa covers about a quarter of the World's land surface area. In 1958, it contained less than a tenth of the total population of the world. The data presented in Table I below illustrates Africa's demographic situation vis-a-vis that of other major regions of the world.

Table 1  
World Population Indices

Region	Mid-year Population (millions)		Annual Growth rate % 1965 - 1976	Crude birth rate per 1000 1965-76	Crude Death rate per 1000 1965-76	Surface Area Km2 (000s)	Density per Km <sup>2</sup>	
	1960	1976					1960	1976
World	2,936(100)*	4,044(100)	1.9	32	13	135,830 (100)	22	30
Africa	273(9.1)	412(10.2)	2.7	46	20	30,319 (22.3)	9	14
America	415(13.9)	572(14.1)	2.0	28	9	42,082 (31.0)	10	14
Northern America	199	239	1.0	17	9	21,515	9	11
Latin America	216	333	2.8	38	10	20,566	11	16
Asia	1,644(55.1)	2,304(57.0)	2.1	36	14	27,580 (20.3)	60	84
East Asia	788	1,021	1.6	21	10	11,756	67	87
South Asia	856	1,283	2.6	42	17	15,825	54	81
Europe	425(14.2)	476(11.8)	0.6	16	10	4,937 (3.6)	86	96
Oceania	158(5.5)	217(5.5)	2.0	25	10	8,510 (6.3)	2	3
USSR	214(7.2)	259(6.4)	1.0	18	8	22,402 (16.5)	10	11

\* Figures in bracket show percentage distribution.

Source: UN Demographic Yearbook 1976: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 1977.

5. In relative terms, the size of the African Population is small. Thus, while the continent has ten per cent more land surface, than Asia, it has less than a fifth of the latter's total population. Population density in Africa is therefore quite low, 14 persons per km<sup>2</sup> in 1976 as compared with a density of 84 per km<sup>2</sup> in Asia and 96 per km<sup>2</sup> in Europe. In 1960, population density in Africa was even much lower than in 1976, 9 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. In that year, densities in Asia and Europe were 60 and 86 per km<sup>2</sup> respectively.

6. The continent however has the second highest annual population growth rate (2.7 per cent) which is exceeded only by the growth rate for Latin America (2.8 per cent). Africa has had the highest crude birth and death rates among all regions of the world throughout the period under review. Thus the continent is commonly described as a high fertility/high mortality region with low population densities, all of which constitute factors which tend to mitigate against current efforts to achieve reasonably rapid socio-economic development. Death rates are still much higher in Africa than in other areas of the world even though appreciable reductions have occurred in both infant and general mortality since 1950. Further declines in mortality portends even further increase in the rate of population growth in Africa. This is likely to be the case if the level of fertility increases or remains constant in the face of declining mortality.

7. The world population has risen from 2,986 millions in 1960 to 4,044 million in 1976 but Africa's contribution to this increase is dwarfed by the absolute size of Asia's population. Thus in 1960 Asia accounted for 55 per cent of the world's total population, by 1976, that continent was the home of 75 per cent of the world's population. For the same period, Africa's share of the world population rose from 9 to 10 per cent. Asia's annual increase of 46 millions accounts for 64 per cent of the world's annual increase; this contrasts with Africa's annual increase of just over 11 millions. (8 per cent of the world's annual population increase)

8. Crude birth and death rates for Africa since 1960 have been the highest recorded among the major regions of the world. Comparison of crude birth and death rates for Africa and other regions of the world show that despite the relative drop in mortality in Africa since the 1950s, Africa remains a continent with the highest birth and death rates.

Table 2

Crude Birth and Death Rates per 1000 Population for Various Regions  
of the World, 1970-1975

	<u>Africa</u>	<u>Asia</u>	<u>Latin America</u>	<u>Europe</u>
CBR	44-48	32-33	36-38	16
CDR	18-21	13	9-10	9

Source: UN Demographic Yearbook 1976, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 1977

9. Although Africa has the highest fertility rate of all regions, the high level of mortality keeps the growth rate (2.7 per cent) at a level lower than that for Latin America (2.8 per cent). Thus while Latin America more than doubled its population between 1950 and 1976 from 164 million to 333 million. Africa registered a lower increase from 219 millions to 412 millions during the same period. It is however expected that improvements in living standards and health services are likely to increase Africa's annual growth rate since trends in mortality decrease are preceding any significant decrease in fertility trends.

(b) Sub-regional and National Pattern

(i) Population Structure and Growth

10. High and constant fertility coupled with moderately high mortality which has been declining since the 1950s have pushed average annual population rate of growth in Africa from 2.1 per cent during the 1950-55 period to 2.7 per cent in the 1960-1976 period.

11. Mortality and fertility rates presented in Table 3 show that although Western Africa records the highest crude birth rate, its annual growth rate (2.5 per cent) is lower than the rate for Southern Africa 2.9 per cent. Although fertility in Southern Africa is moderate by African standards, mortality is relatively low and migration from Malawi, Rhodesia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Asia, etc. has contributed to the high rate of growth registered in this subregion. In Northern Africa both fertility and mortality rates are lower than for the rest of the continent. Although Eastern and Western Africa have the highest fertility and mortality rates, there are countries in each of the two sub-region with mortality level that has dropped and consequently increasing the annual rate of growth e.g. Kenya 3.6 per cent (1974-75) Ghana (3 per cent 1970-75). This is indicative of the future course of population growth in Eastern and Western Africa which together contain about 60 per cent of the total population of Africa.

12. Because birth rates have remained constant over the 1960-1978 period, gross reproduction rates in all but a few countries in the continent still exceed 3. Appreciable drops in gross reproduction rates have been observed only for off-shore islands like Mauritius and Reunion.

13. Notwithstanding the general practice of early and universal marriage among African populations and dominance of pronatalist attitudes on the continent, middle Africa has during the period under review maintained levels of fertility which were below the general level in the rest of the continent. Thus with an annual growth rate of 2.3 per cent per annum (1970-75) this subregion had the lowest growth rate in the continent. It is anticipated that improvements in living conditions will reduce the currently very high mortality in this subregion. Such changes would increase the birth rate and consequently increase its rate of population growth.

14. In general, the expansion of public health services and improvements in living conditions have contributed to reductions in infant, maternal and general mortality. There has been a remarkable decline in deaths caused by communicable diseases. However, the crude death rate remains over 15 per thousand for all African countries except Egypt (12.4) Tunisia (13.8), Libya (14.7), Zimbabwe (14.4), Sudan (14.4), Mauritius (7.8), Cape Verde (8), Djibouti (7.6), Reunion (7.1) and Seychelles (7.9). Infant mortality is less than 100 per thousand live births only in a few countries, namely: Algeria, Angola, Cape Verde Comoros, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, Senegal, Seychelles and Sudan. Because infant mortality is so high in the continent, expected length of life at birth ( $e_0$ ) is low and in a few countries (Central African Empire, Chad, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mali, Nigeria, Togo and Upper Volta) it is still below 40 years. It exceeds 60 years only in the off shore islands of Mauritius, Reunion and Seychelles where infant mortality is around 40 per thousand live births.

15. The pattern of declining mortality and persistently high fertility in the continent of Africa constitute the determining factors raising the annual rate of population growth on the continent. Thus while the annual rate of growth was about 2.4 per cent yearly around 1960, it had risen to 2.7 by 1970 and is likely to exceed this figure in the near future if mortality decline accelerates.

Table 3

Africa: Sub-regional Population Indices

Region/ Sub-region	Population millions		Annual Growth Rate Per cent 1965-76	Crude Birth Rate per 1000 1965-76	Crude Death Rate per 1000 1965-76	Surface Area km2 (000s) 1960	Density per km2	
	1960	1976					1960	1976
Africa	273	412	2.7	46	20	30319	9	14
Western	80	119	2.5	49	24	6142	13	19
Eastern	77	118	2.7	48	21	6338	12	19
Northern	66	101	2.8	44	16	8525	8	12
Middle	32	46	2.4	45	23	6613	5	7
Southern	18	28	2.9	43	17	2701	7	10

Source: UN Demographic Yearbook, 1976

Table 4

Africa: Percentage Distribution of Population and Surface area  
1960 and 1976 by Subregion

	Percentage Population		Percentage Area	Number of Countries	Population Largest Country in 1976 (000)	Population largest country as percentage of population of Sub-Region
	1960	1976				
Africa	100	100	100	54	-	-
Western	29.3	28.9	20.3	16	64,750 (Nigeria)	54.4
Eastern	28.2	28.6	20.9	17	28,678 (Ethiopia)	24.3
Northern	24.2	24.5	28.1	7	28,667 (Egypt)	37.7
Middle	11.7	11.2	21.8	9	25,629 (Zaire)	55.7
Southern	6.6	6.8	8.9	5	26,129 (S. Africa)	93.3

16. As observed in Table 3, fertility levels vary from subregion to subregion. This variation is also observed within individual countries. For example in Zaïre, Cameroon and Tanzania, there are areas with fertility rates that fall far below the national average. Mortality differentials have also been observed among the major subregions of the continent while rural-urban differentials have been found in most countries. Although mortality in rural areas is higher than in urban areas, no definite rural-urban fertility differentials have been established and more detailed studies are needed to identify the pattern of any such differential.

17. The current stable rates of fertility and declining mortality have led to rise in the proportion of young people in the total population of African countries. More particularly, reductions in infant and child mortality have increased the relative number of children in the population. The data presented in Table 5 illustrates changes that have taken place and are likely to continue, at least for some time in the near future.

Table 5

Africa: Percentage Distribution and Increase of  
Population by Broad Age Groups

Age Group	Percentage Distribution			Percentage Increase		
	1960	1970	1980	1960-70	1970-78	1960-80
0 - 4	17.8	17.5	18.0	27.4	34.0	70.8
5 - 14	25.6	26.6	26.2	33.5	29.5	72.8
15 - 64	53.7	53.0	50.0	27.2	30.9	66.5
65	2.9	2.9	2.9	30.3	30.2	60.6
Total population in millions	273	352	461	38.9	31.0	68.9

\* Projected estimates.

Source: Selected World Demographic Indicators by Countries 1950-2000, Population Division UN Secretariat, New York, 1975

18. Close to half of the total population of Africa is below fifteen years old. This contrasts with a proportion of 24.4 for the USA in 1976. While birth rates remain high and modest progress is achieved in reducing mortality, the African population will remain predominantly young. In fact the population aged below 15 increased from 43.4 per cent of the total population of the continent to 44.1 in ten years (1960-1970) and projections show that this trend will continue into the 1980s. Thus the population between 15-64 will continue to bear a heavy economic burden in servicing this young population. Thus burden is further increased by the high unemployment and underemployment rates existing in most African countries.

(ii) Population Distribution and Density

19. The uneven distribution of population in the major continents of the world illustrated in Table 1 is also a characteristic of sub-regional and national variations in population distribution within the African continent. These subregional variations are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

20. Western and Eastern Africa are inhabited by almost 60 per cent of the continent's population. Population densities for these subregions are higher than the continental average. In each of the major subregion, variations in population density are enormous. These variations are summarized in table 4. It is worth noting that in each subregion, one country dominates the others in population size. Thus in Western Africa, the Nigerian population constitutes 54.4 per cent of the total for the sub-region. In Southern Africa the dominance of one country is even more pronounced with only 6.7 per cent of the population of this subregion living outside the Republic of South Africa.

21. A peculiar feature of population distribution in Africa is the widely varying sizes of national populations. Many countries have less than one million people living within their territorial boundaries. By 1976, only five countries: Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zaire had populations that exceeded 20 million. Seven others (Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Ghana) had populations ranging from ten to nineteen million. A third group with populations of 5-9 million included Ivory Coast, Senegal, Upper Volta, Mali, Cameroon, Tunisia, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Madagascar. Eleven other countries (Benin, Togo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Niger, Chad, Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, and Somalia) had between one and four million inhabitants. The rest of the countries had populations of less than one million.

22. Population density in Africa vary both from country to country and from area to area within each country. Only three countries (Mauritius (438), Seychelles (212) and Reunion (203)) have densities of over 200 per km<sup>2</sup>. In general population densities are highest in the offshore islands. Within the continent, there are also pockets of high rural densities in Burundi and Rwanda.

23. Moderately high densities - 25-50 per km<sup>2</sup> are found in Ghana, Malawi, Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia, Egypt, Benin, Sierra Leone, Togo, Gambia and Swaziland. A number of countries are so sparsely populated that densities remain less than 10 per km<sup>2</sup>. These include Algeria, Sudan, Mali, Zambia, Chad, Congo, Niger, Somalia, Botswana, Djibouti and Gabon. A common characteristic of most countries in this category is the desert or semi-desert vegetation found within their territories. Within the tropical forest zone only two countries (Gabon and Congo) have densities below 10 per km<sup>2</sup>.

24. Within individual countries differences in densities are also quite pronounced. Very high densities are recorded for the lower Nile basin which is the life wire of Egypt. Within some countries e.g. the Eastern provinces of Nigeria and the Western provinces of Cameroon (Pays Bamileke) rural densities are quite high and in some areas exceed 200 per km<sup>2</sup>. Along river basins, coastal urban areas and mining regions one also finds high concentrations of population.



25. Crude densities could be misleading and hence when assessing the population "strain" on land, many factors have to be considered. In countries like Egypt, the arable land on which the population depends consists of a small strip of fertile land along the Nile Valley. In countries like Zambia and Ethiopia with large tracts of cultivatable land, the natural habitat is relatively difficult and technology in the agricultural sector is so low that productivity ensures little more than the barest minimum for a subsistence pattern of life. The populations of these areas are overwhelmingly illiterate and the usual argument that these countries have empty spaces to be filled or enormous natural resources to be tapped ignore the fact that the present level of technology precludes the easy exploitation of such potential resources. Even in countries like Zaire where large areas of fertile land lie waste, difficulties of communications make even intensive peasant agriculture relatively unprofitable.

(iii) Urbanisation and migratory movements

26. The phenomenon of urbanisation in Africa commonly referred to as the rural-urban drift originated from the colonial era when European merchants established trade centres along the coast or major communication lines to facilitate the evacuation of raw materials. These centres gradually developed into the commercial, administrative and political centres of African countries. The advent of political independence sparked off a rapid growth in towns and governments spent enormous resources to "modernize" their capital cities. These received the bulk of investment resources in all fields health, construction, education, social welfare and entertainment and so they became centres of attraction to job seekers from the rural areas.

27. The relative neglect of the countryside in contrast to expensive projects in towns and cities has encouraged young people to flock to the city in search of jobs they rightfully believed are only available in the capital. This has created enormous urban problems: slanty towns, poor drainage, poor sewerage and many social problems. It also has created a shortage of agricultural labour in the rural areas resulting in relatively lower production of food. The urban population which in 1950 was only 13 per cent of the total population of Africa is currently about a quarter of its total population. A major feature of the urban population is its youthfulness. The rate of growth of urban population on the continent far exceeds the annual rate of natural increase. Thus, the population of Addis Ababa increased from 795,900 in 1970 to 1,242,555 in 1976 at an annual growth rate of 9.4 per cent. Nairobi (Kenya) contained a population of 509,286 in 1969 and by 1976 its population had risen to 736,000. The city's annual growth rate of 6.7 per cent more than double the rate of natural increase for Kenya which was just over 3 per cent per annum. An even faster rate of urban population growth (15.2 per cent) was recorded for Kinshasa between 1970 and 1974. During this period the population of that city rose from 1,323,039 to 2,008,352.

28. Recently, the refugee problem on the continent has introduced a new dimension in the migration and urbanization process. African cities like Lusaka, Nairobi, Abidjan to cite only a few have become attractive points of call and eventual settlement for refugees fleeing from other countries. These movements have tended to create intractable problems in the countries of settlement, especially the cities.

29. Seasonal movements of labour across and within national boundaries have been very pronounced in Western, Eastern and Southern Africa. Such movements to the Copperbelt of Zambia, the mines of South Africa and the plantations of Ivory Coast have created many problems affecting food production and family stability especially in the sending areas.

### C. POPULATION GROWTH AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

30. The debate on the relation of population growth to socio-economic development has provoked much controversy. Much of the confusion on the subject can be attributed to the fact that there is no agreement on the type of economic development African countries should aspire to. It is however obvious that neither population growth nor socio-economic growth can be isolated and treated outside the development context of each individual country.
31. It has been observed above that while mortality has been declining in African countries during the past two decades, fertility has tended to remain high and constant in most of the countries. This phenomenon has resulted in higher population growth rates which give rise to a broad-based age-pyramid in which children below fifteen years old constitute close to half the total population in most countries in the region. It has been estimated that the high rates of fertility observed in Africa will remain relatively constant for the rest of this century. Significant declines in fertility have been confirmed only for the offshore Indian Ocean Islands.
32. The level of mortality although high by world standards will continue to drop as a result of improvements in living standards, the provision of better medical care and sanitary services, and the expansion of education and more productive employment for large sections of the population.
33. The rapid growth in population in Africa since the 1950s has, as illustrated earlier, resulted in a population nearly half of which is made up of young people below the age 15 years. Although this rapid growth has sometimes been seen as a possible stimulus to the economic development effort and a welcome increase in the size of the potential market, the experience of the last two decades shows that the servicing of the youthful population (through the provision of schools, health and other services) has diverted investment funds which would have been devoted to productive economic ventures.
34. The process of rapid urbanisation has necessitated the use of vital resources for expanding the housing, sanitary and other services for the ever increasing urban population. Shortage of productive employment for the urban population - especially the young school leavers and women - has given rise to numerous social problems for which few African governments have adequate remedies.
35. Most African Governments have addressed themselves to such problems related to rapid population growth as growing demand for education, health, employment, and food. However, their praise worthy efforts in these fields have often lagged behind desired targets because less than adequate account was taken of the growth in population and its likely effect on the demand for these services. Consequently, countries that have attempted implementing universal primary education, for example, are confronted with a demand for extra classrooms, teachers and other resources which render the implementation of the programme problematic to the planner.
36. A number of African countries have started programmes designed to influence the rate of population growth; others seek to improve the level of living through economic programmes which aim at achieving a rapid transformation of the economy. Whatever the approach, it is obvious that all African countries would have to maintain a very high economic growth rate even to maintain current levels of living among their populations.

#### D. POPULATION POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

37. The complex demographic mosaic of African countries and the continent's diversity in socio-economic strategies render discussions on population policy an equally difficult task. Many countries have argued for a larger population as a stimulating factor in their drive towards economic advancement. Consequently only a few African Countries (Kenya, Mauritius, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Ghana) have official policies and programmes aimed at reducing the rate of population growth through the implementation of national family planning programmes. Many other countries (e.g. Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Gambia, Botswana, etc.) have no official programmes but allow voluntary bodies to provide family planning services. Some (e.g. Gabon, Cameroon) still maintain a pronatalist attitude and some (e.g. Zaire) have established national population policy bodies to identify population problem areas and propose appropriate policy and programme orientation.

38. Tremendous efforts have been made by the ECA, WHO, ILO, UNICEF and other organisations to provoke discussions on problems of rapid population growth. These efforts have contributed significantly to the changes in policy orientations and the frankness with which problems of rapid population growth and socio-economic development have been discussed in technical meetings.

39. Particularly in the past decade, more African governments have sought UNFPA assistance in various population programmes areas. ECA efforts to stimulate interest in population problems led the third meeting of the Conference of Ministers in Nairobi (1975) to pass a resolution which invited "the Executive Secretary to continue the Studies on the interrelations of population growth and economic and social development including a study to define population programmes within the context of other desirable and essential services in such fields as maternal and child health ... and to study the demographic problems of high fertility and subfertility in those parts of Africa where they exist". This resolution further requested "the Governments of member states to give due attention to the socio-economic conditions of parents and children in Africa and to ensure that family planning becomes, subject to national sovereign rights and priorities, an integral part of development planning.

40. Consequent on these efforts, a majority of African countries now permit family planning as an integral part of their maternal and child health services even if they have no official family planning programmes as a means of improving the health and the living standards of their populations which aim at reducing the rate of population growth. Some have also begun to integrate programmes which aim at solving other population problems like sparse distribution, in their development plans. It is anticipated that greater interest in demographic research in African universities will provide more empirical evidence that planners can use in the effort to integrate population planning into the total process of socio-economic planning in Africa.