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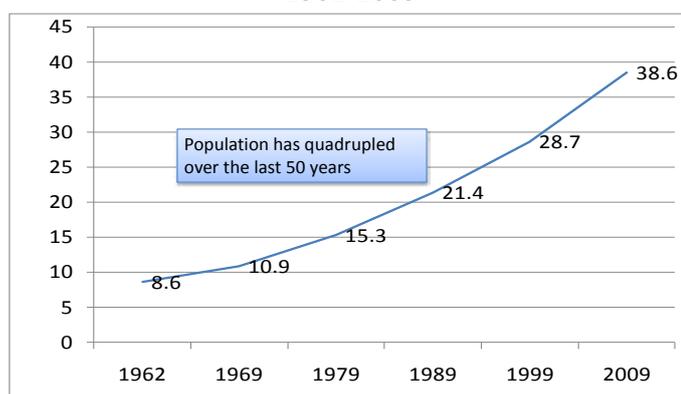
Reaping Socio-Economic Benefits from Kenya's Population

Kenya's rapidly growing population has largely been considered as a strain on the country's development efforts. With the ongoing population pressure due to the high demand for social services and natural resources, it is imperative that appropriate action be taken to slow down the pace of population increase while at the same time enhancing socio-economic development. Some countries, especially in South East Asia, that were in Kenya's situation have managed to turn their once rapidly growing populations into vehicles for socio-economic transformation. Kenya's population which is characterized by a large labor force can also be used to bring about socio-economic transformation of the country if more gainful employment opportunities are created while the pace of population growth is decreased. This brief seeks to highlight what Kenya can do to reap lasting benefits from her large population.

Kenya's Rapid Population Change

At independence in 1963, Kenya's population was estimated to be 9 million. By 2009, the country's population had reached 38.6 million as shown in Figure 1. This represented more than a four-fold increase in the population size in a period of less than 50 years signifying a rapid growth. Figure 2 shows that the country's population has been growing at an average rate of 3 percent every year. In recent years, Kenya's population has been increasing by about 1 million people annually. The main factors responsible for the rapidly increasing population are high birth and low death rates¹.

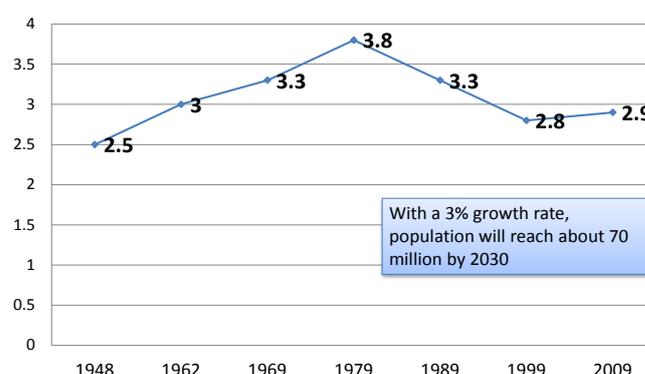
Figure 1: Population Trends in Kenya, (Millions) 1962-2009



Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics

A notable feature of Kenya's population increase is the change in the distribution of the population by age groups. Table 1 shows that between 1969 and 2009, the population of children below the age of 15 years declined from 48 to 43 percent of the country's total population. Over the same period, the population of the youth (15-24 years) increased from 18 percent to about 21 percent, those in the age group 25-59 years increased from 28 percent to slightly above 31 percent, while the elderly population (60+ years) declined from 5.4 to 5 percent². Despite these changes, Kenya's population remains youthful because the population

Figure 2: Annual Growth Rate (%) 1948 - 2009



Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics

of children below 15 years is far greater than 35 percent of the total population (a population whose children below 15 years are less than 35 percent is considered to be an ageing population otherwise it is youthful). These changes in the composition of the population have contributed to changes in the level of demand for education, health, and social security services as well as opportunities for employment and income generation.

Table 1: Trends in Percentage Distribution of Population by Age (1969-2009)

Age Group	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009
0-14	48.3	48.3	47.8	43.7	42.9
15-24	18.1	20.1	20.0	21.8	20.6
25-59	28.2	26.8	27.3	29.2	31.4
60+	5.4	4.6	4.8	4.7	5.0

Population and Development Interrelationship

The size and growth rate of a population can either constrain or facilitate the socio-economic development of a country. A huge population that is growing much faster than the economy would lead to a situation where a country's resources are stretched to the limit in providing social services such as health, education, housing, and water at the expense of economic investments that would create employment and income generation opportunities. In addition to this, such a population would exert a lot of pressure on natural resources including land for settlement and agriculture, trees for construction and fuel, and water for domestic and industrial purposes. Other threats from this population may include environmental pollution and degradation that could lead to spread of diseases and reduced food production. The cumulative outcome of this is a diminished quality of life for the population.

On the other hand, a population that is growing less rapidly can create opportunities for economic investments resulting from savings that would have otherwise been used to largely cater for social needs if the population was growing more rapidly. These investments could in turn create income and employment opportunities for the youth and working population (15-64 years) thereby contributing to improvements in the quality of life for the entire population. It is with this realization in mind that some countries in South East Asia, referred to as the 'Asian Tigers', directed their efforts at reducing the population growth rate while at the same time making investments that would create employment and income generating opportunities for the huge working population. By doing this, these countries were able to take advantage of their huge working age population, especially youths, to drastically improve economic performance and consequently the quality of life for its citizens³. For example Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand now have an average of less than 3 children per woman while Kenya's average is 5 children. The income per person in these Asian countries is now at least twice that of Kenya. In the 1960s these 'Asian Tigers' had similar development indicators with Kenya but over the years they have managed to improve while Kenya has lagged behind.

One of the key factors that helped the 'Asian Tigers' to transform their economies is the huge working age population mainly occasioned by a large number of youths. This working population was seen in terms of its potential to drive economic progress and increase incomes at both national and household levels. In order to utilize this opportunity, the Governments of the 'Asian Tigers' invested heavily in improving the quality of labor force, modernization of agriculture, and improving social services such as education, health and housing⁴. These coupled with the campaign to have smaller family sizes, and consequently fewer people who depend on the working population, reduced the population pressure and enabled more savings and investments to be made towards economic development.

Kenya Vision 2030 aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by following the example of the 'Asian Tigers'⁵. In this regard Kenya has identified population management and scaling up of socio-economic investments as one of the key strategies of achieving the vision.

Kenya's Opportunity for Socio-Economic Progress

A window of opportunity for a country to take advantage of its working population is availed when the proportion of youths is at least 30 percent of the adult population⁶. This means that the population is dominated by those in the working age group while dependants (those less than 15 years and those older than 64 years) are fewer. Therefore, by providing the working population with opportunities to contribute to economic development, a country can increase its wealth and improve the quality of life for its citizens.

In 1960, Kenya's proportion of youth relative to the adult population stood at slightly below 30 percent. This increased to over 31 percent by 1965 reaching a peak of 39 percent in the 1995 - 2000 period before declining to 36 percent in 2010. This means that for a long period, Kenya's population has been dominated by those in the working age group. Unfortunately, this has not translated into the benefits witnessed among the 'Asian Tigers' largely due to the low proportion of people who are gainfully employed out of the total population.

Table 2 shows a comparison of population and economic indicators for Kenya, Nigeria, and a sample of East Asia countries⁷. The table shows that the workers gainfully employed in Kenya and Nigeria is less than a third of their respective total populations. On the other hand, the Asian countries sampled have over 43 percent of the population gainfully employed. Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia have the highest proportions at over half of their respective total populations gainfully employed. Indonesia, which is one of the 'Asian Tigers' that Kenya seeks to emulate, has an annual income of US\$ 4,180 per person, and women in that country have an average of 2 children each. This contrasts greatly with Kenya that has an annual income of US\$ 1,640 per person and an average of 5 children per woman. The other Asian countries in Table 2 also have a better performance on the same indicators when compared to Kenya. This underscores the fact that Kenya can benefit from its current large working age population by simultaneously working towards reducing her fertility levels and increasing investments in both the social and economic sectors thereby enhancing the country's overall development.

Table 2: Population and Economic Indicators for some Low and Middle Income Countries

	Total Population ('000')	Average No. of Children per Woman	Income per person (US\$)	Effective Workers (% of total population)
Cambodia	14,137	2.8	2,080	57.5
India	1,224,614	2.7	3,330	47.3
Indonesia	239,871	2.2	4,180	51
Kenya	40,513	4.8	1,640	32.5
Nigeria	158,423	5.6	2,160	30.9
Philippines	93,261	3.3	3,950	43.2
Vietnam	87,847	1.9	3,050	53.2

Source: NTA Bulletin, December 2012

Advanced studies on the economic potential of a population's large labor force indicate that the window of opportunity created by such a labor force is limited to a period of 30 to 60 years⁸. Population projections for Kenya show that by 2050, those below 15 and those above 64 years of age will constitute about 32 and 9 percent of the total population respectively⁹. This is an indication that the population will still be dominated by those in the working ages. Therefore for Kenya to benefit from her labor force, decisive action must be taken now before this window of opportunity closes. This window of opportunity will start to close when the proportion of the dependent population begins to increase.

From the year 2003, the Government of Kenya has made a lot of effort to invest in the country's social and economic sectors with the aim of improving the lives of her citizens. Some examples of these investments are; improvement of the road network, increasing access to education by removing user fees at primary level; setting up of youth and women enterprise funds to create business and employment opportunities; construction of houses to alleviate the housing problem; and expansion of higher education facilities. In addition to this the Government has put in place policy frameworks aimed at facilitating the country's development progress. These include the Constitution of Kenya (2010) which has created the county governments that have resources to invest in development activities. Others are regulations that provide for the youth, women, and persons with disability to be given business opportunities to work with the Government; and the back to school policy which requires girls who become pregnant to be allowed back in school after giving birth. If these efforts are sustained and improved, Kenya could be on the path to socio-economic transformation.

Policy and Programme Implications

Kenya's economic and social transformation depends on how we engage those in the working age group. One of the first priorities for the country is to increase the proportion of those who are gainfully employed in this group. This means that more investments need to be made to create opportunities for employment and business. In addition to this, further investments need to be made in education, training, and skills development so as to enhance the quality of the human capital and to meet the needs of the

labor market. That way the labor force will contribute to the generation of more wealth for the country which will in turn improve household and individual incomes. With improved incomes, the demand for better social amenities such as health, education, housing, water and sanitation will increase. It will therefore be necessary for the Government to make more investments in these social amenities which are essential in improving the quality of life.

The example of the 'Asian Tigers' clearly shows the benefits to the economy and the high quality of life brought about by lowering fertility levels. Kenya will therefore need to increase its efforts to lower the fertility from 5 children per woman over the next few decades. The set target in Kenya's population policy is to attain an average fertility level of 2 children per woman by 2050¹⁰. Given that between 1993 and 2009 Kenya's fertility stagnated at an average of 5 children per woman, more focus will need to be put on provision of information on population matters and family planning to the public as well as availing high quality family planning services and ensuring that family planning commodities are always available at the service points. Other issues that will need to be addressed so as to bring down the fertility levels are reducing both the childhood mortalities and the number of children desired by individuals because these two factors also contribute significantly to rapid population growth. By expanding the economic opportunities and reducing the country's fertility levels, Kenya will witness progressive improvements in incomes and quality of life over the coming decades.

Recommendations

Given the enormous benefits that will be brought about by the economic transformation of Kenya, NCPD makes the following critical recommendations that will facilitate the said transformation;

- Create more job opportunities to absorb those in the labor force. Already Kenya Vision 2030 has identified key sectors where additional economic opportunities for the labor market should be created. These sectors include agriculture and livestock, manufacturing, trade, tourism, and Information Communication Technology (ICT). Therefore, by diligently implementing the roadmap of the vision, the Government and stakeholders will systematically increase the proportion of those in the labor force who are gainfully employed. These efforts should be continued up to and beyond the period of the vision.
- The Government, at both national and county levels, should increase investments in education, skills development, health, housing, water and sanitation with a view of improving both the quality of the country's labor force and the social amenities required for better living. This will contribute to the country's anticipated socio-economic transformation as envisaged in the Kenya Vision 2030 development blueprint.
- Intensify advocacy and public education on family planning through all available forums. These activities should be undertaken continuously by both the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) and the Ministry of Health (MoH). Also MoH should ensure that family planning services are scaled

NCPD is a semi-autonomous government agency that formulates and promotes population policy and coordinates related activities for sustainable development in Kenya.

National Council for Population and Development (NCPD)

P.O. Box 48994 - GPO,
Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Tel: 254-20-271-1600/01
Fax: 254-20-271-6508
Email: info@ncpd-ke.org
www.ncpd-ke.org

The Population Studies and Research Institute (PSRI), University of Nairobi, was established in 1976 with the mandate to undertake postgraduate training, research and Government backstopping in the field of population and development.

Population Studies and Research Institute (PSRI)

P.O. Box 30197 – 00100 Nairobi
Tel: 020 318 262
Email: psri@uonbi.ac.ke
Website: <http://psri.uonbi.ac.ke>



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up country-wide in order to increase access by the public especially in remote and difficult to reach areas. The ultimate goal is to reduce the country's fertility and slow down the pace of population increase in favor of socio-economic development.

- Continue with efforts to further reduce childhood mortalities which were partly responsible for the fertility stall in the late 1990s and early 2000 as well as the increased demand for more children¹¹. The Ministry of Health should therefore continue to rally all the stakeholders in the field of maternal and child health to sustain and improve on the gains made since 2003. Enhancing child survival will in the long run lead to a decline in the country's fertility levels.

By implementing the above recommendations, Kenya will be on the path to achieve her much desired progress.

Conclusion

Kenya has a window of opportunity to spur socio-economic growth through the existing and future labor force in the footsteps of the 'Asian Tigers'. This therefore calls for concerted efforts by the Government and all stakeholders to scale up investments in both the economic and social sectors with a view of creating better opportunities for those in the working ages and consequently a high quality of life for all citizens.

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