

# University Report

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GWYNETH HENDERSON:

In this weeks 'University Report' the population explosion - and how we must now finally face up to the situation that is being caused by our pretending that it doesn't exist. Very often of course anyone who tries to point out just how serious things are and will get with an unchecked and ever rising birthrate are accused of scare-mongering. Well today we have the case put in such a way that I defy anyone to accuse him of exaggerating - Dr. Ademola Igun is a demographer at the University of Ife, Nigeria - the population and if and how it can care for itself is his business. Well how does Dr. Igun see the situation in perhaps Africa's biggest and potentially richest country?

DR. A. IGUN:

People have said that Nigeria can contain so many people so there is no need to bother, but if we look in terms of our economic development, social development and what is going on now, I think Nigeria has got to start to think and very seriously too, because whether we like it or not there is population explosion, and if it is not guarded there will be great trouble. For instance what happens now does not actually come into reality in terms of population, and we don't start to feel it until about twenty years to come. Hence, if even now we feel that we don't have any population explosion and we still continue to increase our population by the rate we are going now, then twenty years to come we will have double/explosion. and this will be very very tragic. So I can say without any fear of contradiction there is population explosion in Nigeria, but to make the people feel it you have to analyse this situation, not just in terms of size, but in terms of the economic and social implications, to show them that individuals even when you have a small family of five sharing just two rooms, then at the individual level the question of population explosion has already been felt so that population explosion is not just for the country alone, it even seeps down to the individuals as well. So Nigeria has a population explosion, and the earlier they start to think about it I think the better.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Dr. Ademola Igun of the Department of Demography, University of Ife, spelling out the situation for Nigeria in no uncertain terms. A situation that is common all over the world unfortunately. Of course one realises the problems a government may have in setting up an official family planning programme because of oppositions from various religious bodies, but I still find it surprising that, for example, in English speaking Africa, only Ghana and Kenya have official government programmes and policies for birth control. Many other governments do of course give tacit support by allowing various groups like the Family Planning Association or the International Planned Parenthood Federation to run campaigns - but this is not it seems enough. It's said that in Nigeria the population is increasing by three to five per cent annually - which means it doubles itself in a period of only ten to fifteen years. Even given that Nigeria is a relatively rich country how can it cope economically with this sort of growth? With this in mind Akin Euba asked Dr. Igun -

AKIN EUBA:

What are the problems of population in regard to food and agriculture?

DR. A. IGUN:

Well this is a very very intricate subject, but I will endeavour to give a brief outline. It is noted by Malthus that if the population grows at an excessive rate and it is not checked, that a famine might be one of the repercussions or war, or some catastrophe might occur. In other words it is noted that the larger the population the greater the need for more food. But with particular reference to Nigeria the problem of food and population in Nigeria has several aspects. It has the quantitative aspect, it has the qualitative aspect, quantitatively we can say that enough food is not being produced to go around the population. Qualitatively on the other side, that even if enough food is produced it does not have a sufficient amount of the contents that will be needed to make an individual a well developed person, that is nutritionally. Therefore the problem in Nigeria will now be a question of not only growing more food but also making sure that the quality, the proteins, the amount that is needed should be there. But there is one other complication, there is what we call 'Rural Urban Migration' going on in the country. When people who perhaps have been farmers start to get away from the farm it shows that only the old people who were farmers before, but are still working the old tools and are getting less effective are being left, so that it is apparent so far that the cities are not being well fed, and it becomes a fight between the rich and the poor. The rich can get more food, whereas the poor will not be able to have any.

DR. A. IGUN:

I can set an example of what is happening in Agege. Agege is a food producing area in Nigeria but because of the desire to have money, to have cash, Agege sends all the food it has produced to Lagos. With the result that they don't have enough, and so they then go to Lagos to buy it at a more expensive rate so this will outline to you what the problems of food, as measured against population, Nigeria will have, and if something is not done it will become intensified.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

All the time one is conscious of a sense of urgency. Of course as Dr. Igun said migration and urbanization exacerbates the problem a great deal. In Lagos of course the population has grown by eighty per cent in the last five or six years. Of course as a result of migration as well as an increase in the birth rate. People come to the city with all sorts of aspirations and expectations and yet with this sort of growth no city can cope as far as providing employment, housing, health and educational facilities. And the fact that it can't cope leads of course to disenchantment, and almost inevitably other social and political problems will soon follow. The trouble is of course that as the world gets better at looking after itself - as people live longer and no longer die from diseases and accidents that used to be fatal - we have in fact upset the balance of nature. Nature is no longer allowed to take care of itself as far as controlling the population is concerned - man now has to take over with birth control. Akin Euba asked Dr. Igun if Nigeria is taking action.

DR. A. IGUN:

Nigeria is already doing something about it but it is being done voluntarily under what we call The National Family Planning Council, of which I am also an executive member. Now what they are doing is that they try to educate mothers, they tell them about the reproductive system, how it comes about and what can be done to reduce it. But we have one problem in this country. I have conducted a survey all over the country to get an idea of the opinion of the people. and it is surprising to find that even though many preachers or priests who say we should not do it, the people want it. But now the problem is how shall we give it to them? Because if we give it to them in the European method it may not fit into our cultural milieu so we have to know what exists in this culture and bring it. Now for this we have been practising for time and immemorial - abortion is one method, but two we have coitus interruptus and one woman has already told us that even the muslims have amulets to prevent them from getting pregnant.

DR. A. IGUN:

Then in the mid-West for instance they said they were actually under the guise of saying that because we have twins we did not know which of them is the true person or not so we threw them into the river and allowed which ever surfaced, was carried, and if it was both, we just take the two. It was actually a method of preventing this excessive growth. But now we want to do it in a way that is accepted so what we do is Family Planning, but how do you go about it? Now we want to show the people the advantages of doing it. I mentioned the question of education. Now it is becoming very very expensive to educate a child, so that if you have five it means that perhaps only one might get educated, and the people now want it, and what we are doing is to teach them how they can go to the clinics, how they can take care of themselves, tell that that excessive reproduction actually weakens the mother, she might die and at the same time they can take care of themselves. And now that women have taken up employment they want more time for their job and at the same time with education they want to enjoy themselves, so I think Nigeria will grow faster. But one problem that I've seen there is that what we call inter-familiar discussion does not take place. Even though a wife wants it she is afraid to tell her husband because her husband might think that she would be unfaithful, but we've been trying now to get the husbands educated as well, that there is no question of unfaithfulness in this. And in fact you have to tell them that whether you know it or don't know if they are going to be unfaithful, they will be unfaithful. But as it is in Nigeria most Nigerian women are faithful to their husbands but they just want the men to also agree with them, so that it will have some validity, some authority behind it. I hope in the plans we are making in the Demographic Unit on population education is to bring this awareness to the men and get the men and women themselves to plan these things together, and I think that if it is done this way, and it's given to the people in a culturally acceptable method it will have a very big success.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

So Dr. Igun convinced that people really do want to be able to control the size of their families. Well of course no one wants to have children who they can't afford to feed properly, that they can't afford to educate properly and who will probably, when they grow up, not be able to get a job anyway. Unemployment is a chronic problem in the western world - and is rapidly becoming one in Africa too as people continue to move into the cities - people of all levels of education. Dr. Igun gave Akin an example of what's happening.

DR. A. IGUN:

In Western Nigeria we looked into the type of school leavers, that is, those who finished primary, who finished secondary modern, who finished secondary grammar and then tried to see how many of them are working, at what they are working and from this we can see the number who are unemployed. Percentage-wise I might say of all the primary school leavers, 31.3, that is between 31 and 32 of the hundred who finished are not employed. Of the secondary modern 54.8 that is about 59 of every hundred finishing secondary modern are unemployed. In secondary grammar about 40.2. that is between 40 and 41 of every hundred completing secondary grammar education are not employed, and on the total that is everybody educated at all these levels about 33.9 that is about 34 out of every hundred working who went through this course of education are not employed. So in other words we have a very big unemployment problem and I do not know yet what the country is doing about it although everybody says that they are aware of the problem. But one thing, whether we should call it fortunate or unfortunate I don't know, the last war helped Nigeria to siphon off a number of people who were unemployed so that they are still in the army, but when they are now demobilised we start to feel the problem as we are already seeing. So in other words the country has got to start to plan. I wrote a paper when we started to worry ourselves about what is going to happen for reconstruction and to continue development. I wrote a paper telling them that before these people get out of the army they should be given some skills and that most of our jobs for development and all the industrialisation should not, all of them, should not be capital intensive. There should be a lot of labour intensive, but the machinery should be of the type that can be converted as soon as we can train these people, they can take up some other jobs because definitely you know one is like what the economists call the multiplier. If you find a job for one person, he is working at this, one needs some subsidiary people to work at other things. So as soon as they start, and we start to bring these men out we can siphon them off to jobs because they have acquired a skill through training and this to me, of course, is subject to some other modifications. It seems to be about the best way that Nigeria, in fact all developing countries, should try to solve unemployment problems. It would be a mistake to shy away from it. In fact the more they shy from it the more you get into trouble because these are the people when they are not employed, and we have told them that Independence is to give them all the things they need and they find that Independence is not giving them - you have whetted their aspiration for this, and if we don't give it to them then we are caught in trouble, and such countries cannot last. In fact it is one of the reasons, one of the causes of political instability in any country.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Dr. Ademola Igun of the Department of Demography, University of Ife, talking to Akin Euba on the campus there. Well you may just have noticed that I didn't actually need convincing about the necessity for official family planning programmes - nevertheless what Dr. Igun has said now makes me feel that there isn't an argument left against birth control.

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