

Population Control and Rural Poverty Reduction for Sustainable Development in Rural Communities of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The need for population control especially in rural communities and in all societies cannot be over emphasized. Population control has become very imperative in rural communities of Akwa Ibom State and in Nigeria where people depend on farming as the main source of income with dependents family sizes causing a serious challenge to the attainment of sustainable development goals come 2030. The study which was exploratory in nature employed the Thomas Malthus Theory of population growth and 450 respondents from three Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State selected for the study. The study revealed that illiteracy, cultural beliefs, religious affiliation and early marriages as some of the causes of overpopulation in rural areas. To control the population and reduce poverty in the rural communities of Akwa Ibom State, the study recommends among others that measures on creation of awareness and implementation of policies should be enacted to control population in rural areas, control of extinction of environmental habitat, provision of job opportunities and extend social services to rural communities to help transform the areas and reduce rural-urban migration. The study also recommended the investment in female education as it is believed in reducing the problem of early marriages and by so doing reduces population growth.

Keywords: Communities, Control, Development, Poverty Reduction,

Introduction

There is a serious global concern of population growth and control. This challenge has also threatened the cooperate existence of Nigeria and the ecosystem. Population however is a determining factor in planning and the socio-economic development of the nation. This is so because in terms of its size and composition, population has a far-reaching effect on social change, development as well as on the quality of life of the people. According to Ottong, Ering and Akpan (2010), population is a major asset first as a resource for development and secondly

as the prime beneficiary of development in the society. As indicated by the National Population Commission (2006), population is said to constitute the bulk producers of goods and services, as well as the major consumers of these products. It is a major attraction for national and international investment as well as a determinant of rural development.

It is important to note that population is both a sensitive and controversial issues in Nigeria, first because of its roles in designing the geo-political and socio-economic relations of the nation, regions and states, secondly as an index for resource distribution. For instance, in a communiqué issued at the end of the sub-national consultations and engagement with the Presidential Tax Reform Committee on 16th January, 2025, the forum endorsed 20% of resource base sharing/distribution on population. According to Daniel, Udousoro and Effiong (2024), it is the attitude towards political imbalance, superiority and control that disabled the population question in items of its absolute size, the benefits of such size as relates to the provisions of basic infrastructures, and as it affects the states and the sub-regions that constitutes the challenges of rural development which Nigeria has been associated with.

However, sandwiched by the above challenge, Daniel, Udousoro, Effiong (2024) noted that population growth rate and inconsistent population figures from different institutions are major variables that defile rural development and poverty reduction in Nigeria. The growth rate and inconsistent figures affects national planning as well as constitute a serious deficit to socio-economic and political development of the country as manifested in rural underdevelopment. In response to the above generic problem, the federal government of Nigeria approved the National Policy on Population for Development on February 4th 1988 and a further review in 2005 known as the National Policy on Population for Sustainable Development which was inconsonance with the Millennium Development Goals agenda to come up with a blue print that will help control population growth, create jobs in rural areas and by so doing reduces rural poverty and urban migration. The new policy recognizes that population factors are interrelated and interwoven with socio-economic development, environmental sustainability and the attainment of sustainable development goals targets. Despite setting this policies, targets and agenda to control population growth, create jobs, reduce rural-urban migration and poverty, population growth rate in Nigeria has still remain alarming and causing a serious challenge as a result of rural population drift to urban centers.

Objectives of the Study

Based on the underlying challenges of population growth in Nigeria, the study sets to assess the effects of population control on rural poverty reduction for sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

The study also addresses the following primary objectives;

- i. to assess the effectiveness of the existing population control policies on rural poverty reduction and sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
- ii. to measure the poverty index in the rural communities of Akwa Ibom State.

- iii. to proffers measures of controlling population growth towards enhancing rural poverty reduction and sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State.

Literature Review

Population according to Pearl, Emmanuel and Oyemike (2013) is a group composed of all members of the same species that live in a specific geographical area at a particular time. Deducing from the above, population is a group of people that live in a specific geographical area of the world at a particular time.

To Pearl, Emmanuel and Oyemike (2013), geographical area has to do with countries, for example Nigeria, Ghana, United States of America etc. However, the rate of population growth differs from country to country. Before the civil war, Nigeria's population for instance was not a challenge to the development of the country not until the 1970s when the country experienced industrialization as a result of the oil boom that attracted technological revolution, migration of foreigners and expert from other countries to Nigeria improved medicare that reduces infant and maternal mortality with no corresponding effects on birth rates and control as well as rural-urban migration. These factors however leads to the population explosion as experienced in the population growth rate of the country since 1970.

Nigeria Historical Population Growth Data

Year	Population	Growth Rate (%)
2025	234,573,603	2.37
2024	229,152,217	2.39
2023	223,804,632	2.41
2022	218,541,212	2.41
2021	213,401,323	2.44
2020	208,327,405	2.47
2019	203,304,492	2.48
2018	198,387,623	2.53
2017	193,495,907	2.56
2016	188,666,931	2.54
2015	183,995,785	2.57
2010	160,952,853	2.78
2005	140,490,722	2.73
2000	122,851,984	2.64
1995	108,187,610	2.59
1990	95,214,257	2.66
1985	83,585,251	2.76
1980	72,951,439	3.11
1975	62,851,312	2.77
1970	55,569,264	2.22

Data Source: United Nations-World Population Projection

Nigeria's Population, Poverty and Human Development

Nigeria's population is rapidly growing, and is estimated to reach about 400 million in 2050. It has a high proportion of youths (Daniel, Udousoro, Effiong 2024) with relatively employment opportunities. However, studies reveal that about (70%) of the population is under 30 years thus making Nigeria to be one of the most populous youth population in the world. Daniel, Udousoro Effiong indicates that over the years Nigeria has struggle against demographic tide with a widening gap in poverty, unemployment, and inequality thus affecting the attainment of sustainable development in the country.

As documented by Daniel, Udousoro, Effiong (2024), population growth in Nigeria between 2014-2024 significantly created an unequal gap in the human development index of the country. The data shows an unemployment level of (5.3%) in 2024 first quarter against (5.0%) in the third quarter of 2023 and with a poverty level of (38.8%) in 2024. The authors identified population growth as the bane to poverty reduction and recommends population control and the institutionalization of policies that will attract investors to the country. Population control in accordance with the effort to address youth unemployment and subsequently reduce poverty, an inclusive economic policy that will enhance rural development is eminent, and should be conceived and implemented in line with the describe needs of the people. Such policies according to Thomas, Abaikpa, Daniel and Akpan (2024) will help the citizens to develop skills set through quality education, create jobs and reduce rural poverty and migration.

The UN (2022) report shows that a large proportion of rural population in Nigeria lives in poverty. The reports indicate that about 75 million people in rural Nigeria lived in extreme poverty which is more than the 13.5 million people in urban areas indicating that poverty is more severe in rural areas than in urban areas. In another, studies by the UN (2019), the findings revealed that the poverty head count rate in rural areas was higher than in urban areas for households of 5-9 people, 10-19 people, and 20 or more people. The findings identified;

- i. population growth
- ii. poor economic opportunities in rural areas;
- iii. civil unrest, noting that this will manifest in poverty and malnutrition
- iv. dependence on subsistence agriculture; and
- v. inflation

Drawing from the above, the studies recommends the following:

- i. family planning and sex education for population control inorder to create a balance between population growth rate and available job opportunities.
- ii. creation of an enabling environment to attract investors for economic explosion, industrial development and employment generation.
- iii. that where the two above is achieved will reduce civil unrest, poverty and malnutrition.
- iv. investment in the rural areas will transform the rural communities, eliminate dependence on subsistence agriculture and create a complex economic system.

- v. by so doing address the problem of population growth, reduces rural poverty and inflation and as well enhance sustainable development in the state.

The Concept of Poverty

Poverty describes a wide range of circumstances associated with needs, lack of resources and hardship. It is a subjective and comparative term which according to Dada (2005) are descriptions of material needs that includes deprivation of essential goods and services. Poverty includes economic distance that manifest in inequality of social relationships, that could be in the form of social exclusion, dependency and the inability to pay for his/her basic needs and to live what is understood in a society as a normal life that is to be capable of raising a healthy family and educated children. UN (2023) define poverty to mean the inability of the state and its agencies to redistribute resources and wealth to that group of society that has limited access to education and basic medical services. It categorizes the poor according to the international poverty line of \$1.90 (dollar) per day, meaning anyone living on less than this amount is considered to be living in extreme poverty.

According to Anyanwu (1997) designing and implementation of a consistent poverty alleviation Programme is considered successful when measurements and causes are identified and analysed. Poverty to Anyanwu is a situation where the income of families was insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency. In this connection, the concepts of absolute poverty emerged. This is primarily measured by expenditure/consumption minus income and basic needs-oriented indices of a family to the ratio of the population. Ekong (2010) defined poverty as a condition in which income is insufficient to meet subsistence needs. As rightly espoused by Rede (1990), subsistence level, for example possessing just the necessities of life for survival of a population, reflects the classical concepts of minimum standard. Poverty implies that if living is considerably lower than the acceptable norm measured by the population. Studies by Rede (1990) further indicates that most of the poor lives in the developing World in Africa, Asia and Latin America with the proportion of rural poor, mainly the small farmers and landless labourers also been quite high in Third World Countries.

Rural Poverty

Nigeria's rural areas is relatively poorer than the urban centres. Judging by the level of deprivation of purely biological minimum necessity for the survival of a household in rural areas in Nigeria the issue of poverty is very intense in the rural areas. Nigeria's rural area experience high population growth with simple or no employment opportunities and other basic necessities of life. The cultural-religious affiliation of the rural people has defiled the idea of family planning thus defeating every effort of population control and employment generation in the area. The population of rural family indicates that each family has between 7-9 members manifested through high birth rate, unemployment and increased poverty rate. The above position is in line with UN (2023) reports on rural poverty that poverty in rural areas is influenced by the rate of population growth without a corresponding development and

investment in education, skill acquisition, population control, healthcare services, security services, environmental sustainability and job creation.

According to Ekong (2010) and Mboho and Joshua (2009), understanding the nature and concept of rural poverty is very useful in designing policies aimed at addressing poverty. To Udoh and Mboho (2021) rural poverty is sandwiched by rural population growth, simple means of survival, deforestation, and lack of external economic investment for employment opportunities. This is why the rural area is characterized by ill health, hunger, malnutrition, inadequate or poor housing, illiteracy and unemployment and the rural people are thus unable to attain their minimum standard of living which stems from lack of command over subsistence goods and basic needs which include food, shelter, housing, potable water, and basic healthcare and education.

Ekong (2010), noted that those households or individuals whose incomes are insufficient to provide for their basic needs are regarded as poor and are more in rural areas as compared to those in the urban areas. To Anyanwu (1997), the rural poor according to the Nigerian context are;

- i. rural households or individuals living below the poverty line and whose income are insufficient to provide for their basic needs;
- ii. rural households or individuals lacking access to basic services, political contracts and other forms of government support, including urban squatters and street children;
- iii. people in isolated rural areas who lack essential infrastructures;
- iv. female headed households whose nutritional needs are not being met adequately;
- v. persons who have lost their jobs and those who are unable to find employment as a result of economic reforms;
- vi. ethnic minorities who are marginalized, deprived and persecuted socially, culturally and politically; and
- vii. communities who have experienced the effects of environmental degradation and devastation.

The measurements and indicators of poverty as pointed out above is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals targets of no poverty and of making life meaningful and better for the people. It is obvious that the question of how a consistent poverty policy can be developed depends on the relativeness of poverty in the area, and in spite of the fact that most developing countries are still battling to integrate the provisions of basic education, health care, food production, environmental protection into poverty reduction strategies, the issue of gender equality, social services provision, job creation, freedom of speech and religion, cultural restrictions among others poverty still remain alarming in rural areas. However, large proportions of the rural population are still culturally, socially and politically deprived in many ways in Nigeria and based on the sustainable development goals measurement index, the height of rural poverty in Nigeria indicates that the achievement of the agenda by 2030 is blicked.

Rural Poverty Reduction Strategies in Nigeria

Successive Nigerian Governments had initiated multidimensional and multifaceted strategies to improve the welfare and standard of living of the people in the rural areas. These policies have been in the form of economic diversification, social protection, and programmes that improve access to education and skills, as well as micro support to boost agriculture and reduce reliance on oil. Mboho, Tahirih and Udo (2014) identifies the above policies to include Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), Better Life Programme for Rural Women, and Family Support Programme, Directorate of Foods, Road and Infrastructure (DIFRI), Community Banks, Peoples Bank of Nigeria, Small Scale Enterprises Schemes, National Economic Reconstruction Fund, Education for all good health for all by 2030, Subsidy Programs for Agricultural and Social Services, Rural Water Supply, Rural Electrification Programmes.

However, these target programmes could be grounded under;

- a) income generating and augmenting programmes for the rural people
- b) wealth redistribution for the deprived and rural population
- c) empowerment programmes for education, job creation, employment generation and self-reliance of the rural people.

Noteworthy, is the fact that evidence has shown that of these programmes which were designed to meet the needs of the people, only a few of it had a far-reaching effect on poverty reduction, and therefore leaving a lot of people still below the United Nation poverty margin.

Sustainable Development Goals is the response to the development challenges of Third World Countries and rural poverty reduction in particular. The SDGs blue print is projected as a comprehensive socio-biological, economic and technological development programme targeted at human and environmental sustainability. It is an inclusive agenda whose proper implementation will address the problems of population and poverty. SDGs is a solid foundation for sustainable poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth creation and value reorientation among others.

From the SDGs blue print, it could be submitted that the agenda therefore is to mobilize the resources of Nigeria to make a fundamental break from the failures of past policies and to bequeath Nigeria a united and prosperous nation for all. As a poverty reduction strategy SDGs is built on the earlier efforts to reduce poverty and to meet with the basic needs of the people on a sustained basis with a leap from the failures of past strategies. This is indeed considered as the only guarantee for rural poverty reduction. The strategy of poverty reduction implies population control, wealth creation, employment generation through the promotion of private enterprises and environmental preservation and sustainability. The documents have it that encouraging the growth of the private sector, will creates opportunities for employment and wealth creation as well as investment in education, incentives for farmers and skill acquisition for the vulnerable thus reducing poverty in the rural areas.

It is important to state that the objectives of SDGs have not been achieved thus far, manifesting therefore in the dwindle state of the nation. An assessment of Sustainable

Development Goals indicate that all the goals relates to population and rural poverty reduction and not much has been done by government in these areas, vis-à-vis no poverty; zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals.

To control rural population and poverty, thus achieving the SDGs the strategy should include improved education system that will give half of Nigeria's children opportunity for a prosperous future, improve the healthcare delivery system with emphasis on family planning, infant and maternal mortality as well as on HIV/AIDS and other preventable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and reproductive health, initiate laws and programmes that will empower the vulnerable and implement reliable social services programmes.

However, despite the statistical claim by governments between 2016 to 2024 on the living standard survey that the incidence of rural poverty in the country has declined, nothing concrete can support the authenticity of this claim. The increasing level of population growth and rural poverty has defiled this position and the measures initiated so far. The continued drift of rural population (Daniel, Udousoro and Effiong, 2024) to urban areas and that of the Nigeria youths abroad has remain one of the crucial index of the economic downturn in Nigeria which has continued unabated, and the realization of the poverty reduction plan is yet a far cry.

Theoretical Framework

Thomas Malthus theory of population growth

Thomas Malthus theory of population growth (1766-1834) is adopted for this study. Thomas Malthus in his publication on "An Essay on the Principle of population". argued that overpopulation was the cause of many of the social ills observed in the society: poverty, malnutrition and disease. The theory has it that population growth if left uncontrol would exceed resource growth. To Malthus this because population grew geometrically while food supply grew arithmetically, and if left unrestricted human population would continue to grow until they would become too large to be supported by the resources. In other words, humans would outpace their local carrying capacity, that is the capacity of ecosystems to support the local population, Malthus stated that food shortages in particular were inevitable. Hence, according to this Malthusian Equation; population food supply if left uncontrolled.

Malthus argument was directed at the relative growth of different classes within the population; those who did not practice preventive checks on their family size would soon outstrip their means of survival and so fall in status. Ultimately, in his view, poverty existed because of the growth in family size caused by lack of self-restraint.

Malthus has been criticized for not considering technological growth in his theory. His undue emphasis on the limitations of the supply of land, which was subdued by the agricultural revolution of the nineteenth century, brought in its wake the system of rotation of crops, fertilizers and quality in agricultural production that affected the prediction of Malthus.

Malthus religious beliefs prevented him from grasping the possibility of the widespread use of contraceptives and female education to check population growth. Worth noting is that Malthus underestimated the importance of industrial development thus not take into consideration the faster and more reliable model of transport which helped colonial empires to provides additional raw materials, an exploitable land supply as well as new markets for manufactured products. Though critized, the economic law of diminishing return has strongly reinforced the Malthus theory of Population growth thus its relevance to this study.

It should be stated that over the last two hundred years of Malthus's projections, famine has overtaken numerous individual regions, pressures on food production, combined with threats to other aspects of the earth's habitat such as climate change, making overpopulation a still more serious threat in the future – this is because a lot more resources is taken out to manage and later for the teeming population than the same can generate.

Deducing from the above therefore, it is correct to state that the reduction of a nation is significantly dependent on the growth of its population. Nigeria is one of the fastest going countries in the world. With an estimated population of 229,152,217 and an annual growth rate of (2.39%), with this statistic however, the population dynamics shows profound inequities and disproportions when analyzed with the development indicators in the rural areas.

From Malthus submission, it is therefore inferred that uncontrolled population growth in the rural areas would exceed carrying capacity, leading to overpopulation, social problems and poor services delivery.

Methodology

The study investigated the effects of population control on rural poverty reduction in the rural communities of Akwa Ibom State. The Study selected three Local Government Areas through the purposively sampling method from the three senatorial districts of the State. The Local Government Area selected for the study include Uruan in Uyo Senatorial District, Mkpato Enin in Eket Senatorial District and Obot Akara in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. Of the 7,200,000 population of Akwa Ibom State, 5,231,520 that is (72.66%) is said to reside in the rural area, thus the study on the need to control excessive population growth of the rural areas. This is why the state is said to have a high rural population concentration and poverty in the rural areas. This study adopted a mixed method of data collection in generating data for the study from as population of 450 respondents of age 20-50 selected for the study through a stratified, purposive, and convenience sampling techniques.

Table 2: Sample Selection and Data Collection

Study Area	Interview	FGD	Total
Uruan	60	90	150
Mkpato Enin	60	90	150
Obot Akara	60	90	150
	180	270	450

Source: Field Work 2025

In each of the Local Government Areas studied, interview was conducted in three communities with twenty respondents from each and therefore respondent for a focus Group Discussion to ascertain the validity and reliability of the interview results.

Table 3: Communities studied per Local Government Areas

URUAN				MKPAT ENIN			Obot Akara		
Communities	Interview	FGD		Communities	Interview	FGD	Communities	Interview	FGD
Ik. Inyang	20	30		Ikot Ekop	20	30	Ikot Abia	20	30
Esuk									
Ibiaku	20	30		Ikot Akata	20	30	Nto Edino	20	30
Uruan									
Nung Ikono	20	30		Ukam	20	30	Mbiaso	20	30
Ufok									

Source: Field Work 2025

From the interview reports, findings indicate that families have between 7 to 12 children. It further indicates that 70% of the families studied have never done anything to control the rate of their population/birth rate growth. This however manifest in their inability to send their children to schools and to have a meaningful employment in future.

Findings from the interview also indicates that the believe system of the people affects their perception of family size planning as according to the respondent children are gift from God and it is believed that they need to have more children in case any of them may die in future. The findings further indicates that having a gainful employment in the area is very difficult that is why their children have to move to urban areas for employment, noting that they relied on their farm product and daily paid jobs which generates between N3,000.00 to N5,000.00 daily for them and their children to live on.

In some of the FGDs the respondents thus;

I have a total number of 12 children, we have not been able to send them to higher schools because of our lean income. My faith too does not believe in family size control.

Another FGDs responds as follows:

Using technology to control birth is like contesting with the purpose of God. I have 7 children. My wife delivers in the traditional birth home close to us. We relied on our farm for survival from where we raised an income of N4,000.00 in a day.

In another FGDs the respondents respond thus:

In our community, we do not have opportunities for white collar jobs, so our children have to move to town for employment. We don't have much awareness on family size control and some of our women who have

been involved in it complained of much health hazard that is why we are discouraged from it, and we cannot equally go to the hospital because our income cannot even carry our families talk less of paying medical bills.

In summary, findings gathered through the interview indicate that lack of family size control is as a result of belief system and illiteracy level of the people and it causes poor wealth generating avenue thus causing poverty in the areas. The above findings were equally affirmed by data generated during the focus group discussion.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Population growth has become a serious issue of global concern. Nigeria as a nation is witnessing population exploitation at an alarming rate, and this has affected livelihood in the rural areas leading to dwindling development and poverty in the area. Studies by Udom and Tahirih (2023) indicate that if nothing is done about it, the implication will be socio-economic crisis and poor life expectancies.

The study which was exploratory in nature identifies poor awareness, attachment to belief, religion and income level as some of the reasons why the rural people are not into population control. The study therefore revealed that with the dangers posed by population growth especially to our rural areas, the need to control the growth of population therefore becomes imperative thus the study recommends the following.

In order to maintain stability and address economic challenges, population control is eminent. Government should implement policies that will help her manage and regulate the growth of population for sustainable development. This approach should involve all stakeholders in creating awareness and educating families on the need to control the size of their population.

Secondly, since population growth increases the amount of resources extracted from the environment, the need to manage the growth in population becomes important in order to avoid the extinction of the environmental habitat in the rural areas. Having identified the fact that family size is a factor that influences the state of her livelihood. The study suggests that a manageable family size is important as it will reduce the burden of dependency and illiteracy. By this family size planning facilities should be extended to the rural communities to help them utilize the services.

The study also identifies that investment in female education especially in the rural areas where the citizens are poor will help to address problem of early marriage, create employment opportunities for the female child and by so doing reduces population growth.

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