Population Programmes and Their Implications for Poverty Reduction in Indonesia and Nigeria, 1966–1999

Akinyinka Akinyoade

Introduction

This paper assesses the contribution of population policy and programmes to the divergence in poverty levels between Nigeria and Indonesia in the period 1966–1999. These two dates marked the span of military regimes (Suharto's in Indonesia, 1966–1998; seven military leaders in Nigeria) and the transition to democratic governance in 1999. Primary attention is given to the different institutional set-up for population policy formulation (Isaacs et al., 1985) and implementation in the two countries. The study of their divergence borrows from works of Bevan et al. (1999) and Lewis (2007), which have explained the post-1970 economic divergence of the two countries from a policy perspective.

The nexus between population growth and development has been explored among others by Benneh (1990), Leete (1991), Eltigani (2001), Karim (2004), Szirmai (2005), and HPCR (2006). Common to all the aforementioned scholars is the fact that the content of population policy and its contribution to reduction in poverty levels was virtually untouched. Particularly in regard to the divergence in development trajectories of Nigeria and Indonesia, Tirtosudarmo (2009) and McNicoll (2009) alluded to the potential impact of the population factor, but not specifically to the differential adoption and implementation of population policies and the implications for poverty reduction in the two countries. McNicoll's analysis was limited to an examination of legacy factors that affect fertility (initial stock of natural and human capital, existing physical infrastructure, inherited
economic and political institutions, family and household organizations, kinship systems and community structure, belief systems—as they influence agency—and aspects of public administration and local government organization). This study discusses the importance of standard population policy as a driver of the fertility transition that played a significant role in sustaining poverty reduction in Indonesia and vice versa in Nigeria. As an alternative proposition to McNicoll (2009), it argues that the implementation of standard population policy in Indonesia in the 1970s brought profound changes to legacy factors that in turn positively influenced processes of socio-economic development. Thus, this study offers a hypothetical alternative direction for Nigeria's socio-economic development if similar population programme options—like the ones in Indonesia—had been pursued in the same period.

The Population Factor

Nigeria's population grew from barely 50 million at independence in 1960 to about 125 million people in 1999. Within the same period, Indonesia's population doubled from approximately 100 million to 200 million people. In absolute numbers, when compared with Nigeria, Indonesia's population may represent a larger developmental burden. However, a population problem arises not from a population's size but from its rate of growth (Akinyoade, 2007). Nigeria annual rate of population growth is now at 2.4%, having reached highs of over 3% in the 1970s and 1980s (Figure 7.1). If we project forward, based on current annual growth rate, the two countries' populations could be on a par by 2050. The implication of Nigeria's growth rate is that it is currently adding some 3.5 million persons annually; even in the face of the decline in national fertility levels, the annual increase would still be almost 3 million in 2050, with implications for family and national dependency burden.

In addition, Indonesia's fertility transition started in the 1970s, and by the 1980s fertility rates fell close to replacement level. In Nigeria, fertility levels remained high, at about seven children per woman in the 1970s, until the later part of 1980s when a slight decline was observed; fertility transition began later, in the first years of the twenty-first century, with regional differences clearly marked, as depicted in the 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) records (five children per woman in 2003).

It is also interesting to note that a simultaneous decline in poverty rate and a rise in per capita income occurred in Indonesia at the time