

The Socioeconomic Impact of Fertility Rates on Nigeria's Development: A Policy Perspective

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Abstract. This paper explores the socioeconomic impact of Nigeria's high fertility rate and its influence on the country's economic development. With a fertility rate of 5.14 children per woman in 2022, far exceeding the global average, Nigeria faces significant demographic challenges. The analysis focuses on three critical data points: fertility rate, female tertiary education rate, and female labor force participation rate. The findings highlight how cultural factors, educational attainment, and labor market participation contribute to sustained high fertility rates, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, the paper examines how these factors exacerbate gender inequality and limit economic opportunities for women, thereby hindering Nigeria's overall economic progress. Policy recommendations include promoting female education and workforce participation to help manage population growth and stimulate economic development.

Keywords: fertility rate, female education, labor force participation, economic development, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The most significant public policy in Nigeria is to reduce fertility in order to promote economic development. As the seventh most populous country in the world, Nigeria's fertility rate remains at 5.14 [1] children per woman in 2022, which is far above the global average. The high fertility rate has accelerated population growth, and if the demographic dividend is not utilized in a timely and effective manner, population growth will lead to significant pressure on resource allocation, public services and infrastructure, particularly in the areas of education and health care. Although the proportion of women with higher education has reached 44% [2] in 2022, the fertility rate has not declined significantly. Cultural factors and traditional beliefs have a significant impact on the fertility decisions of local women, especially those living in rural areas. Data show that 62 percent [3] of young rural women aged 15-24 in Nigeria want to have more than four children, compared to 45 percent in urban areas, indicating a strong link between education level and fertility intentions. In addition, only 52.2% [4] of women are in the labor force, nearly half of them working in basic agriculture or fishing, contributing little to economic growth and income generation.

The following analysis will focus on three data points which are fertility rate, female tertiary education rate and female labor force participation rate. To explore their influence on Nigeria's socio-economic progress. Furthermore, the policy challenges related to these impacts will be examined and solutions that Nigerian government might take to address on these critical issues to contribute to economic development.

2. Data Analysis

2.1. Fertility Rate

Nigeria's fertility rate in 2022 is 5.14. Even though there has been a gradual decrease in fertility rate in decades, the present fertility rate still exceeds the globally recognized replacement fertility rate, which is 2.1. This is the minimum number required to maintain a stable population.

Nigeria is made up of three primary ethnic groups: the Hausa/Fulani, the Igbo, and the Yoruba. The Hausa/Fulani live mainly in northern Nigeria, while the Igbo and Yoruba live in the south. Family planning and reproductive decisions in these communities are largely influenced by cultural and religious traditions. The phenomenon of early marriage and early childbearing is very common, especially in the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group. Their fertility rate is much higher than the other groups. Also, there is a

wide disparity in the use of contraceptives among these groups. The percentage of Hausa/Fulani women using contraceptive methods is only 3.5% while the percentage of Igbo women and Yoruba women using contraceptive methods is 36.7% and 50.2% respectively. [5] A relationship also exists between contraceptive use and fertility. The lower the rate of contraceptive use, the higher the fertility rate. High child mortality is also a contributing factor to high fertility. In 2022, the under-five mortality rate is 107.2 deaths per 1,000 live births. [6] In the face of high child mortality, many families prefer to have more children to ensure that at least some of their offspring survive. The behavior of having children as a precautionary measure is very common in many traditional societies, especially in some parts of Nigeria. This behavior not only exacerbates population growth, but also puts enormous pressure on resource allocation and social infrastructure.

2.2. Tertiary Education Participation Rate

The tertiary education participation rate for Nigerian females is 44% in 2022. Women with higher levels of education typically postpone marriage and childbearing and have lower expectations of family size. [7] Higher levels of education are strongly associated with lower fertility rates, indicating a significant negative association. Data shows that in Nigeria, for every year of increase in female education, the number of children born at a young age decreases by 0.26. More educated females have a more powerful voice in family decision-making, especially when it comes to deciding on family size, and they are more cautious in their fertility decisions.

However, Nigeria still faces a serious problem of child marriage. 44% of girls are married before the age of 18. [8] This has made Nigeria become the third highest proportion of child brides globally. Early marriage is more prevalent in rural areas, especially in low-income families, and among girls with low levels of education. Low-income families sometimes prioritize the education of male children as a means of alleviating financial strain, while female children are forced to enter into early marriages as a strategy to mitigate family pressure. [9] These cultural views not only prevent girls from getting an education, but also lead to an increase in fertility rates, producing a harmful circle that has a negative impact on socio-economic development.

In addition, in many areas, especially in the Muslim communities of Northern Nigeria, school attendance by females is further restricted due to traditional cultural and religious beliefs. These cultural norms tend to make women give priority to their families but may limit their success in the social and economic spheres, which may impact on women's educational advancement.

2.3. Female Labor Force Participation Rate

In 2022, the female labor force participation rate in Nigeria is 52.2%. About half of the working females are engaged in elementary occupations such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. [10] Educational attainment has a direct impact on female labor force participation. Highly educated females are more likely to work in occupations that require advanced skills. This will not only increase their income, but also help to provide the skilled workers needed for the diversification of the country and the development of high-value industries. However, it is notable that the percentage of females with tertiary education in Nigeria is only 44%. Large numbers of females face challenges in seeking to enter the high-skill sector, thus limiting their choices and competitiveness in the job market.

Occupational choices for women are also limited by traditional cultural attitudes. Males dominate the labor market, while women often face opposition from their spouses, which leads them to give up their jobs. Even when women seek to enter the labor market, they find it difficult to gain access to equitable employment opportunities. In addition, the economy of Nigeria is heavily dependent on the primary sector. As a result, women with limited education are more likely to be restricted to low-skilled occupations, thereby exacerbating their unequal position in the job market.

3. Implications

The high fertility rate in Nigeria indicates that demographic pressure on the country will increase in the coming decades. This pressure will create tremendous problems in resource allocation, public service delivery and infrastructure development. Over time, it could lead to social instability and a slowdown in economic development, especially if governments are unable to effectively utilize the benefits of the demographic dividend. Moreover, an increasing fertility rate will lead to greater poverty and more economic difficulties for families, thus limiting the opportunities for children for quality education.

The lower rate of women's participation in tertiary education is expected to lead to higher poverty rates. This is because families are under more financial pressure to raise more children, which limits their children's chances of receiving a qualitative education. Less educated females are at higher risk of pursuing low-paying, unskilled occupations. This exacerbates the gender gap and prevents the country's ability to compete in the global economy. In addition, limited education leads to higher fertility rates, which exacerbates demographic pressures in Nigeria and limits economic progress.

4. Policy Challenge

According to the above data and analysis, the most important policy challenge in Nigeria is to improve women's access and educational attainment in order to provide more opportunities for women to work. Currently, a significant percentage of women in Nigeria have no tertiary education, resulting in their low status in the labor market. Most females are confined to low-skilled, low-income industries such as agriculture and fishing. In addition, the low level of female education makes them lack the ability and willingness to resist in the face of traditional cultural constraints to escape from gender inequality in society and unequal status in the family. This situation will not only frustrate efforts to manage the ongoing expansion of the population but will also exacerbate the country's decreasing ability for economic advancement. As a result, it is imperative for the government to formulate and implement policies that foster the advancement of female education and employment. It includes increased investment in girls' education, contributing to a change in socio-cultural attitudes, eliminating gender discrimination, and providing more vocational training and employment support. These will all help to improve the status of women in society, reduce fertility rates and contribute to the sustainable development of the economy of Nigeria.

5. Conclusion

Nigeria's high fertility rate, combined with low female education levels and limited participation in the labor force, presents major challenges to its economic development. The analysis shows a clear connection between fertility rates, educational attainment, and labor force participation. Higher education tends to lower fertility rates and increases women's economic contributions. However, cultural factors, particularly in rural areas, continue to drive high fertility rates and hinder economic progress.

To overcome these challenges, Nigeria must focus on improving access to education for women and increasing their participation in the workforce, especially in skilled jobs. By doing so, the country can better manage its population growth and reduce pressure on resources and public services. The key to Nigeria's sustainable development lies in tapping into the potential of its population through education, employment, and promoting gender equality.

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