

# Chapter 25

## An Overview of Population Growth and Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

**Vincent Sebastian Pande**

*Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU), Tanzania*

**Neema Penance Kumburu**

*Moshi Co-operative University, Tanzania*

### ABSTRACT

*Development efforts in several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are harmed by a combination of many factors, high rates of population growth being among of them. Despite the strong links between population and sustainable development, these issues were not a priority in broader development policies and strategies in SSA. Population and sustainable development had been often addressed separately at policy and programme levels. Despite the fact that decision makers in these countries recognize the importance of population issues for sustainable development, these issues are rarely worked on together, limiting the payoff that could result from integrating the two. This chapter, therefore, re-examines and relates these two concepts to see their compatibility and provides a more realistic approach in converting population growth into economic gains for future development of SSA countries and Africa in general.*

### INTRODUCTION

Population growth is one of the key factors to consider when thinking about sustainable development. The strong population growth is mainly caused by the high birth rate and the resulting increase in the number of young people. At the same time, improved in medical care and decline in mortality rate can result into more children grow up (Mutunga *et.al.*, 2012). These conditions still exist in many African countries. Studies indicate that the fastest growing population is in Sub-Saharan Africa despite the large mortality rate caused by AIDS (United Nations, 2011). Here, the high population growth can be connected

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to all of the negative structure characteristics of under development. Since the population in Africa and SSA countries in particular grows the fastest, there is hardly a development policy discussion that does not begin with a population problem and ends with the apocalyptic horror and catastrophe scenarios that involve a population explosion. This creates fear because many see this to be the main cause of the feared global match from the poor regions to the prosperous regions of the world.

Population situation in many African countries contribute to or detract from their chances of realizing the goals of development, not only for the current generation but also for the future generations (Herrmann, 2012). The link between population growth and sustainable development is particularly critical for Africa. Statistically, it shows that world population has increased by 2 billion people over the past 25 years, from 5.3 billion in 1990 to 7.3 billion in 2015. Although population growth rates have slowed, the world's population is still growing by an additional 81 million people per year. With the exception of Europe, where total population is projected to decrease by slightly less than 1 percent by 2030, all other regions are projected to grow by at least 10 percent over the next 15 years. Africa, long the poorest and least developed continent, will account for more than 40 percent of the absolute increase in population so that, by 2030, the region will account for nearly one fifth of the world's total population (United Nations, 2015). Sub-Saharan Africa alone has around 900 million people and it is projected that by 2025 and 2050 this number will grow to 1.2 and 2 billion respectively. With an average population growth rate of more than 2 percent for most countries, the region has the fastest growing population in the world. Of the 2.4 billion people who are projected to be added to the world by 2050, 46 percent will be born in Sub-Saharan Africa. The region will contribute 77 percent of the total increase in global population by 2100 (Unies, 2017).

Population growth in Sub-Saharan Africa is manifested from two dimensions; micro and macro levels (Garenne, 2016). At micro level of individuals and families, high rates of population growth are associated with high dependency ratios and low investment in the human capital of children and young adults. At macro level, high rates of population growth hinder investment in both human and physical capital formation, and exert pressure on the environment and often fragile resource base (Basten *et al.*, 2011). Despite the strong links between population and sustainable development, these issues are not a priority in broader development policies and strategies rather are rarely worked on together in most of SSA countries (Ohadike, 1996). This is to say that population and development are often addressed separately at policy and programme levels.

Despite that SSA is relatively rich in natural resources, still development strategies and programmes pursued have not always been in harmony with the objective of ensuring decent living standard for population. For instance, rapid population growth as one of the key factors has seriously damaged the quality of SSA's environment and the life of its population (Sherbinin *et al.*, 2007). In absolute terms, about two-thirds of SSA's agricultural lands are already seriously degraded. At the same time, in view of social realm, there is a big gap between economic and social well being (Jayne *et al.*, 2003). The question is what can be done by SSA to convert population growth into economic gains? Specifically, to what extent does rapid population growth make it more difficult to provide essential social services for people? What are the implications of higher population growth to the development efforts of SSA? To what extent poor living limit the freedom of people on reproductive health decision making? What strategies need to be adapted to ensure a balance between population and development? To answer these questions, government, donors and civil society need to invest more in population and development, to address the two issues together in policies and programmes, and to build the technical capacity to develop programmes and research.

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