

# Human Population 2017

## Homework 1. The tasks of Science.

### DIPA

Descriptive task

Interpretive task

Predictive task

Active task

*Review the "DIPA" discussion in the slides from Lecture 1.*

*Highlight the following text according to DIPA. The first half of the article has been highlighted for you. Read this part with DIPA in mind and ask yourself why each sentence has been highlighted as such. Is the sentence an interpretation or explanation? If so, it belongs to the Interpretive task. Does the sentence use the future tense, with or without a conditional clause? If so, it is probably a Prediction. Does the sentence or phrase use the subjunctive form (would, should, could) or suggest an ethical option or experimental design? Then, it is an Active task statement.*

*Note that DIPA tasks are tasks associated with the authors, not with the cited work! Any cited descriptions, interpretations, predictions or actions are all Descriptive in the current context, because the authors are performing the task of description of the work of others.*

*Please use the highlighting feature of your word processor, which may be Pages, Word or Reader. Or print and highlight using highlighting markers. If you highlight electronically, please email your file to me (bystrc@rpi.edu). If you did it on paper, bring it to class.*

*Due Jan 24.*

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## Is Africa's growing population a threat to the Sustainable Development Goals?

Martin Namasaka and Milou Vanmulken

Thesis statement: *Exploiting the stalled fertility transition to meet*

*the SDGs in African countries is contingent on improving public health and educational institutions and promoting the informal and agricultural sectors.*

----- *begin highlighting here* -----

Recent estimates of Africa's population indicate that in less than three generations, 41% of the world's youth will be African (Ibrahim, 2012). Proponents of population growth postulate that this could act as a dynamic engine for agricultural growth and technological innovation. In contrast, pessimists predict that impending doom is correlated with this population growth given challenges such as food insecurity, depleting natural resources, rising unemployment, political instability as well as heterogeneous limits to growth in the continent's economic prospects. The underlying limitation in these claims lies in understanding precisely how Africa can transform this population boom into economic gains to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

First, African countries will only reap a sizeable demographic dividend, if fertility rates decline rapidly. In light of the East Asian miracle, conventional theory posits that socio-economic development is a key determinant of fertility decline (Notestein, 1953; Easterlin, 1975). This experience offers valuable lessons for African countries, to focus on socio-economic development as an *initial condition* towards fertility decline. By declining mortality as well as fertility, East Asia experienced a rapid demographic transition between 1965 and 1990, leading to a growth in the working age-population of four times compared to the young and elderly dependants, which primarily reduced the dependency ratio (Bloom et al., 2002).

The success of East Asia in converting its population growth into economic gains, can be attributed to a focus on well-functioning *institutions* that ensured effective trade liberalisation policies, physical and human capital development through improvements in quality education and health sectors, as well as emphasis on the labour intensive export market, which created quality employment for the population including that of women (IMF, 2014). Even so, it is fundamental to note that there is not a significant heterogeneity between East Asia's experiences with Africa's because Africa's demographic transition is atypical and has been sluggish due to a

stalled fertility transition. However, African countries can still borrow from the East Asia's family planning programmes which made contraceptives easily accessible and more socially acceptable, in addition to encouraging fewer children.

As argued by population optimists (Boserup, 2005 and Simon, 1992), population growth promotes economic growth; in the sense that it furnishes abundant human and intellectual capital as well as an increasing market size. By 2035 Africa's labour force is expected to be bigger than China's, greater than India's and three times larger than Europe's (Ibrahim, 2012). For this projected workforce to result in significant investments for their home countries will depend on how it can ideally be turned into a productive labour force to fit the *international context*. Arguably, literacy and numeracy are significant preconditions for society's socio-economic development and for women to be able to make an informed decision, leading to a fertility decline. However Africa's economic future depends on a sufficiency of technical and vocational skills (ILO, 2012) for its human resource. These are needs which many of the educational and training institutions are not adequately addressing (Cleland, 2012). Yet, turning the rapid population growth into quality human resources would be a great chance for Africa to benefit from its working age population.

Consequently, realising the demographic dividend, demands increasing productivity of the approximate 80% of working-age African youth projected to be in the informal sector by 2050, will enable the formal sector to thrive, as witnessed in the structural transformation of Asia and Latin America (World Bank, 2014). Conceivably, African governments should see the informal sector as an opportunity by promoting the growth of small firms, ultimately encouraging them to transition into large firms (African Economic Outlook, 2012). Although Africa has potential in the agricultural sector, efforts to accelerate agricultural growth have been significantly separated from initiatives aimed at creating employment for Africa's growing population. Yet, it could be a great catalyst for economic growth as was the case of the Green Revolution in Asia that focused on increasing smallholder productivity (World Bank, 2008).

With a record of 3.5% annual urban growth until 2050, Africa is likely to experience considerable economic development due to the correlation between urbanisation and development (AfDB, 2012). In this

vein, the population growth has the potential of increasing urban density from rural-urban migration that can eventually create urban agglomeration which is essential for sustained economic growth, because large urban centres encourage innovation and increase in the economies of scale (World Development Report, 2009). In face of these optimistic assertions, it is significant to note that there is no absolute guarantee that rapid population growth and urbanisation in Africa will automatically lead to economic development. The proliferation of slums, rising inequality, urban poverty and insecurity demonstrates that maintaining sustained economic growth due to population growth and urbanisation remains a challenge for African countries (AfDB, 2012).

In contrast with the optimists' perspective, the Malthusian theory (Malthus, 1798) and population pessimists' hypothesise this high population leads to poor socio-economic development. Insinuating that African countries are demographic outliers and that the current high fertility and rapid population growth inhibits the progress towards sustained economic development. For instance, 53 million of Africa's 200 million young people, who represent the youth bulge aged 15 and 34, are not in stable employment; of the 40 million young Africans who are not working, 18 million are still looking for a job while the remaining 22 million have given up (African Economic Outlook, 2012).

If the demands of this population is not met, it is likely to lead to political instability (Cincotta, 2010) and might be problematic for democracy in the continent as witnessed in the case of the Egyptian uprising in 2011 and the Arab Spring (Dyson, 2012). The effect of this growing population is further demonstrated by the faltering job markets in Nigeria where the rapid population growth accounts for 1.8 million people annually, with few jobs to absorb them, eventually turning the flaunted demographic dividend into a demographic disaster, as characterised by the nihilistic violence of Boko Haram (Meagher, 2013). Based on these examples, it can be argued that uncontrolled population growth in African countries undermines sustainable development prospects and could lead to socio-political destabilisation.

Subsequently, Africa's growing population presents a challenge to food security. Rising food imports in the region alone, implies that the growth in domestic supply is unable to match the increase in demand (FAO,

2011). The continent spends US\$35 billion each year in food exports due to its inability to produce enough food for the growing population as well as process its agricultural commodities to climb up the global value chain (Africa Progress Panel, 2014). Perchance, by increasing participation and upgrading the global value chain, African countries can not only promote development but will also ensure that small producers who constitute the majority of the population can enjoy a fair share of the gains derived from trade as well as economic growth (Goger et al., 2014). Feeding this rapidly growing population is even more complicated considering the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate (2014) which ranks Africa as the most vulnerable region to climate change due to its low adaptive capacity. Climate change in this region is linked to agricultural losses as well as violent conflict, illustrated in a study of more than 78,000 armed conflicts from 1980 to 2012 in the Sahel region of Africa (O'Loughlin et al. 2014).

From the pessimists' point of view, it seems possible that African countries may miss the window of opportunity to create employment through *industrialisation*, noting that it is a latecomer and inherently out of phase with the global industrialisation process in the last 80 years or more (Mkandawire, 1988). This is so, owing to its strain with the burden of unprecedented diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and the recent ebola outbreaks. Malaria and HIV/AIDS account for close to a third of Africa's ten million deaths every year, most of whom are working-age adults between 20 and 59, on whom realising the demographic dividend depends.

Therefore, to follow the sustainable development trajectories of the East Asian economies, Africa needs to have ardent *interests* in: improving public health systems to improve child survival, providing available and acceptable family planning, ensuring declines in child bearing to reduce dependency ratios, encouraging savings for investments, improving educational institutions as well as quality training together with stable economic growth conditions that will ultimately encourage job creation, with sufficient social protection. Turning this population into an opportunity depends on what policies individual countries will implement, since one size will not fit all of Africa and each country is at a different stage of the demographic transition.

Overall, since demography is not destiny, fertility decline on its own holds no guarantee for realising the demographic dividend. African

countries need effective policies in three key areas. First in *catalysing* the demographic transition by improving health sectors eventually leading to a decline in mortality and fertility thus initiating the demographic transition; second, in *accelerating* the fertility transition through family planning initiatives; third, in *exploiting* the transition through education, good governance, transparency, democratic institutions free from corruption, which are all critical in collecting the demographic dividend and meeting the SDGs.

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NOTE: *This article expresses the views of the authors, and not necessarily the position of the IGC.*

This post forms part of a cross-blog series on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development run by the IGC, [Africa at LSE](#), and [South Asia at LSE](#) blogs.