

DEMOGRAPHIC PRESSURES AND THE STABILITY OF THE STATE
IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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A study of current literature and data on global demographic trends reveals two distinct patterns. In sub-Saharan Africa and much of the developing world, population continues to rise, while population has stabilized, is declining and ageing in much of the developed world. These demographic trends, left unchecked, hold serious implications for the stability and survival of the state in sub-Saharan Africa. This paper explores those implications and proposes recommendations to manage the rising problem.

In many ways this is a very difficult paper to write. There are no historical precedents for state failure due to its rising population and inadequate resources. As if that were not a difficulty enough, many before me have made predictions about population growth, mostly dire, which did not materialize. The population question has thus become like “crying wolf.” But this is a paper that deserves to be written and this topic *needs* to be kept in the public debate. “There are roughly as many humans alive now as existed cumulatively throughout all of the millennia prior to the Industrial Revolution” (Heinberg 2). Never before in human history has such a phenomenon developed: high population growth among those with dangerously low and further decreasing resources with which to accommodate the rising population. This is the trend we see in Africa.

The second component of my paper deals with state failure: On September 11, 2001, terrorists hi-jacked commercial aircraft and used them as projectiles, flying them into buildings that represented American economic and military power. They had been trained in Afghanistan and had received orders from a command center located in

Afghanistan – a failed state. Clearly, Afghanistan did not fail because of population trends. However, population trends *could* contribute to state failure and that is where this paper connects the two.

This paper raises questions about the implications of contemporary demographic trends for the stability of the state in sub-Saharan Africa? Sheer numbers, as in population size, does not usually cause disruptions in the developing world. It is rather the “skewing of the national age distribution...that often puts extreme pressure on the educational, health, sanitation and economic infrastructure.” (Nichiporuk 39)

Robert I. Rotberg, in a CIA discussion paper noted, “The decade since the end of the Cold War has witnessed a cascading plethora of state failure *mostly in Africa*, (italics mine) but also in Asia... [M]ore and more states are at risk and exhibiting acute signs of weakness and/or the likelihood of outright failure (1).” Sixteen of the twenty nations with the highest fertility rates in the world are located in sub-Saharan Africa (Nichiporuk).

THE SOURCES OF STATE FAILURE

Nation states usually fail when they are overwhelmed by internal violence and can no longer deliver positive political goods to their citizens. The government loses its credibility and legitimacy with its citizens (Rotberg 1). Various factors interact and cause states to fail. Some are historical while others dynamic and are occurring presently.

Inherent geographical, physical and economic constraints leave some states weaker than others and thus more susceptible to failure. A state’s ability to penetrate society, obtain and maintain the loyalty of its citizens is crucial to its survival.

The Foreign Policy Association and the Fund for Peace have created a failed states index with 12 indicators that point towards state failure. These indicators interact within the framework created by the three factors listed earlier: a colonial legacy, the Cold War and Globalization. The twelve indicators are:

- a) Mounting Demographic Pressures , b) Massive Movement of Refugees or Internally Displaced Persons Creating Complex Humanitarian Emergencies
- c) Legacy of Vengeance-seeking group or group paranoia, d) Chronic and Sustained Human Flight d) Uneven Economic Development Along Group Lines e) Sharp and or Severe Economic Decline f) Criminalization or Delegitimization of the State g) Progressive Decline of Public Services
- h) Suspension or Arbitrary Application of the Rule of Law and Widespread Violation of Human Rights, i) Security Apparatus Operates as a State Within a State, j) Rise of Factionalized Elites, k) Intervention of Other States or External Political Actors

A state, however, needs not possess all twelve indicators to fail. Some states, like India, have a colonial legacy, existed through the Cold War have embraced globalization without failing. Botswana, Mauritius, Mali and Malawi continue to face many of the problems associated with state failure, but have not failed (Rotberg, 20).

This paper will focus mainly on one of those indicators – population trends. Many of the other indicators will be discussed, but not in depth as will population.

POPULATION TRENDS

They will feature prominently where their interaction with each other or specifically with population warrants attention. Presently, the population of the world is growing at a rate of 1.2 percent per year. Around 74 to 76 million people are added each year. Population is projected to triple between this year and 2050 in the following countries: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger and Uganda. These countries are now among the world's poorest countries. Nine nations will account for half of the global increase in population in the next 45 years. In order of projected contribution, these countries are: India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bangladesh, Uganda, the U.S., Ethiopia and China (Cohen).

Four of these countries are found in Sub-Saharan Africa. Africa, which is the poorest and fastest growing continent, contains more than 650 million and that number is expected to triple by 2025. Kenya could expand from 25 to 77 million people, Tanzania from 27 to 84 million, the DRC from 36 to 99 million..." (Kennedy 25)

The population of the developed parts of the world is rising at a rate of 0.25 % annually while in the developing countries is rising at a rate of 1.46%, six times faster. The United Nations projects that there will be no significant change to this trend until 2050. By 2050, the population of the Global North would have been declining for 20 years while that of the Global South would still be rising at a rate of 0.4%. But what is note-worthy is that the least developed countries will still have an annual population growth rate of 1.2% (World Population Prospects: The 2002 Revision – Highlights).

The projected numbers point towards the likelihood of such problems in the next forty-five years. The Population Reference Bureau predicts that Africa's population could

reach 1 billion by 2050. Such an increase will be hard on countries that already barely provide basic necessities for their citizens.

Nigeria's neighbor Niger is a clear example of how a failing state can cause mass movement of people and thereby destabilize its neighbors. Niger continues to suffer from acute economic crisis and ranks 172 out of 173 countries on the United Nations Human Development index. Niger's fertility rate, however, is among the highest in world and according to the United Nations Population Fund, "population growth [in Niger] has overwhelmed the country's already poor human and natural resource base, resulting in an increase in the number of households lacking food security (UNFPA: Niger)."

More than a third of the girls in Niger have a child before age 17. In July 2005 images of starving children in Niger shocked the world. A quarter of its 12 million inhabitants needed food and children started dying.

The population growth rate of the entire sub-Saharan Africa will continue to rise until 2050. Between 1995 and 2000, 59 countries or areas (44 located in the Global North) were experiencing fertility levels below 2.1 children per woman. At the same time 133 countries or areas (132 in the Global South) experienced total fertility levels at or above 2.1. Among these countries 47 experienced total fertility levels at or above 5 children per woman, and majority of these countries are considered least developed countries (World Population Prospects: The 2002 Revision, 8). The report adds further details: There are 24 countries with total fertility levels of 6 children or higher... and the continued rapid growth of their population poses serious challenges to their future development. Not surprisingly, these names of these 24 countries read like a who's who among the world's troubled spots. They are: Afghanistan, Benin, Burkina

Faso, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia (8). Mali and Malawi remain weak and very poor. They countries lack easily exploitable resources, geographical hindrances and decades of despotism. Changes in the climate could hit both Malawi and Mali particularly hard, also (Rotberg, 20). But why does population continue to rise in this part of the world?

WHY POPULATION GROWS

There is a direct relationship between poverty and fertility rates. Driven by an instinct to survive, poor families have more children for practical reasons. The children would help with farm work or earn extra cash working elsewhere. These regions of the world also experience high infant and child mortality rates. Having many children ensures that those who die young will be replaced (Weatherby et al 73). Richard Benedick writes that by 2050, the individual populations of Afghanistan, Sudan and Yemen will exceed that of France. Tanzania's population will exceed Germany's. Yet most of these countries are already face political or ecological problems. For an example Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen already face water shortages at 72.4 million, 40 million plus and 20 million plus people respectively. By 2050, their populations are expected to be 169, 59, 59 million people respectively.

Left unchecked, these trends could result in mass movements of people in their respective regions. Without any significant armed conflict nation states may exhibit a

complete inability to provide basic services to their population or collect revenue to run the government. The state becomes incapable of projecting any significant power within its territory or embark on any activity to contribute to the welfare of the majority of its population. However, state weakness can itself be the cause of the rise of armed militias or for the official armed forces to break off into semi-autonomous bands. As such groups perceive that the government is losing its control, they try to fill the power vacuum. The presence of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations augmenting governments' efforts in providing vital services help prevent the total break down of these amenities.

THE ROLE OF NGO'S & IGO'S

In pursuit of co-active peace and humanitarian objectives international and non-governmental organizations remain active in the least developed regions of the world providing vital basic services in the areas of food security, health and education. Their efforts are shored up by foreign aid from developed countries. This combination is integral to the continuing performance of the state among the world's poor. Imagining a world in which such efforts did not exist is at best troubling. A clear example of this was UNICEF's polio eradication campaign. Since its inception in 1988, the Global Eradication Initiative successfully reduced polio transmission by more 99 percent (UNICEF). I was in Liberia when the campaign was relaunched in Liberia. Several NID's (national immunization days) were proclaimed and UNICEF workers went from door to door immunizing infants. This campaign was beyond the resources of the Liberian

government. Recently, under protection from a 15,000 strong United Nations peace keeping force, Liberia conducted its first elections since its 14 year old civil war ended.

Through its Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has projects in over one hundred countries implementing programs to eliminate hunger, undernourishment and poverty. The SPFS assists national governments and regional organizations to run efficient and focused food security programs. It also works with regional organizations to develop food security capacity in trade policy (FAO - The Special Programme for Food Security) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees provides basic food, clothing and tents for refugees and internally displaced persons during natural and man-induced disasters. All of these agencies and numerous non-governmental organizations continue to supplement the efforts of government and in more ways than one support the state and brace its fall. One can safely conclude, that should these organizations fail to provide these services, the regions where they are most needed would be in crisis.

This brings us to the juncture of the confluence we do not want to see occur. International organizations, specialized agencies of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations are financed by the world's wealthiest nations. For these IGO's and NGO's to exist and function, the economies of the world's wealthiest nations must continue to perform well. Population growth in much of the developed world, with the United States being the exception, has either remained constant or in some cases declined.

DECLINING POPULATION & ITS IMPACTS

But the population is also aging. By 2050, large portions of the population would be elderly and no longer able to contribute to the economy although, would be in need of social security amenities. The world's industrialized nations will face pressures to increase domestic spending when the work force will be considerably smaller. Under pressure from domestic needs, their contributions to International and non-governmental organizations will decline. However, if demographic trends continue in the least developed parts of the world, at a time when contributions are decline, demand for the services provided by IGO's and NGO's will be increasing. Thus we see two trends with serious implication of the survival of the state and the maintenance of order in the international state system.

In recent decades, the fear of rising population has been reserved for developing countries while developed countries are now focusing on the so-called 'birth dearth'. In a background paper for the United Nations Expert Group Meeting, the experts write, "In response to very low levels of fertility in a growing number of countries, and the social and economic consequences of resultant population ageing and the potential for population decline, more countries are expressing concern about low rates of population growth." (2) Most of these countries are developed countries.

In his article, The Global Baby Bust, which appeared in May/June 2004 edition of *Foreign Affairs*, Phillip Longman asserts that no industrialized still produces enough children to sustain its population in the long run or even to prevent rapid ageing of its population. Germany is on track to lose the equivalent of the "current population of what was once East Germany over the next half-century. Russia's population is already contracting by three-quarters of a million' annually." (2)

As is the case with rising population trends in places like Africa, Asia and Latin America, this decline in birth rates and rise in ageing population is not limited to Germany. Predictions are for a stabilized or shrinking population all over the world in the next 50 years, but with a greater effect in the industrialized world. This population will be much older and at the global level, the proportion of those over 60 will increase from the current percentage (10) to around 22 percent in 2050. The most extreme levels of ageing will be reached in the Pacific OECD countries, mainly Japan (Lutz et al, 543). 51 countries in the more economically developed regions of the world are expected to lose population between 2005 and 2050. Italy is projected to drop from 58 million to 51 million, Japan from 128 million to 112 and Germany from 83 million to 79 million (Cohen, 50). Population decline and ageing will pose major political, social and economic problems.

Population ageing will put a strain on government spending and depress government revenues. Public spending on pensions, in Germany for an example, is expected to swell from the current 10.3 percent of GDP to 15.4 percent by 2040. This is even more staggering when one considers that the number of workers available to support each retiree will shrink from 2.6 to 1.4.

Revenue will decrease noticeably. Economies grow because people buy things and more people create more demand for goods. The decline in a country's population is also a decline in its number of buyers. Also, GDP is the sum of the labor force multiplied by average output per worker, as workers decline so does the potential for growth. One could counter this problem by raising the retirement age, making people work longer. But health habits pose a challenge to this.

There is declining fitness among the general population (Longman, 3). A recent survey of the Higher Education Research Institute reports that Berea College Freshman, *like their counterparts across the country*, are less likely to report maintaining a healthy diet and exercising. This is not an anomaly, according to Longman, the same declines in population fitness can now be seen in many other nations and may overwhelm public health benefits. The International Association for the Study of obesity reports alarming figures for Europe. Thirty-five percent of Italian children are overweight. Forty percent of French men are overweight or obese. For Germany, that number is seventy percent. Government expenditure on health care is expected to rise, not decline despite any technological breakthrough in medicine (4). This may or may not be true, what is certain however, is that ageing and declining population means there will be more people drawing benefits than paying into it. More government expenditure will go towards ageing population since they will, as a bloc, heavily influence politics because of their numbers.

What does this have to do with the stability of the state? Global ageing will affect the global power balance. As populations decline in the industrialized world, maintaining a strong military would become a problem. With most families having one or two children, every soldier's death would mean a devastating loss to his/her family. The ability to project any significant force outside their borders will be greatly curtailed. Interventions like American presence in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo or British presence in Sierra Leone will become rare. Increased spending on old age or disability pension and health care will greatly reduce these countries ability to maintain current levels of military spending, be it to maintain fleets or invest in research. Recruiting personnel to

man the borders and maintain law and order within them will be increasingly hard. We must, however, remember that the state in the developing world will be facing its own challenges from a burgeoning population. If these states fail, terrorist organizations like al Qaeda could set up camps. Reductions in the military power of industrialized nations increase their vulnerability to attacks from such organizations. Diverging demographic trends pose grave concerns for the stability of the state.

RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM

There is no panacean response to the issue of demographic pressures, but because they could lead to state failure, they need to be addressed. As argued earlier in this paper that there is a direct link between poverty and fertility levels. Intentional investment into poverty reduction will be crucial to slowing population growth. Poverty reduction is at the core of managing population growth in sub-Saharan Africa. Heavy investment must be made into removing the incentives for larger families. Government subsidies in the form of seeds, efficient farming methods, fertilizers and if need be a price index for locally grown commodities will go a long way.

Trade will be crucial to poverty reduction, as will foreign direct investment (FDI). Even after all of China's reforms, it was as FDI that lifted the economy. Africans must first invest in creating an environment that is hospitable to trade and investment. Governments must first intervene in society in such a way that they gain the respect and trust of their citizens. This means establishing and maintaining an accountable, regulatory framework. They must work to democratize their system with smooth transitions and

regular elections. They will have to decentralize their governance structure, strengthen the legislature and establish an independent judiciary.

The eradication or reduction of corruption in the public sector cannot be overemphasized. Continued, prevalent corruption will only aggravate the problem. Corruption would misallocate resources and lower the return on any gains made on trade and investment. It also creates important uncertainties that engender distrust and impede investment. Mobutu Sese Seko of the former Zaire, is reported to have publicly told public servants to steal, but with moderation. Such an attitude is unacceptable and must not be tolerated (Weder).

The state is still the primary actor and much of the recommendations place the onus on the state. But intergovernmental organizations and regional organizations will also play a prominent role. The state's effort must be complemented by regional programs directed at achieving similar ends. Regional organizations and the state must attempt to influence family planning through conventions and laws protecting women's rights. They must support educational and informational programs about birth control. Universal reproductive health care must be an objective toward which they strive with the assistance of intergovernmental organizations. Addressing the problem of population growth in sub-Saharan Africa will have to begin with the place of women in society. By providing adequate primary and reproductive health care, women would no longer have many children to ensure that some survive. Women's education must also become a priority. An educated female population would try to hold jobs. When women have jobs, they would have smaller families. In countries where on average women do not have secondary education, the average woman has seven children. In countries where about 40

per cent of all women have had a secondary education the average drops to three children (Cartledge 3).

But we must also reconsider the Chinese approach and open the debate on modifying and applying it to countries with high growth rates and low or declining resources. The United Nations has made several declarations since 1966 affirming the principle that “determination of the number and spacing of children is a basic human right of parents (Bennett, 337).” These declarations prevent the state from interfering with parents’ desire to have many or few children. Since, however, the greater part of the population growth will occur in the regions of the world least able to absorb large increments of people, the problem will still have to be addressed. It threatens sustainable development and may cause further deterioration in levels of living and quality of life (Population Issues: Advancing Sustainable Development). The right of the child to a “decent quality of life”, must be considered as is the right of parents to determine the number and spacing of children. It is not reasonable to defend a mother’s right to have five children only to watch the five children starve or live in wretched conditions. Children born and living in poverty make excellent recruiting targets for rebel groups and other organizations intent on destabilizing society.

That demographic trends is a problem cannot be debated, it is however our responsibility to adequately respond to them before they become dangerous conflagration. One of the indicators of state failure – the presence of vengeance seeking groups or group paranoia is already beginning to affect Nigeria and have negative impact on energy price worldwide. While disappointment with the Federal government has been the driving force behind the militants’ attacks on oil companies, population growth also

plays a role. As the numbers of Nigeria's minority tribes living in the Delta increase, competitors for limited resources increase and their perception of the Federal government's failure to respond is heightened. While we cannot conclude that Nigeria may fail, Nigeria has many indicators of state failure. Demographic pressures on their own may not cause a state to fail, but it aggravates existing conditions and lead to failure. A medium power and regional stabilizer like Nigeria's failure will be crucial not only to the West African sub-region but to the global economy and international system because of Nigeria's petroleum exporting role.

Failed states pose problems for the international system because they can spark humanitarian disasters and prompt large movements of people within states and across national borders. State failure also provides recruiting ground for nihilist organizations among disenfranchised, unemployed and disenchanted young people. Failed states also provide such terrorist organizations the freedom to plan, train and direct terrorism. This poses a very grave threat to the international system because a very small number of people can be successful in causing great havoc to the international economy. The World Bank estimates that the attacks on September 11 increased the number of people living in poverty by 10 million (14). It becomes clear then that the sources of state failure must be addressed. But state failure is not the only reason this problem should be addressed. Rising population without the resources to accommodate them could lead to large-scale death and as human beings we have a responsibility to each other.

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