

An Inquiry into the Relationship between Population Growth and Development: The Case of Malawi and Kenya

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Abstract: This paper sought to analyze the relationship between population growth and development. The motivation is that population growth has been blamed as a cause of being under development in LDS (Least Developed Countries). This is a descriptive study employing review of secondary data and reports. There is no direct relationship between population growth and being under development. This is supported by countries which are populous yet their economies are growing fast enabling them to graduate from developing and donor reliant to developed and donating countries. China and India are examples. Again, data show that socio-economic indicators were not any better when population sizes were low in the last 3 to 4 decades. Countries should focus on sound economic management to improve the supply side of goods and services which ultimately will result in reduced population growth as one of the effects. It is concluded that the notion of high population is built on the experienced and anticipated challenges in supplying goods and services that meet the demand and not on any standard measure as to what is standard population size for a country of a given physical size and natural resources.

Key words: Population, development, per capita growth, GDP (Gross Domestic Product).

1. Introduction

One of the impediments to development progress in developing countries is rapid population growth. This fact is cemented by the fact that most economies in these countries are predominantly subsistence agriculture thus rapid population growth increases pressure on non-reproducible cultivatable land resulting in declining food security at household level and declining economic growth rate at national level. A detailed interrelationship between declining household economic growth and national economic growth is outside the scope of this paper. It should be stated however, that a household as economic unit

plays on the market as seller and/or buyer. Thus, poor household economies result in declining purchasing power affecting the industry upstream and also affecting government resource allocation from investing in productive sectors to social protection budget lines downstream. In recent years, the food insecurity situation has been aggravated by climate change effects such as droughts earth quakes, floods and so on.

Although the notion of population growth as impediment to development is accepted unconditionally, there is nonetheless scanty literature on models that estimate the appropriate population size for a country of a given physical size and given resources. This lack of models coupled with the emerging Asian economies such as China, Singapore and India in which population sizes are big yet they

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are graduating to donor status provokes to rethink into the status quo relationship between population growth and development. It thus would appear that the notion of population size and development may be sweeping and hasty. In fact, countries need population to generate manpower to create domestic demand for their industries, and savings. While this paper is incapable of estimating the population size that is considered standard for a country of a given size and given resources, it all the same attempts to begin challenging demographers and related professionals to consider working on equilibrium between population and resources. The concept of economic development (or broadly development) is loosely proxied by GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita for purposes of simplicity. Thus, being under development is a situation in which per capita income is low.

Malawi and Kenya are LDCs (Least Developed Countries) and Kenya is a developing country. In 2017, their per capita incomes stood at US\$320 and US\$1,440 respectively [1]. Malawi's population of 18.6 million and Kenya's population of 49.7 million have both seen average annual population growth rates of 2.9 per cent and 2.7 percent respectively in recent years to 2017 [2]. It is also noted that at the time of political independence in 1963 and 1964 for Kenya and Malawi respectively, both countries had relatively far much less population and far poor per capita incomes.

2. Study Objectives

The broad objective is to investigate the relationship between population growth and development.

2.1 Specific Objectives

To describe the growth patterns in populations and development;

To investigate relationship between population growth and development;

To compare scenarios in Malawi and Kenya with

emerging economies.

3. Methodology

This is literature review-based study in which we review documents and analyze statistics from reports. Trends of variables have been presented by graphs and correlation tables. Data sources include World Bank reports, United Nations Development Program, other scholars and organizations.

4. Results and Discussions

Population as expected has steadily grown in the two countries over time. On the contrary, statistics show that economic growth has been dwindling and, in many cases, there have been more troughs than peaks. Consequently, per capita income growth has followed similar patterns. Overall however, income per capita has increased from pre-independence days to the current period. Figs. 1a and 1b below illustrate the patterns of GDP growth and GDP per capita growth:

The figures above clearly show that there is a positive correlation between GDP growth and GDP per capita growth. Since per capita growth incorporates population growth element, it can be deduced that high population growth directly contributes to slow GDP per capita growth. Nonetheless, the net effect is dependent on growth patterns of population and economy.

Population growth rates in Malawi and Kenya have stabilized at 2.9 per cent and 2.7 per cent respectively which is still high. Again, considering the largely youthful population of at most 15 years of age of 45 per cent and 46 per cent for Kenya and Malawi respectively [1, 3], the potential for population expansion is huge thus population sizes are bound to continue increasing despite stable growth rates [4]. Previous conferences on population have had different themes including the recognition of development as best contraceptive. Indeed, this recognition reflects the path taken by western industrialized countries in

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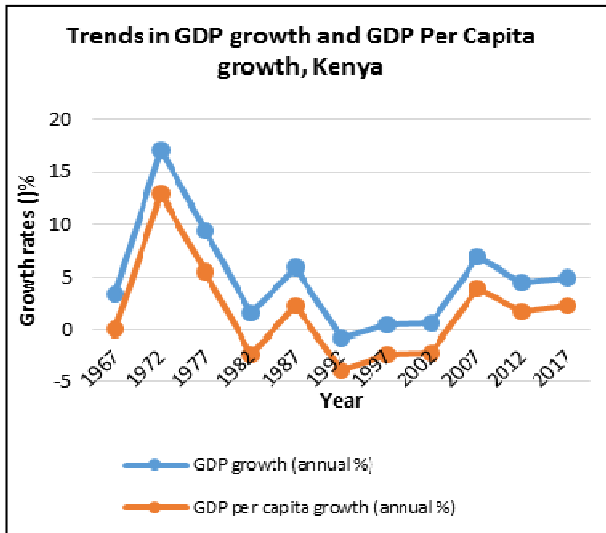


Fig. 1a Kenya trends in GDP growth and GDP per capita growth.

Source: World Bank (2018).

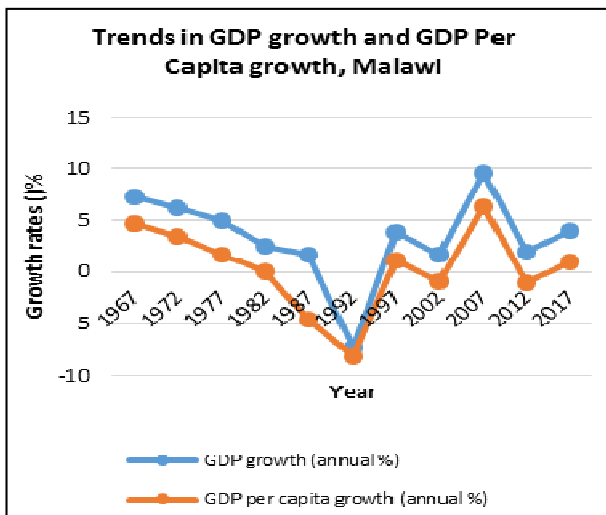


Fig. 1b Malawi trends in GDP growth and GDP per capita growth.

Source: World Bank (2018).

which declining population growth was an effect of socio-economic progress following industrial revolution [5]. The path taken in many developing countries including Malawi and Kenya is that of medical intervention using condoms, pills and other forms of contraceptives [6]. This may explain the difficulty in controlling population expansion despite various interventions that have been applied.

The argument of population size and development is an off shoot of economic forces of demand and

supply. High population entails high demand for socio-economic goods and services and puts pressure on the supply side which is anchored by natural and unnatural resources with government, corporate sector and other actors as facilitators to supply them. Thus, efforts to reduce population growth imitate shifting demand left wards to create a new equilibrium in which demand for and supply of goods and services are satisfied. From this line of thinking, it then comes out clearly that a new equilibrium is attainable by reducing population growth thus reducing demand (which is what is vocally preached through family planning) or expanding supply holding population constant or at slow growth (which is less workable given poor economic management in many African countries) or indeed the combined forces of the two. This assertion is supported by emerging economies particularly from the continent of Asia namely China, India and the branded six Asian Tigers (Singapore, Malaysia, Hongkong, Taiwan, South Korea and Indonesia). China and India have populations in excess of 1 billion yet they are fast growing economies and have joined the donor community. Historically, they have had poor economic indicators and for some years poorer than some African countries including Kenya. For example, in 1960, China had a GDP per capita of US\$92 and India had US\$84. By 2017, China's GDP per capita was US\$8,827 and India's was US\$1,940. Interestingly, Kenya had in the same year GDP per capita of US\$98 suggesting that it had better economic indicators than China and India. As shown in Fig. 2, Kenya for a number of years had higher per capita income than China. China and India are not oil exporters nor do they have gold or diamond. Thus, the overtaking in GDP per capita is more to do with policy and sound management than natural resource differences.

Available data indicate that China and India have had consistent positive economic growth rates resulting in positive GDP per capita growth and declining population growth. In the case of China, the

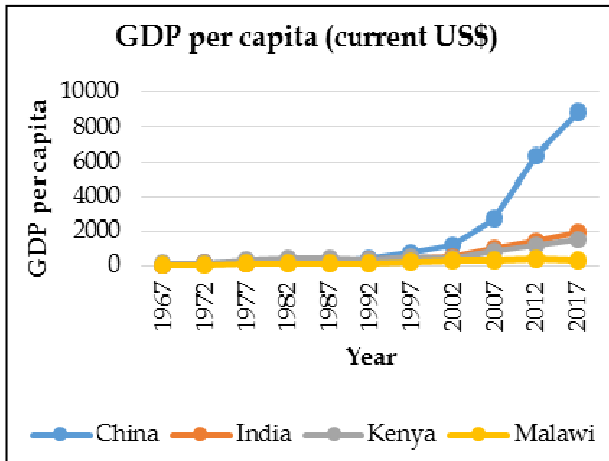


Fig. 2 GDP per capita US\$ (current prices).
Source: World Bank, 2018.

one child policy might have contributed to the slow population growth. Similarly, the male sterilization in India might have contributed to slow down population growth. Nonetheless, the fact that these countries were by far highly populated by the time such policies were introduced and that even after introduction of the policies the population sizes are huge yet the economies are expanding fast resulting in better social and economic indicators is supportive of the fact that sound economic policies and management and not population per se, account for development. Evidently, population densities for Kenya, Malawi, China and India are 87, 198, 150 and 450 persons per square kilometer respectively. On the other hand, life expectancy at birth is 65, 61, 76 and 68 for Kenya, Malawi, China and India respectively. The figures suggest that population may not necessarily be a causative agent of being under development; it may instead be more of a consequence of being under development. Economic management may be at the center of development which then can slow down growth of population. Projections of population suggest that China's population will expand from 1.4 billion in 2017 to 1.5 billion by 2025 and decline to 1.3 billion by 2050 while India's will expand from 1.3 billion in 2017 to 1.5 billion in 2025 and 1.7 billion in 2050. On the other hand, Malawi's population is projected to increase from 18.6 million in 2017 to 22.9

million by 2025 and 37.4 million by 2050 while Kenya's 49.7 million in 2017 is projected to expand to 59.1 million by 2025 and 96.9 million by 2050. These projections follow rates of natural increases of 0.5, 1.5, 2.9 and 2.7 per cent for China, India, Kenya and Malawi respectively.

As can be noted, there are overall consistent growth in per capita income and high peaks from mid 1990s. This is consistent with economic growth rates (positively) and population growth rates (negatively). Fig. 3 shows trends in economic and population growth rates.

The increasing per capita incomes for China and India have been witnessed against population increases from 667 million in 1960 to 1.4 billion in 2017 for China and 435 million in 1960 to 1.3 billion in 2017 for India. Notably, over time, the countries have graduated from agrarian economies to industrial economies, a feature that is resisting in Malawi and Kenya where subsistence agriculture is economic main stay and largest employer. Although per capita incomes have increased over time in the two African countries, the levels remain too low and are inconsistent reflecting inconsistent economic growth rates. Fig. 4 shows growth patterns in GDP and population for Kenya and Malawi. The inconsistent

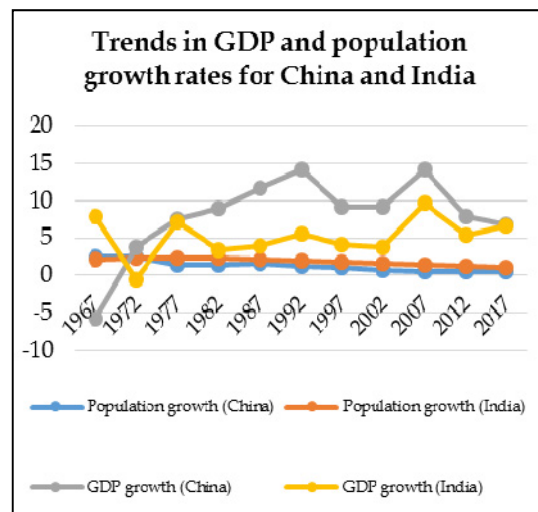


Fig. 3 Trends in GDP and population growth rates for China and India.
Source: World Bank, 2018.

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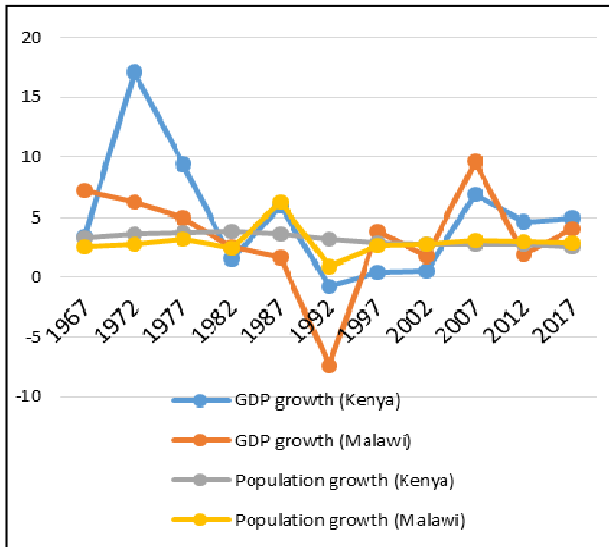


Fig. 4 Trends in GDP and population growth rates for Kenya and Malawi.

Source: World Bank, 2018.

growth patterns with sharp peaks and troughs against high and stable population growth rates are in sharp contrast to the patterns witnessed in China and India (Fig. 3). In the case of Malawi, the per capita income of US\$320 arithmetically implies that the whole population lives below US\$1 poverty line for a year of 365 days.

4.1 Investment in Human Capital

As pointed out above, the notion of population growth as impediment to development progress smacks from disequilibrium between demand for and supply of socio-economic services. Since resources grow from sound economic management, poor economic management retards economic growth and thus creates imbalance between demand for services by citizens and supply of the same by government. Resultantly, countries register poor indicators. According to the 2011 Human Development Report, out of 187 countries, China is ranked 101, India 134, Kenya 143 and Malawi 171. In terms of HDI (Human Development Index), China has 0.687, India 0.547, Kenya 0.509 and Malawi 0.400 [7]. These figures reflect health and education investments which are core ingredients of the HDI together with GDP per

capita. By extension, the figures reflect government ability or inability to endow capability and functioning in its citizenry. As noted, there is a positive correlation between size of economy catalyzed by equitable distribution on one hand and HDI on the other hand again supporting the point that economic management is central to development.

5. Recommendations

Following the discussion above, the following recommendations are made:

Governments should focus more on sound economic management in order to promote socio-economic status of the citizenry which will raise status of women and increase opportunity cost of bearing a child (against work time) thus reduce population growth. The biomedical interventions for family planning are likely to continue being less effective than they potentially could if poverty was not high. Multi-sectoral professionals should facilitate debate on the relationship between population growth and development, bringing substantial empirical evidence of what needs to be done.

African countries which are largely consumers of technology need to become producers by investing substantially in technological innovations as one way of demand management given limited or stunted growth of supply especially in natural resource use. This includes support to scientists and their research, linkages among government, corporate sector, universities and research centers

6. Conclusions

The literature reviewed suggests that there are no models to estimate standard population for a country subject to physical size and resources and therefore the arguments and counter arguments on what is high population for a country are *inter alia* based on experienced and anticipated challenges on resources, environment and service provision which themselves are effects of poor economic and technological

standards. The fact that economic indicators were as well poor when population sizes were low supports the quest to focus more on economic management which will produce as some of its effects reduced birth rates and population growth.

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