

EVOLUTION OF THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POPULATION VARIABLES AND DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES

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Abstract

The concerns and issues of the relationship between demographic dynamics/population variables and development could be traced as far back as 500 BC and also during the Ancient Chinese, Greeks and Roman Empire.

However, since the 18th century, the relationship between the two systems (*population and development*) gained international concerns and attention. It was during this century that a clergy man, named **Thomas Robert Malthus**, an economist and demographer (*born February 1766 in Rookery, England and died in December 1834*), had been best known for his theory that **population growth** would always tend to outrun the **food supply** and that betterment of mankind is impossible without stern limits on human reproduction. In our time, this thinking is commonly referred to as Malthusianism, entitled as “*An Essay on the Principle of Population*”.

Overtime, the Malthusian population growth notion sparked debates which gained momentum and featured into the international political agenda after the 1945 establishment of the United Nations. Accordingly, since early 1970's, sentiments started to express that rapid population growth was a hindrance to development in the third world countries and hence, argued by the modern Neo-Malthusian capitalist oriented group that direct “**birth Control**” should be introduced as the *only condition* to enable couples to limit their fertility thereby curbing the high population growth to be covered by the available resources.

However, the idea of the *direct birth control* alone was counter-argued by socialist-oriented group that “*development is the best contraceptive*” and hence, the UN 1974 Bucharest World Population Conference (WPC) and the UN 1994 Cairo International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) were organized and finally elaborated that the reduction of human fertility levels, patterns and trends should be integrated with the developmental stages of a given society.

Hence, the interest of this *review paper/article* is, therefore, focused on looking at the differences between the Malthusian/Neo-Malthusian historical hypothesis and the contemporary perspectives in the interaction between population variables and developmental stages..

Key Words: *Malthusianism, contemporary birth control, development, WPC and ICPD,*

Background of sub-Saharan Africa demographic features:

Sub-Saharan Africa, consisting of 46 countries (excluding 5 North African countries and Small Islands), has some common demographic and socio-economic problems but differs in many aspects as compared with the so-called Third World Countries. It has been generally sparsely populated as related to South East Asia; less urbanized compared with Latin America and has been experiencing the slowest rate of economic growth, which was as low as 1.8 percent during 1980-1992. During the same period, countries that performed the lowest were Zambia, Ethiopia and Rwanda and others that performed the highest included Botswana, Mauritius, Lesotho and Chad.

The Sub-Continent has been experiencing rapid population growth since its emergence after the Second World War. Its population size has increased from 181 million in 1950 and jumped to 793 million in the year 2000 and is estimated to reach 1.5 billion by the year 2020. The Sub-Regional growth rate ranges between 3.0-3.6 percent for East Africa; 3.3-3.5 for Middle; 3.3-3.8 for Southern and 3.2-3.3 percent for West Africa.

The high fertility performance, with a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) per woman by the end of her menopausal period ranges from 6.7 for East Africa; 6.0 for Middle; 6.8 for West and 4.7 for Southern Africa, accompanied by moderately declining mortality rate in the 1990's, contributed to youthful population and high growth potential. This high population growth has not been commensurate with the low pace of social and economic development in most Sub-Saharan African countries. Even after the introduction of population policies, there has not been any evidence of significant harmonized growth between population and development.

In spite of all efforts of implementation of the Global Recommendation of the "Structural Adjustment Programmes" and the "Social Dimension of Adjustment Programmes" for social, economic, and environmental management and political democratization and trying to influence the demographic factors through various implicit and explicit Population Programmes and Projects, the Sub-Continent couldn't break the "*Vicious Circle of Poverty*".

Besides, since African Society is characterized by familial burden, sharing relationship, the effects of the HIV/AIDS have been felt in all segments: individual, household, community and national levels. The pandemic and its intimacy with other "opportunistic illnesses" and STD's, appears to spread quickly with no sign of slowing down, with a narrowing trend in the gap between urban and rural prevalence rates. Every Sub-Saharan African country has been experiencing the pandemic in varying degrees and dimensions. For example, the expectation of life for Ethiopia is estimated to decline from 51 years in 1998 to 41 years in the year 2010 and for Botswana, it was estimated to decline from about 62 years in 1998 to 38 years in the year 2010, jeopardizing the modest improvement in the health sector since 1970's.

In view of the high rate of population growth potential and unemployment, accompanied by meager income level, the prevailing socio-economic poverty and backwardness, and political turmoil, the Sub-Saharan African Nations couldn't even address the major and longstanding

health problems and manage the economic hardships, environmental degradation, and civil wars and conflicts and the consequential increasing refugee problems.

Considering the afore-stated background of demographic indicators, let us examine the historical and contemporary perspectives in the phenomenal population and development reciprocal relationship in the following sections of this paper/article.

The multidimensional relationship between demographic/ Population factors and development

The ideas and concerns of the relationships between population and resources have been there from time immemorial. The relationship can be examined in two broad perspectives of time frame: *Malthusian/Neo-Malthusian Historical Perspectives and Contemporary perspectives*

The Malthusian and Neo-Malthusian Historical Perspectives:

The Malthusian perspective used to be spear-headed by Malthus, a clergy man of the early 18th century, conceptualized population as growing in an exponential fashion and food supply by arithmetic progression. The interaction of these two variables perceived as “*the generative power*” of man assumed to have been superior to the “*nutritive power of the earth to produce food*”, which perceived as suppressing population growth below the resource curve. Accordingly, the land productivity used to reach *its diminishing returns due to the unprecedented exponential population growth as the outcome results of Demographic Dynamics (resultants of the interactions among of fertility, mortality and migration levels, patterns and trends)*.

The afore-stated hypothesis was pessimistic where population was considered the causes of all sorts of backwardness, poverty and misery, whereas other things, such as science and technology, were assumed to be constant, formulating an idea that **Nature takes its own course**, where population growth would be controlled by natural positive and preventive checks.

In the 1960’s and 1970’s, the principal ideas of Malthus had been popularized and elaborated widely by prominent demographers and other social scientists, acknowledged as Neo-Malthusians. It was the time when the developing countries started experiencing unprecedented demographic growth rates. Their ideas are summarized as follows:

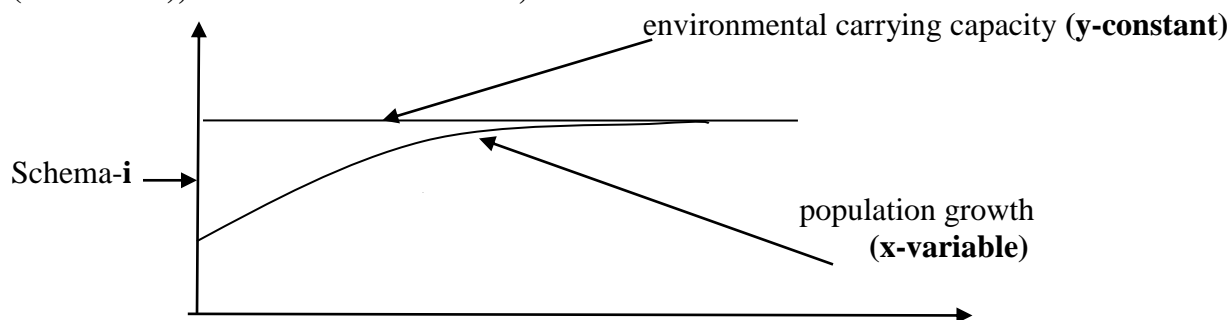
- *Resources of the earth is assumed to be non-renewable;*
- *The earth’s biosphere capacity to absorb pollution is finite/limited;*
- *Provision of arable land to supply food is finite or limited;*
- *The Earth has been facing an unprecedented pace of demographic growth.*
- *Consequently, the planet would fall into a danger of absolute “Overpopulation” with respect to food availability, deterioration of the eco-system and depletion of natural resources needed for industrial inputs.*

Based on the above major variables, the Neo-Malthusians conceptualized that “*population growing in a limited environment can approach the ultimate Carrying capacity of that environment in several ways*“. From this general “*Proposition*” of the Neo-Malthusians, the

complex relationships between the population and environmental carrying capacity can be simplified in the following three representative schematics:

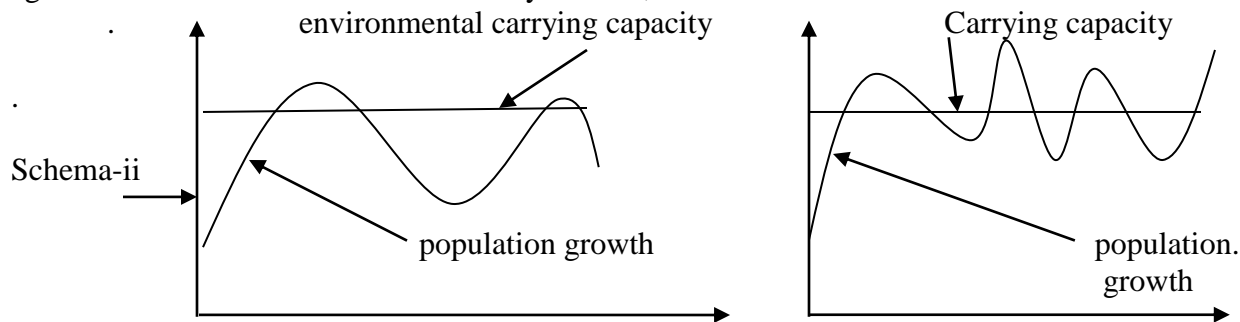
Proposition-1: *Asymptotic Relationship Between Population Growth and Environment:*

In this proposition/hypothesis, population factor is assumed adjusting smoothly to an equilibrium below the environmental limit (**Y-variable**) by a gradual decrease in the growth rate (**X-variable**), as illustrated in Schema-i, below:

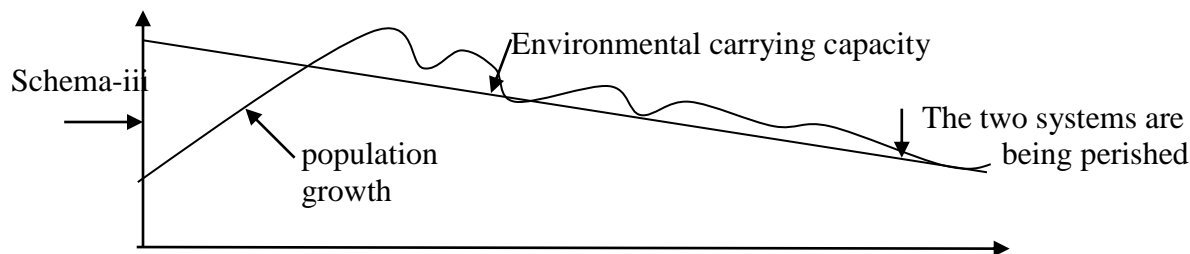


Proposition-2: *Oscillatory relationship between population growth rate and environment:*

In this situation, population factor can overshoot the environmental limit and then dive back again in either a smooth or an Oscillatory fashion,



Proposition-3: *Relationship showing when both population and environment were perishing:*



In the above schema, the population factor can overshoot the limit and in the process reduce the ultimate carrying capacity by consuming some necessary non-renewable resources. Here, the superior growth power of the population is repressed suddenly and the population tends to be kept as low as the means of subsistence, tending both to perish.

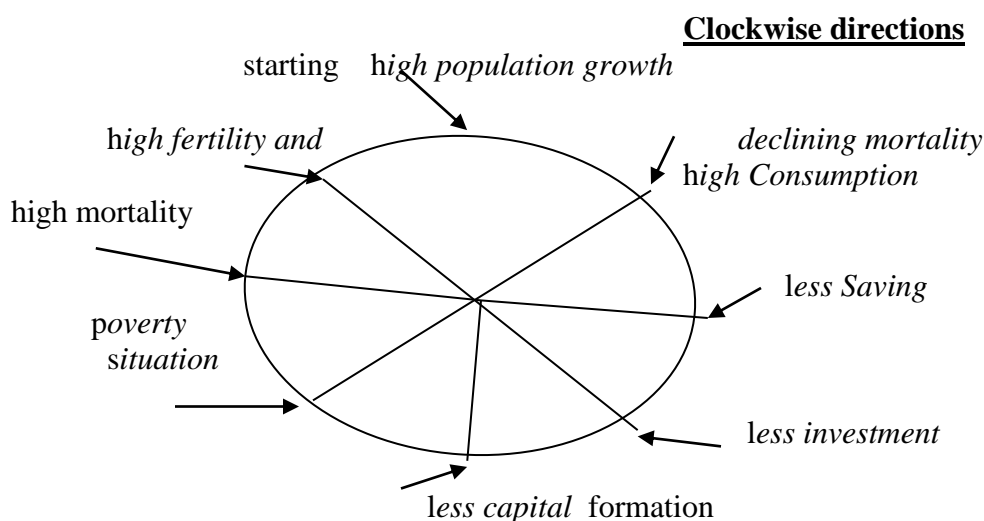
Further arguments advanced by the Neo-Malthusians were on the vicious circle of poverty as the result of the linkages between population and development and stated as follows:

- The impact of the **decline of infant and childhood mortality** is felt in the increase of dependency ratio on the adult population engaged in the production of goods and services;
- Impact of decline in **adult mortality** (i.e., more adults living longer) is to increase potential labour supply and this implies increase in the number of employment seeking persons, aggravating the existing rampant unemployment and underemployment rates;

Proposition-4: Uncontrolled High Population Growth:

High population growth rates imply high consumption, reduce capacity to accumulate saving, implying low capital formation and slow economic growth and manifests vicious circle of poverty, as illustrated herewith below:

Follow the vicious circle of poverty how it is conceptualized below:



In parallel thinking, it was argued that the high population growth rates, which were thought to contribute to poverty in the developing countries, were assumed to have been caused as follows:

- The prevalence of high fertility levels characterized by too many births;
- Early onset of childbearing;
- Late stoppage of childbearing; and
- Short birth intervals of women in the developing countries.

Furthermore, the prevailing high fertility level in the developing world, like Sub-Saharan Africa, has been motivated by the following main factors:

- Socio-cultural factors: perpetuation of family lineage;
- Children are looked as social insurance during old age
- Children as replacement for high infant and childhood mortality rates;
- The high prevalence of early age at marriage followed by high pre-natal/feotal wastage eventually induces to high fertility levels.

The Contemporary Perspectives:

(1) The Marxist/Buseropian Perspective-Cause/Consequence Nexus:

Marx was of the opinion that poverty, hunger and other social welfare problems are associated with economic backwardness. Unjust and unequal distribution of wealth, social and the management of means of production and production relations are also the basic causes of poverty.

Furthermore, the political dominance by few at the expense of the mass/majority is another cause of fundamental violation human dignity, which leads to the persistence of poverty. In similar ways, **Buserup**, from Eastern Europe, established the *Population Push Theory*, which explains population as power, creating miracle in exploiting natural resources is another typical example of the Marxist philosophy as opposed to the **Malthusian/Neon-Malthusian's Pull Hypothesis**, which explains resources as pulling down population growth rate, the *"Push and Pull" Nexus (Refer to the previous Propositions #1-3, above)*, are the relative indicators of the population/resources balance.

(2). The Driving Forces for Establishing the UNFPA:

(a) UNFPA Formation:

The UN started its activities and organized the first and second UN International Population Conferences in **Rome (1954)** and **Belgrade (1965)**, respectively, though both focused on research and academic- pursuing knowledge, not strictly policy matters. However, in order to focus on assisting the developing nations with respect to population issues and resources, the UN replaced the then *UN Population Commission* by the UNFPA, established in 1967 to provide consultation and advise to the UN Member States of Africa and other developing countries pertaining to undertaking Nation Population Censuses, Analysis, Policy Formulations and other population-related issues, such as training and computing facilities.

Hence, the first assistance was supporting in organizing the 1974 Bucharest World Population Conference (WPC). This conference opened the door for delegates to express divergent political views, interests and understandings with two major opposing radical ideas about the interrelationship between population issues and Socio-economic development.

Accordingly, the delegates were divided themselves into *capitalist-oriented and Socialist/Marxist ideology* with respect to *cause/consequence* of underdevelopment and poverty, where the former stressed that **"direct birth control** as the only panacea to eliminate existing poverty levels", but opposed by the participants from the then developing world, stating that distributing *contraceptives/direct birth control mechanisms* without studying the prevailing independent background variables, such as culture, religion, modern socio-economic factors etc. would block the acceptance of the recommendations of the **Capitalist West**, stating that the background of the developing societies should be favourable and concluded that *"development is the best background requirements for contraceptive use"*.

(b) The Special Recommendations of the 1974 Bucharest WPC:

African countries were advised to establish “**Integration of Population and Development Planning Unit**” whose duties anticipated to be as follows:

- *promote better understanding of the role of demographic variables in development planning;*
- *to foster harmonization of population and economic growth rates and take care of the *Integration Processes* :*
- *facilitate and encourage training in population studies;*
- *identify relevant demographic data inputs for development planning; and*
- *develop methodologies of integration in collaboration with relevant departments/units.*

(c) The 1984 Mexico UN International Population Conference and the 1994 Cairo International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD):

- These conferences re-iterated that **population problems were more complex**, elaborating the recommendations of the 1974 Bucharest World Population conference and called for a *multi-disciplinary approach than preoccupation with policies dealing with fertility regulation programmes, which have been used on “Birth control in isolation.*
- Among the main focus of the ICPD recommendations were on “ **reproductive health issues (RH) and mother and child health concerns (MCH). women’s empowerment, birth spacing etc**

(d) Relative differences between the 1974 Bucharest WPC and Cairo ICPD 1994

Bucharest was largely inter-governmental(macro-economic issues), avoiding non-scientific influences; strongly recommended countries to establish population study programmes to integrate population variables into development planning, monitoring and evaluation at macro/sectoral aspects; whereas the Cairo process was influenced by the participation of a broad coalition of more than 1500 NGOs, focusing on the following concerns :

- (1) reproductive and adolescent health aspects;
- (2) women’s rights and empowerment;
- (3) violence against women;
- (4) the issues of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM);and
- (5) the rights of indigenous peoples and the family planning,

Unlike the Cairo ICPD, the concerns at Bucharest were about the determinants and consequences of population growth issues. Participants: of the two conferences varied in terms of scale, with the Bucharest conference attracting up to 1200 delegates, while ICPD was attended by up to 10 000 delegates from international agencies, NGOs as well as media practitioners of diverse outlooks.

The ICPD Programme of Action called for the need for governments to develop policies and laws, such as better support for the family, contributing to its stability, particularly for the growing number of single-parenthood families; *promotion of equal opportunity* for family members, especially the rights of women and children in the family.

In the end, 179 governments signed and/or adopted a 20 year Programme of Action that stressed empowerment of women and the needs of individual men and women and the reciprocal relationship between population and development rather than demographic targets. ICPD is not an isolated event as its Programme of Action builds on the considerable international consensus that has developed since the World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974 and the International Conference on Population in Mexico City in 1984 [Margaret Hempel, 1996].

Forward Recommended Questions of Future UN International Conferences:

(1) The Main issues beyond Cairo:

At the end of UN sponsored international conference, it has been a normal tradition to pass quantitative and policy resolutions and recommendations without realistically assessed the objective conditions in the ground of developing countries, like the African continent. For example, the 1990's recommendation of "*Health for All by the Year 2000*" was simply an ambitious wish, awaiting for evaluation of the levels of performance and problems being encountered with respect to the Sub-Sahara African prevailing conditions.

(2) The UN Millennium summit 2000: Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Initiatives:

This summit recommended the achievements of the Global, continental and at country level issues of population, development, environment and the economic and political inter-dependencies among the nations of the world, specifically covering demographic, epidemiological variables, socio-economic, environment, cooperation etc.

The major components of the MDG , include the following developmental variables;:

- (1) *to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;*
- (2) *to achieve universal primary education;*
- (3) *to promote gender equality and empower women;*
- (4) *to reduce child mortality;*
- (5) *to improve maternal health;*
- (6) *to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;*
- (7) *to ensure environmental sustainability; and*
- (8) *to develop a global partnership for development.*

These goals are **inter-dependent** in that all the afore-stated goals, directly or indirectly, influence health, and health influences all the MDGs. For example, better health enables children to learn and adults to earn. Gender empowerment is essential to the achievement of better health. Furthermore, reducing poverty, hunger and environmental degradation positively influences the health aspects positively. Besides, these component influence the

demographic dynamics (fertility, mortality and migration), including the population age structure, size, distribution and the overall expectation of life.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this paper/article starts with reviewing the historical evolution of population and development concerns and examines the main issues raised at UN sponsored International population conferences, with particular reference to the 1974 Bucharest WPC and the 1994 Cairo ICPD, the extent of their complementarity, differences etc. in their issues and final outputs. The reasons for picking the Bucharest and Cairo initiatives and conferences from among other International Conferences, were motivated by the facts that these conferences invited and involved huge number of Global participants of different opinions and roles in diversified population issues,

Population growth has always been on the agenda of many rulers and governments from as far back as 500BC. There was a time when such growth was necessary to boost the political, economic as well as military strength for dominance. With time, population explosion became a concern among many Malthusian scholars, who raised a flag for governments and relevant stakeholders to take action.

This catapulted the population politics in the international arena with acrimonious debates reigning for decades. Ultimately, we can note that the 1974 Bucharest conference laid the foundation for relevant policy adoption which explicitly called for *integration of population variables into development planning*. This call was further reinforced almost two decades later at the 1994 Cairo ICPD. As a result, thanks to the two forums, conceptualization of the behavior of the real world, one that takes into account various socio-economic and demographic reciprocal interactions.

On the other hand, we also observed that the population field is also becoming increasingly complex as shown by diverse experts aiming to push their interests or rather represent various sub-population groups. To be more precise, the population field is not defined and driven by a single interest group nor by an alliance with concerns that can readily be addressed by a sectorally structured national government. Rather, the population field is made up of a coalition of interested groups whose goals and purposes overlap in many important respects and, as the conference in Cairo manifested, divergence at other times and in other important issues

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