

Policy Brief

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A Snap on the Population Policy for National Development

Kenya is experiencing economic and social problems resulting from a large and fast population which cannot be adequately supported by the available resources. This has been a matter of concern since the 1960s when Kenya gained independence.

Various policies have been introduced to deal with the problem with limited success. The most recent census undertaken in 2009 yielded a population size of 38.6 million and a growth rate of 2.9 percent. At the same time, the 2008-09 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) found that on average women in the country have 5 children each and about 18 percent of adolescent girls aged 15-19 years have already begun child bearing. The survey also showed that less than half of the married women aged 15-49 years use family planning methods to limit and space birth while 1 out of every 4 of these women are not using any method yet they want to delay the next birth or they do not want to have any more children. These among other factors are contributing to the rapid increase of the country's population. It is against this backdrop that the government has introduced *Sessional Paper No. 3 of 2012 on Population Policy for National Development*. The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for the implementation of the population programme with the goal of ensuring that the population is managed at a level that can be sustained by the available resources. Attainment of this goal will immensely contribute to the goal of Vision 2030 which seeks to transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by 2030 in a clean and secure environment.

This policy brief looks at the population challenges that the country faces and what can be done about them by the national government, county governments, partners, and stakeholders for the prosperity of Kenyans.

Population Policies – Past and Present

Concerns about Kenya's population date back to 1962 when the population census established that the country's population, which stood at 8.6 million, was increasing rapidly. In 1967, the government initiated the *National Family Planning* programme in an attempt to slow down the high pace of population growth which was causing problems such as unemployment and increasing demand for health



care, education services, food, and housing. The focus of this programme was the provision of family planning services. This entailed building more health facilities, training health personnel, and provision of family planning information and commodities. By 1979, the country's population was still growing rapidly and had exceeded 15 million. In response to this, the government in 1982 renewed its effort by establishing the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) with the mandate to formulate population policies and strategies and to coordinate population activities aimed at reducing the country's population growth rate. This was followed in 1984 with the issuance of *Sessional Paper No. 4 on Population Policy Guidelines* that provided a framework for the coordination and implementation of population programmes.

In 1994, the world convened in Cairo, Egypt for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). At this conference, the scope of population policy concerns was expanded to include quite a number of issues that were not addressed in the *Population Policy Guidelines*.

Some of these issues include human rights, environment, gender, poverty, and problems facing youths, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. This therefore necessitated the development of a new policy to build on the guidelines and incorporate relevant recommendations from the Cairo conference. In this regard, *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2000 on National Population Policy for Sustainable Development (NPPSD)* was issued to guide the population programme up to the year 2010.

Efforts by the government to address the population problem in Kenya have yielded some positive results. For example, by the year 2010 the population growth rate had reduced to 2.9 percent from a high of 3.8 percent in the 1970s while the average number of children per woman had come down to 5 children from a high of 8 children recorded in 1979. Between 1979 and 2010, the use of contraceptive methods by married women increased from 7 percent to 46 percent and the family planning knowledge increased from below 80 percent to 95 percent. Over the same period the infant and under-5 mortality rates reached the lowest ever levels of 52 and 74 deaths per 1,000 live births. On the flipside, the life expectancy at birth reduced from 62 years in the early 1980s to 57 years in 2000. Though improvements have been registered in the prevalence of HIV, the level still remains above 6 percent of the total population. According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2008-09 KDHS), the country's HIV prevalence was found to be 6.3 percent representing a drop from the 2003 level of 6.7 percent. Some of the factors that have contributed to these achievements are the government's commitment and support from development partners, advocacy activities targeting the country's top leadership, and multi-sectoral approach in implementing population programme activities.

Despite the above achievements, much more remains to be done to march the population growth with available resources. Given that the term of the NPPSD ended in 2010 and there were still a number of pressing population issues to be addressed, the government has therefore issued *Sessional Paper No. 3 of 2012 on Population Policy for National Development*. This policy, which was developed through an extensive and inclusive consultative process, is intended to guide the population programme in Kenya up to the year 2030 and beyond.

Population Management Challenges

Over the years, the management of Kenya's population has been faced with numerous challenges some of which are persistent. Though the desire of Kenya's population programme is to reduce the pace of population increase, some parts of this country have continued to exhibit high levels of fertility and low utilization of family planning methods. Nyanza, Coast, Rift Valley, Western, and North Eastern regions of the country have fertility levels of 5 or more children per woman. In the same regions, family planning methods are used by less than 50 percent of

the married women aged 15-49 years. Of concern also is the proportion of married women aged 15-49 years countrywide who want to delay getting the next child or do not want to have any more children but are not using any family planning method. This proportion stands at 25 percent and is further compounded by lack of contraceptive commodities and quality family planning services in some of the health facilities. Regrettably, 18 percent of adolescents in Kenya aged 15-19 years have already begun child bearing.

Diseases and deaths continue to be a matter of concern. Considerable improvements have been made in the reduction of childhood deaths in the recent years but much more remains to be done for the country to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets. On the other hand maternal deaths in the country have remained quite high. For every 100,000 births, about 488 mothers die as a result of their pregnancy or during child birth. This situation is partly attributed to the fact that more than half of the mothers in Kenya deliver their children without the services of a skilled provider. In the general population, communicable diseases continue to cause illness and death. These include HIV/AIDS, TB, and malaria. Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart diseases, and cancers are emerging as leading causes of illness and deaths in Kenya.

Population pressure continues to contribute to the degradation of the environment in the country. Of particular concern is the destruction of forest cover through the cutting down of trees to provide raw materials for industries, fuel wood for domestic use, and space for settlement. This in turn has contributed to the loss of fertile soils in areas with high agricultural potential. Pollution of soils and water sources due to poor agricultural practices and waste production from industries and urban settlements poses a threat to food security as well as human and animal health. Rapid urbanization mainly due to rural-urban migration has created a situation where the demand for water and sanitation, health care, education, and housing services are growing much faster than the rate of expansion of these services. The resultant effect is an increase in informal settlements that are poorly served by the social amenities.

Socio-cultural practices by some segments of the population continue to hamper the implementation of the population programme. These practices include early marriages, female circumcision, and patriarchy. The 2008-09 KDHS found that among women 20-49 years, more than 35 percent got married for the first time when they were still adolescents. This survey also found that even though 1 in every 4 females has been circumcised in Kenya, in some ethnic groups the prevalence is about 9 in every 10 females. Some of the negative consequences of these socio-cultural practices are low male involvement in maternal and child care, overburdening of women and

girl children with household chores, and low levels of education and high levels of poverty among females.

The challenges faced by Kenya's efforts to manage the population have contributed to various economic and social problems. Some of these problems are high unemployment and poverty levels, increase in the number of people living in informal settlements, deterioration of security, and poor provision of social services such as education, health, water and sanitation. All the above factors combined continue to inhibit efforts to improve the quality of life for all citizens of Kenya.

Critical Population Issues and Measures

The *Population Policy for National Development*, whose overall goal is to attain a high quality of life for the people of Kenya by managing population growth that can be sustained with the available resources, identifies three broad areas of focus for the population programme in the years ahead. These areas are;

Population size, growth and structure: Kenya's existing population cannot be adequately supported by the available resources. Any future increase in the population should therefore be slowed down in order to allow the resources to grow to a level that can sustain the available population. In addition, the different segments of the population structure i.e. children, young people, active age population, the elderly, and persons with disabilities require targeted interventions that address their respective needs.

Population programme factors: In this area, two issues have been identified. The first one is information, education, communication and advocacy activities whose aim is to increase the public's awareness on population issues, improve the policy environment to tackle population concerns, increase resources for population related programmes, and enhance capacity for programme planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation. The second issue is family planning delivery services. Under this issue the focus is to increase family planning delivery points and ensure that family planning methods are always available at these points. Promotion of male involvement and participation in family planning is also targeted under this issue.

Thematic areas: These seven (7) thematic areas link population with socio-economic and political development of Kenya. They are: population and poverty reduction; population and environmental sustainability; population, technology, research, and development; population and education; gender equality, equity and women empowerment; morbidity and mortality; and reproductive health and reproductive rights. By implementing activities that address the above linkages, the quality of life for the country's population is bound to improve.

Population Policy Goal, Objectives and Targets

Policy Goal: The goal of the *Population Policy for National Development* is to attain high quality of life for the people of Kenya by managing population growth that can be sustained with the available resources.

Policy Objectives: The six (6) objectives of the population policy are;

- i. Reduce population growth rate in order to harmonize with the economic growth and social development envisioned in Vision 2030.
- ii. Reduce the number of births born to a woman, deaths that occur among children aged five years and below, and deaths that occur among women due to pregnancy related causes. At the same time, assist individuals and couples who desire to have children but are unable to.
- iii. Provide information and education on population matters to the general public and particularly the youth to encourage a small family norm.
- iv. Provide equitable and affordable quality reproductive health services including family planning.
- v. Contribute to the planning and implementation of socio-economic development programmes.
- vi. Mobilize resources through government budgetary allocation, international cooperation and public-private partnerships.

Some of the key targets of the population programme are shown in Table I.

Table I: Policy Targets

Indicator	Base Year		
	2009	2030	2050
Population (millions)	38.6	59.5	77.3
Dependency Ratio	86.8	54.3	44.6
Infant Mortality (per 1000 live births)	52.0	25.0	11.0
Under-5 Mortality (per 1000 live births)	74.0	48.0	34.0
Life Expectancy (years)	57.0	64.0	72.0
Contraceptive Prevalence (modern methods)	40.0	70.0	75.0
Total Fertility Rate	4.6	2.6	2.1

Population Programme Implications

A country's population can either facilitate or hamper development. Kenya Vision 2030 therefore recognizes that population has an important role to play in the attainment of its goal. In this regard, the *Population Policy for National Development* aims to ensure that Kenya's population is well managed thereby facilitating the achievement of the Vision 2030 goals and objectives. The main strategy of this policy is to implement activities that

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will contribute to the slowing down of the country's population growth rate which will then allow other sectors to grow thereby increasing the resources available to the population. This is expected to translate to improved quality of life for all Kenyans. However, for this to happen, all the stakeholders of the population programme from the national to grassroots level must play their role in support of the programme. Resources for the programme must also be mobilized in order to ensure success. Failure to adequately support the population programme will hamper the attainment of the aspirations of Vision 2030 and other national and international development targets that Kenya subscribes to.

Conclusion

The interrelationship between population and development is a crucial factor that affects the wellbeing of a nation. In order for a country to prosper, this linkage must be taken into consideration when implementing development activities. Therefore, for Kenya to achieve its development targets as defined by Kenya Vision 2030 and other development plans, the *Population Policy for National Development* must be fully implemented. If this policy is fully implemented, the number of births per woman will be reduced, the number of deaths among children below age 5 will decline, and the population will grow at a slower pace. The resultant effect of this will be a reduction in the pressure being exerted on the available resources thereby enabling the country to use these resources to improve the wellbeing of the population by creating more employment opportunities, ensuring that all have access to quality health and education, and reducing poverty levels among other benefits,

Recommendations

Here below are four (4) key general recommendations for the successful implementation of Kenya's population programme;

1. **Planning** of all development activities at the national, county, and sectoral levels should incorporate population concerns as highlighted in the *Population Policy for National Development*. This will require that capacities for such planning be built at the different levels. NCPD will ensure that these capacities are built-up on a continuous basis. The end result of this will be the strengthening of the population programme and maximization of benefits to the public.
2. For the population programme to succeed, the national and county governments as well as partners should **mobilize and allocate adequate resources** for implementation of population related activities. This will ensure that activities earmarked for implementation are fully undertaken in a timely manner and targets achieved.
3. Population issues cut across many sectors. It is therefore important that at all levels a **multi-sectoral approach** towards the implementation of the population programme is adopted. By adopting this approach, the population programme will achieve much more because planning will be enhanced, wastage of resources will be minimized, and more people will be reached.
4. **Monitoring and Evaluation** of the population programme should be undertaken on a regular basis at national, county, and sectoral levels with a view of ensuring that implementation is on course and set targets are being achieved. This will entail the development of monitoring and evaluation plans at each of these levels.

The implementation of the above proposed activities will greatly contribute to the country's economic, social, and political development and subsequently the lives of Kenyans.