

AN ASSESSMENT OF RURAL POPULATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ACHIEVING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT

Every society desire development that is sustainable. Sustainable development guarantees that the future generations have resources to fall back to. Population phenomenon plays a crucial role in actualizing this desire. Nigeria, which has a relatively young and large population can leverage on this potential and productive population and invest for national development and growth. Unfortunately, demographic composition of the country's population is far from articulating a transition of the potentials to real benefits. This is apparent because about 46.48 percent of the population resides in rural areas and although engaged in diverse income generating activities are substantially poor. In Akwa Ibom State, 72.66 percent of her over 5 million population resides in rural areas and are predominantly farmers. A greater proportion of the population comprises of persons in the cohort of 15-64 years, most of whom are jobless and poor. However, with the current fertility rate of 3.6 and low mortality rate as indicated by the recent national survey, attention over the achievement of demographic dividend becomes apparent. This study found that instead of the rural population being beneficial to the state, it is rather being left to chance without proper policies for guidance in achieving demographic dividends.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has enormous population potentials that can facilitate her developmental goals. Her population is the largest in Africa as well as having the largest economy in Africa yet an approximated 84 million Nigerians out of the 225 million current estimates are living below poverty line of one dollar, 25 cents (\$1.25) thus, regarded as the world's second largest poor population after India (World Bank 2022). Based on world meter estimate of Thursday 26th October 2023, Nigeria's population had reached two hundred and twenty-five million, four hundred and ninety-eight thousand six hundred and eighty-six (225,498,686) and still

counting. This represents 2.78 percent of the total world population and ranks Nigeria as the 6th on the list of countries by population.

The estimate from world meter shows that 55.9 percent of the population of Nigeria is urban (120,696,717) people and approximately a median age of 17.2 years. Further inquiry into the population phenomenon shows that life expectancy is 53.87 years, total fertility rate of 5.1 birth per woman, infant mortality of 70.6 per 1000 live births and under age 5 mortality at 109.1 per 1000 live births. Studies (Canning, Raja, and Yazbeck, 2015, Weny, Snow & Zhang, 2017). They have revealed that with the relatively young population, the size of the country's economy and natural resources that abound in the country, the political leadership should galvanize them into productively growing the economy and also aim at achieving demographic dividend.

However different schools of thought have agreed that prognosis of attaining demographic dividend in the country is good if the right political leadership could be put in place to harness other resources for sustainable development. The growing youthful population and the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria have been a cause for concern. Naturally going by the cycle of life, the period (15-30) is usually boisterous, adventurous and energetic. The median age in Nigeria puts at 17.2 years means that a lot of her population can be found in the age cohorts considered to be youthful. This is the appropriate time to channel such human resources into productive ventures to avoid restiveness and wastages of other form of human resources.

Akwa Ibom State is considered a civil service state. a label which tries to describe the lack of opportunities in the formal or cooperate establishments or industries other than the civil services. Perhaps this lack of industries plays a major role in the high unemployment rate and high rate of poverty that currently characterized the state. These variables alongside others impact on rural-urban migration, leading to urbanization which have detrimental effects on the people and the environment. In May 2007, the government of Akwa Ibom State declared the twelve (12) years of basic education from primary to secondary schools freed and compulsory. This policy surged the enrollments in schools, and the two subsequent administrations that follow, have continued with his policy.

For sixteen (16) unbroken years now, and still counting this policy of free and compulsory basic education have surged the unemployment level in the state. This is without a corresponding increase in employment opportunities, that can articulate increased productivity, personal sowings and re-investment which are requirements for Demographic dividend. This study seeks to assess the implications of Akwa Ibom State harnessing her population to achieve demographic dividend to the end that she can attend sustainable development. Our study objectives are to assess to educational level in rural Akwa Ibom state, to assess fertility rate in the rural area of Akwa Ibom state, to assess employment rate in the rural area of the state and to assess the level of savings in the rural Akwa Ibom State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The global interest on development is now focused on sustainable development. The narrative of sustainable development centers on exploring the earth's resources for mankind to avoid wastages as much as possible and preserving the resources for future generations. Achieving demographic dividend therefore, is a good trajectory for sustainable development. Many developed countries have entered the economic terrain where working population (15-65) years are employed and also outnumber the dependent population (0-14 years and 65+). Cuaresma and Lutz (2014) observe that earlier scholars paid little attention to the role of

population on the emerging development of South East Asia Unit as pointed by the works of Bloom and Williamson (1998) when the term “demographic gift” was used to describe the emerging economic prosperity catalyzed by the demographic transition in the region. A condition that saw change in demographic structure leading to a very high labour force. Bloom and several other scholars later popularized the term “demographic dividend” in the twilight of the twentieth century to explain observed economic prosperity catalyzed by population transition.

Demographic dividends do not just accrue automatically to the society, there are drivers in the state that make it happen. Foley (2022) asserts that capital investments are required for a country to achieve demographic dividend. The investments done in this wise can also play a major role in determining if the population transition can be harnessed into an economic gain or allowed to go to waste. Woldegiorgis (2023) observe that Africa’s fertility is still high, but it is beginning to decline which can usher Africans into demographic dividend. A number of factors have been identified to drive the attainment of demographic dividend in different societies. Bloom and Williamson (1998), Ssewamala (2014) and Woldegiorgis (2023) have identified the following: quality of rural population and economic institution: The achievement of demographic dividend depends to a large extent on the dynamics and functionality of social institutions. Similarly, the dynamics and level of functionality of the societal institutions are determined by the quality of the human population. Kenton (2020) asserts that the demographic dividend is neither automatic nor guaranteed but depends on whether the government implements the right policies in the area of health, education, economy and governance.

An earlier submission by Ssewamala (2014) indicate that developing economies especially sub-Saharan Africa, the middle East and North African may stand the risk of losing the demographic dividend if the right social, economic and human capital polices were not put in place and fully implemented. He strongly advocated for policies that would strengthen economic institutions to enhance contractual saving held at formal financial institutions and insurance of financial investments. Writers on this subject have generally stated that the role of governance as a driver of demographic dividend cannot be over emphasized. This is because governance plays the role of providing policies for other drivers that would enhance demographic dividend. Governance can be seen as the nexus that galvanizes other drivers in the process of attending demographic dividend (Bloom, World Bank, 2019, Cuaresma, Lutz & Sanderson, 2014; Woldegiorgis, 2023).

African still needs increased investment in family planning. Based on the assertions of Gribble and Bremner (2012) that two out of three women who wants to avoid pregnancy for at least two years are not using a modern family planning method. Though Nigeria has experienced declines in mortality and fertility, the rate still remains high. Omolase, Faturoti and Omoase (2009) argue that there is a high level of awareness on family planning but the uptake of modern contraceptive is low. Also, recent studies on this subject reveal that the trend has not changed (WHO, 2022; Chmielowsak & Jackson, 2022; Akamike, Okedo-Alex, Eze, Ezeamosike & Uneke,(2020). Notable impediments to the uptake of modern contraceptive are systemic and include poor infrastructure both at facilities and logistics, acute shortage of health workers and resources allocation are generally considered abysmal. The rate at which new mouths are added to the existing population has a greater impact on the quality of the human population. There are persistent gaps in the implementation of family planning polices in Nigeria that has led to delay in achieving the desired TFR which is one of the crucial components of demographic dividend (Chi, Menezes, Rusativa *et al*, 2017).

Studies have shown that improved maternal and child health care translate into low mortality for children and adult. The provision and seamless access to pre and post natal health care services to both mother and child in area such as safe motherhood initiatives, vaccinations and nutrition programs including breast feeding and proper/timely response to maternal and childhood illnesses (WHO, 2022; Weny, Snow and Zhaw, 2017) according to scholars will encourage smaller family size. Most often, it is the uncertainty of child survival that encourage parent to go for more number of child (Ahmed, Cruz, Quillin & Scheppekens, 2016; Weny, Nown & Zhang, 2017). The implication of improved maternal and child health will be fewer children and healthy workforce.

Though studies have shown that sub-Saharan Africa has recorded increased primary and secondary schools' enrolments in the past decades, Canning, Raja and Yazbeck (2015) observe that the region still falls short of the MDG targets of schooling. The concern of education is because the quality of the population can be enhanced by the level of education of attainment of such population. Guaresma, Lutz and Sanderson (2014) see education as a key driver of demographic dividend because every aspect of the demographic dividend is really an "educational dividend". From their submission, improved education translate to higher skills level of the work force which is directly proportionate to higher income level, better quality of governance and even more importantly, female education which is the key factor in demographic dividend narrative, because it induces fertility decline and reduces age dependency ratio. Education plays the role of a catalyst, as it enhances better and speedy uptake new technologies (World Bank, 2019; Kenton, 2022; Foley, 2022).

The empowerment of women in any given population, is always beneficial to the entire population in the long run. It has the capability to accelerate demographic transition that will spur demographic dividend and also reduce gender inequality. Part of the discuss of demographic dividend is to harness and utilize as much as possible the working population. The inclusion of women into the formal economic activities would translate into greater economic benefits for all. In the traditional African Society, the role of the women was limited to household chores, especially to take care of home; the children and husbands. This traditional role of women is one of the contributory factors to higher fertility since it encourages early marriage.

But when women are empowered, chances are that more will be educated and skilled for the labour force, earn income and also save. In fact, for Foley (2022), the empowerment of women begins with sex and health education. Formal education of the female child and skill acquisition is also a positive native towards accelerating the demographic dividend (Zhou, Deng, Li and Wang, 2023; Gribble & Bremner, 2012). A large labour force that is more than the number of dependents is the population is key to achievement of demographic dividend. Characteristically, a labour force is made up of healthy, educated and high-income earners (Bloom, Kuhn and Prettnner, 2017; Ahmed, Cruz, Quillin & Schellekens, 2016).

Ssewamala (2014) notes that to optimally draw the benefits from the labour force, the female folks should not be constrained. Writing further, Ssewamala (2014) highlight the important of saving and other investments to serve as assets for the future. But this, in his opinion is obtainable when jobs are created and the working population are adequately educated. Guaresma, Lutz, and Sanderson (2014) argue that the size and quality of the workforce (in terms of education attainment is what makes the difference in achieving demographic dividend and not just the structure of the population. This is because the quality affects the economy most in terms of earnings, savings and investments.

METHODOLOGY

The area of study of this work is Akwa Ibom State and Akwa Ibom State is one of the coastal states in Nigeria located in the south-south geo-political region of Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State is situated in the rain forest region vegetation. Akwa Ibom is bordered by the east by Cross river state, by the West by Rivers State. Two distinct rivers the cross river by the east and the Imo river by the west are the distinguishing and natural boundaries that separates her from the afore mentioned neighbours. In the state is bordered by the Atlantic where the two rivers; cross river and Imo river the two rivers the demarcate her from her neighbours empty into the Atlantic while in the north, she is bordered by Abia State. Akwa Ibom State is made up thirty-one (31) local government areas with Uyo Local Government as her capital.

The occupation of the people that resides closest to the water bodies are predominantly fishing and aquaculture while those upland are predominantly crop farming. Trading is common amongst the people and population of the state is estimated to be over five (5) million and a larger portion to the tune of over 70 percent to be rural dwellers. The focus of this study is on the identify areas of the state. The demographic transition theory is the theoretical consideration for this work. This theory presents four stages of demographic transition and four different phases of social development based on the demographic stage in which they are. Demographers are of the consensus that the population whose working-age population (15-64) is larger than the dependent-age is usually the ideal stage where development should not be left to chance as proper utilization of this stage brings about demographic dividend. This study target population was the young rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State. Respondents were purposively drawn from rural communities in Akwa Ibom State. The selection was purposive to represent each of the senatorial district in the State.

RESULTS

Data for this study were collected from respondents with the following background characteristics. This work adopted the descriptive method. Focused groups were used to generate the data for analysis.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by sex:

SEX	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Male	193	56.10
Female	151	43.90
TOTAL	344	100.00

The table above shows that 56.10 percent of the respondent are male while 43.90 of the respondents are female.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by age

AGE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
15-19	20	5.81
20-24	48	13.95
25-29	69	20.06
30-34	72	20.93
35-39	63	18.31
40-44	37	10.76

45-49	19	5.52
50-54	16	4.65
55-59	-	-
60-64	-	-
Total	334	100

The age distribution of respondents shows that those in the age cohort of 15-19 were 20 which represents 5.81 percent, 20-24 were 48 which represents 13.95 percent 35.39 were 63 which represents 18.31 percent, 40-44 were 37 which is 10.76 percent, 45-49 were 19 represent 5.52 and 50-54 were 16 and represent 4.65 percent. Two cohorts 55-59 and 60-64 would not be represented because in most communities these cohort were unwilling to participate.

Table 3: Distribution respondents by last Academic certificate

CERTIFICATE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
FSLC	6	1.74
SSCE 'O' Level	299	86.91
OND, NCE	36	10.46
BA, BSC, HND +	3	0.09
TOTAL	344	100

This table shows that 6 respondents were holders of first school leaving certificate representing 1.74, 299 respondents are holders of SSCE 'O' level representing 86.91 percent. Higher qualification is represented by OND/NCE holders were 36 (10.46 %) and Bachelor degree/HND or above were 3 (0.09 %).

Table 4: Distribution respondents by marital status

MARITAL STATUS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Single	179	50.03
Married	91	26.45
Widowed	11	3.20
Divorced	23	6.69
Separated	23	6.69
Cohabited	17	4.94
Total	344	100

The marital statuses showed the following 174 respondents (5.03%) are single, 91 respondents (26.45%) are married, 11 respondents (3.20%) are widow while 23 respondents

(6.69%) are divorced. Similarly, 23 respondents representing 6.69% are separated and 17 respondents representing 4.94 are Cohabit.

Table 5: Distribution respondent by employment

EMPLOYMENT TYPE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENT
Paid employment	65	18.90
Self-employment	121	35.17
Unemployment	158	45.93
Total	344	100

This table shows that 65 of the respondents (18.90%) are on paid employment 121 respondents (35.17%) are self-employed while 158 (45.93%) are unemployed.

Table 6: Distribution of respondent by family size

FAMILY SIZE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENT
1 to 3	178	51.75
4 to 5	101	29.37
6 to 8	51	14.83
9 +	14	1.07
Total	344	100

The table shows that 178 respondents or 51.75 percent of the respondent reside in a small household unit of 1-3 individuals. 101 respondents or 29.37 reside in a family unit of 4-5 individual. 51 respondents or 14.83 percent reside in a family unit of 6-8 individual. And 14 respondents or 1.07 percent reside in family unit of 9 and above individual.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Transition in population is considered a boost in actualizing demographic dividend. However, the quality of such population would serve as the needed catalyst for actualizing demographic dividend. From this study, the education level of the rural population of Akwa Ibom State is still largely at the basic level. Guaresma, Lutz and Sanderson (2014) argue that the quality of the population is determined by level of education. The findings from this study shows that the cross section of the rural area where this study was done has holders of a Bachelor's degree lower than 1% and about 10% of the rural residents hold qualification higher than the basic education.

The implication is that the needed man power at the rural level is still low. Findings also shows that the number of individuals in the household is decreasing (Gribble and Bremner, 2022) but it is not uncommon to see household with nine or more individuals. The decreasing

number of fertilities is really not as a result of the use of modern family planning (Omolase, Faturoti and Omolase, 2009) but as a survival strategy since the means of food production are getting leaner. Findings also show high level of unemployment and as such savings and other forms of investments are low. Kenton (2020) had revealed the importance of economic institutions to enhance contractual savings and investments. This is virtually nonexistence in the rural area of Akwa Ibom State.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Akwa Ibom State is experiencing a decline in fertility and the majority of her young population have attained the basic education. Though this might not be adequate but the government can take advantage of this and up-skill the young population in skills that will be relevant in today's reality. Deliberate policies should be implemented to capitalize an area of advantaged which will imply on working on areas of disadvantages such as job creation. Unemployment should be eliminated or reduced. Contractual savings and other financial education and investments should be encouraged through policies that will encourage assets building for the future. The quality of labour force should be improved on by make vocational education accessible. Education in the areas of technology will also make this goal of demographic dividend realizable.

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