

An Assessment of Implementation of the National Population Policy of Ethiopia (1994-2015)

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Abstract: The development of policy on paper and its implementation is quite different. The government of Ethiopia repeatedly confessed that its policies are relevant, but suffering a lot in the implementation aspect. The population policy's implementation does not seem different. The major objective of this study was to critically assess the implementation of the National Population Policy of Ethiopia from 1994 to 2015. This study is a cross-sectional and qualitative in its design. This research uses both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Both primary and secondary data were used to gather the necessary information. Ten Federal Ministries and four institutions were chosen as samples. A total of 55 Experts and concerned officials from each office were selected purposively and interviewed. A number of relevant documents were also consulted. Lack of political commitment among the implementing bodies, the government did not effectively implement the policy in changing the attitude of the people and in addressing the pressing development issues of the people, population issues in the implementing ministries/organizations are considered as secondary and the transfer of the Population Office from the Prime Minister's Office to MoFED has reduced the vitality of the policy and weakened the translation of rhetoric into practice. Based on the findings of the study, a number of recommendations are made for policy makers and practitioners. These include: the government should reaffirm its commitment to implementing its population policy, the Prime Minister's office should lead the responsibility of coordination, follow-up and monitoring and evaluation of the policy; design an alternative specific population policy for each region as regions have unique culture; and the role of the private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders should be enhanced in the implementation of the policy.

Key Words: Population policy, Fertility, Population growth rate, Total fertility rate, food security, climate change.

Date of Submission: 12-08-2019

Date of Acceptance: 26-08-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

Population issues in Ethiopia were not given due attention during the Imperial and then-military regime because their roles were not recognized (Arowolo, 2006: 3). The neglect of population dynamics occurred as a result of unawareness and ideological dispositions (Hailemariam et al. 2011: 304).

Nonetheless, in the 1980s, there was a change of attitude among the officials as there was conspicuous population pressure and food insecurity in the country (Asmerom, 1990: 127). The then-military junta was also frustrated by the tragic consequences of the 1984 famine and it 'counted' its people for the first time (Gill, 2010: 120). Surprisingly enough, the population was found to be 40 million, 9 million higher than expected (Assefa and Sisay, 2003: 27) no matter how the counting was conducted after millions lost their lives to war and famine (Zuberi et al 2003: 472). Then, the international community pressurized the regime to introduce a population policy and the regime produced a draft in 1988 but it was not even adopted (Gill, 2010: 122).

The present Government introduced a new national population policy in April, 1993. Arowolo (2010: 6) citing ONCCP (1999) revealed that the policy was a result of research, policy dialogue, and deliberations among the concerned bodies. Its goals were "the harmonization of the rate of population growth and the capacity of the country for the development and rational utilization of natural resources and the improvement of the welfare of the population" (TGE, 1993: 1). The population policy has eight major classifications and clearly set goals, objectives and strategies.

Yet, Ethiopia has the highest fertility rate in sub-Sahara Africa and the population is growing by 2.73% yearly doubling every 27 years and 45% of the population is under 15 years of age (MoFED, 2006: 166; CSA, 2010:29). This clearly indicates that the implementation of the population policy has been tough as it failed to meet, for instance, its overarching objective-the reduction of fertility rate.

Even though the structure of the population policy is stretched to a zone level, the study is limited to the fourteen ministries/organizations situated in the capital city that shoulder much of the implementation work and many of the policy-makers and experts work in these offices. Besides, the researcher lives in the capital and has the access and the familiarity to the offices. Time wise, the study covers the time from 1994 to 2010 as the implementation began in 1994 though the policy was adopted in 1993.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

There have been legitimate concerns as far as the population in the developing countries. These 'concerns' were translated into population policies which were characterized by the imposition (Chimbwete et al, 2005: 86; Robinson, 2012: 278), hypocrisy (Seitz, 1988: 38; Aguirre, 2001: 1) being out of reach (Shiva, 1999: 112-113; Adegbola, 2008: 57; May, 2012: 63, 163; Robinson, 2012: 275) and ideology (Rowley and Holmberg, 1999: 116; Charbit, 2009: 1-8). Other writers contend that population growth in Africa was a real threat and that population policies were justifiable (Young, 1998: 254; Kravdal, 2001: 105; MacDonald, 2003: 89; Young, 2005: 83-85).

Nowadays, issues other than population, such as climate change, migration, security and reproductive rights have dominated the agenda (Findlay and Hoy, 2000: 208-209; De Souza et al., 2003: 7; Speidel et al. 2009: 3049). Besides, the Cairo Conference has also minimized the involvement of other parties on the population policies of other nations (Grimes, 1994: 219) and the decision was welcomed by the leaders of the poor nations (Najam, 1996: 9). Thus, many countries are trying to implement their population policies, though their financial and administrative capacities are limited (Demeny, 2003: 13) and their political commitment is weak (UN, 2008: 32).

In Ethiopia, the commitment of the government to implementing its population policy has never been consistent. At the beginning, the government was so determined that it equated the failure of the policy to a failure of the whole macro economy (TGE, 1993: 7; UN, 1998: 11). The international organizations and NGOs were also part of the implementation process. Later, it declared the sole ownership of the implementation of the policy (UN, 2001: 3) but the results are not encouraging. The government has assigned different responsibilities to fourteen implementing organs so that the goals set can be achieved. This demands systematic and scholarly study. To the best of my knowledge, no researcher has holistically addressed this issue. The focus of the study is therefore to fill this knowledge gap.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The major objective of this study is to critically assess the implementation of the National Population Policy of Ethiopia from 1994 to 2015. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- ✓ Assess how the implementing organs exercise the responsibilities vested on them and what their developmental strengths and weaknesses are and
- ✓ Assess the positive and negative impacts each implementing organ has on the goals and objectives set by the policy.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ✓ How does each organ exercise its responsibilities and what are the development implications of each implementing body's strengths and weaknesses? and
- ✓ What are the positive and negative impacts each organ has in terms of the goals and objectives set?

V. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The scope is limited to the fourteen implementing bodies for three reasons:

- The fourteen organs shoulder huge responsibilities and assessing the cooperation and performance of these offices would give a clear picture of the population policy.
- Ten of the fourteen implementing organs are Ministerial offices. Most of the policy makers are working there. The remaining four bodies are very much important as there are many experts working on a full time basis on population issues.

Moreover, the study covers the period from 1994-2015. The policy was adopted in April 1993 but the implementation began in 1994. This will definitely help the writer to understand the development implications of the policy.

VI. RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Designing policies and programs on paper and its implementation are quite different. The government repeatedly confessed that its policies are relevant, but suffering a lot in the implementation aspect. The population policy's implementation does not seem different.

One of my justifications for the study is the fact that Ethiopia has still the highest fertility rate and a big population growth with 85% of its population living in the rural areas (MoFED, 2006: 127). This high rate of population growth in turn has made the expansion of education challenging (Arowolo, 2010: 4).

Another justification is that Ethiopia still has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world due to low level of access to reproductive health and emergency obstetrics service (Arowolo, 2010: 5 citing UN, 2009). Similarly, UNFPA (2006: 2) confirms that the reproductive health status is still poor. For instance, one in three births is unwanted and a large proportion is unplanned (Arowolo, 2010: 9).

Harmful traditional practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early marriage and abduction are still vigorously practiced. In fact, in some regions of the country, 90% of the girls get mutilated (UNFPA, 2010: 37) though the Constitution under Article (35) 4 protects women from any harmful practices. Sadly enough, the Muslim religious leaders and the elders are divided on the issue-some consider it as a religious obligation, but others regard it as irreligious and cruel (PMC, 2011: 14, 30). Early marriage is also common. According to Yemane, et al (2003: 11), girls are given for marriage irrespective of what the penal code and the civil codes say. The writers mentioned the following consequences of early marriage: fistula, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, desertion of young women to urban areas and prostitution. Abduction is also a means of securing marriage in the rural areas (Yemane et al, 2003: 10).

The final justification is that environmental degradation like soil erosion is still high as there is no well-organized and sustained conservation (Aynalem, 2009:7). The need to accommodate an increasing population has resulted in the distribution of grazing lands (Befekadu and Berhanu, 2000: 199).The aforementioned justifications for the study include the implementation failures observed in the process in the areas of fertility reduction, maternal mortality rates, in the fight against harmful traditional practices, and environmental protection. Therefore, the researcher deeply assessed how the designated ministries/organizations accomplish the responsibilities vested on them.

VII. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The overriding aim of this research is to assess the implementation of the national population policy of Ethiopia. The research examined the interagency coordination of the implementing bodies and the performance of each organ based on the responsibility it holds. Based on Mouton's (2001: 54) advice, the researcher applied a process implementation approach.

The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches as suggested by Kumar (2005: 12). According to him, this approach can yield in better results. Besides, issues that are tough to quantify can be entertained through qualitative approach and vice versa. Creswell and Plano (2011: 78) also proposes using both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Given the number of bodies involved and the responsibilities vested on them, using a quantitative approach is logical. On the other hand, the qualitative approach is essential for obtaining the vital information that higher officials or senior experts know. As the research includes knowledgeable officials from different ministerial offices, the data collected through interview is vital.

VIII. RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

This study employed both primary and secondary data. As far as the primary data are concerned, a key informant interview was conducted with key informants from the ministries, and authorities involved in the implementation process. In this regard, Quinn (2002: 344-345) and Monette et al. (1994: 154) stress that interview is essential to know the perceptions, knowledge and feelings of the respondents about the subject matter. The research also used various research findings, policy documents, reports, censuses, draft plans, provisions, proclamations, additional published and unpublished documents, magazines, newspapers, and Internet sources.

Sampling and sampling techniques

The National Population Policy of Ethiopia stretches from the Federal Government to the Regions then to the Zones and then to the Woredas. This makes the policy so extensive and difficult to cover everything in one study.

The researcher thus chose the Federal ministerial offices that have responsibilities to implement the policy. Thus, the researcher selected the ten Ministries and four institutions as these offices are decision makers and they encompass much of the administrative and financial capacity. The performance of the regional and zonal offices is mainly decided by these offices. Furthermore, the researcher focuses on the cooperation and performance of these decisive offices.

Experts and concerned officials from each office were selected purposively. More experts from the Ministry of Health were included in the interview as it runs different programs related to population. The

Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation is also responsible for coordinating and monitoring the financial aspect and hence six experts are included.

Table 1: Sample size of governmental organs

Ministry/ Authority/ University	Total
Ministry of Education	3
Ministry of Information	3
Ministry of Health	12
Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation	6
Ministry of Justice	3
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	3
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs	3
Ministry of Young and Sports	3
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development	3
Ministry of Housing and Urban Development	3
Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia	3
The Central Statistical Authority	3
Addis Ababa University	2
Population Office	5
Grand Total	55

IX. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher is cognizant of the ethical rules and regulations and practices in conducting research. The researcher strictly adheres to the rights to confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of respondents as advised by Quinn (2002: 408-427), Stier and Roger (2008: 49) and Kumar (2005: 212-216).

X. MAJOR FINDINGS

To reiterate, the major objective of this study is to critically assess the implementation of the National Population Policy of Ethiopia from 1994 to 2015. The specific objectives of this study are to: (1) Assess how the implementing organs exercise the responsibilities vested on them and what their developmental strengths and weaknesses are and (2) Assess the positive and negative impacts each implementing organ has on the goals and objectives set by the policy.

Strengths and Weaknesses in the Implementation of population policy

❖ Strengths

From the interview conducted with the key informants, the various ministries have tried their best to implement the policy. According to respondents, the major strengths of the responsible ministries and institutions include, among others: the overall support provided to regions in terms of budget and collaboration, an effort to coordinate the activities of different offices,

❖ Weaknesses and limitations

Poor implementation capacity of plans, blanket recommendation of policies across regions by the federal government without taking the unique context of each region, lack of regional specific policies; failure to pre-test of policies, and knowledge gap are some of the weaknesses observed in the past 20 years (Interview, 2015).

The following is also the major weaknesses of the implementations of population policy in the various ministries. These are: Low consultation and partnership with other stakeholders, including None-Government-Organizations, Youth and Women Associations, Religious Institutions, the Media etc.; absence or delay of performance reports by other offices; lack of sustainability and consistency; and the gap between plan and achievements (Interview, 2015). Furthermore, delay of task accomplishment is mentioned as a weakness of the federal support programs. Lack of continuity of financial support, lack of regional capacity building, lack of frequent monitoring and evaluation of programs, lack of adequate financial support are some of the weaknesses mentioned by key informants. There are a number of factors that could determine the success of population policy as mentioned by respondents. These are: Leadership and political commitments; budget; and accountability.

Negative Impact

According to respondents the once green and fertile lands of the country turned arid and semi-arid. Even the most respected trees used for medicine no more exist. Almost all the wells dried, domestic animals should travel tens of kilometers to drink water. There is little effort to tackle this challenge, though the government promised the integration of fourteen bodies to address population problems. Almost all the key informants said that the government did not effectively implement the policy in changing the attitude of the people and in addressing the pressing development issues of the people.

Respondents further mentioned that there is a lack of political commitment among the implementing bodies. A concrete evidence for this is the transfer of the Population Office from the Prime Minister's Office to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED). Normally, the most important national issues are under the domain of the Prime Minister's Office. This is shared by Gill (2010: 136). Besides, population issues in the implementing ministries/organizations are considered as secondary. As to their opinion, the transfer of the Population Office from the Prime Minister's Office to MoFED has reduced the vitality of the policy and weakened the translation of rhetoric into practice.

Ethiopia is an ardent follower of democratic developmental state. A government policy document (FDRE, 2010: 66-70) declares that the government has three defining features: development as a key to the survival of the nation; economic and political freedom from the influence of the rich; and the hegemony of the developmental state. The government believes poverty can lead the nation to disintegration and civil war. To this effect, local efforts and external assistances should focus on poverty eradication. Besides, the government frees itself from the influence of the rich by owning the land, telecommunications, financial institutions, power, the airlines, and brags about having the support of the peasants. Further, the government believes that every effort should be made to place developmental state at a commanding height. Due to this, the government has been at loggerheads with the west on development issues regarding excessive government intervention on the economy, refusal to privatize land, power, financial institutions, etc. On top of this, UNFPA (2001: 3) witnesses that Ethiopia is seriously committed to the ownership of development programs even those supported by external development partners. Nonetheless, Sachs (2005: 89-91) states that the stances of the WB and the IMF are not only based on economic theories but also highly influenced by US interests. Besides, Borg and Johnston (2006: 220) and Chandhoke (2009: 12) contend that if a country adheres to policies, even in achieving the MDGs, which are antagonistic to the interests of the west, it can be denied financial assistance as it happened in Venezuela. Therefore, the government should be smart to reduce the political impacts observed in the efforts to implement the population policy (Interview, 2015).

The national population policy of Ethiopia is so comprehensive that it directly or indirectly embraces seven of the eight Millennium Development Goals. Although there are commendable success stories in achieving the MDGs, there are still areas that need a vigorous effort from the government. Maternal mortality, Harmful traditional practices, income inequality or deep rooted poverty are some of the areas that need further attention.

Population growth can have local political consequences that include, among other things, un-governability, instability and political turbulence and international impacts such as international conflicts and migration (McNicol, 2003:18). In this regard, the key informants said that the consequences of population explosion seen in Ethiopia will have its own negative impact on the political stability of the country. The recent recurrent conflicts between the populations of neighboring regions might be caused by population pressure (interview, 2015).

Development scholars and practitioners prefer situationally determined responses to specific problems with universal standards that are unrealistic and frustrating (Grindle, 2011: 415). The national population policy of Ethiopia has features that differentiate it from the universal standards. For example, the policy does not have room for the private sector; NGOs and other 'external' partners are governed by the development agenda of the government.

Besides, Ethiopia is the very African country that officially declared through its leaders and government documents that neo-liberalism is dead. Ethiopia has also been an active participant in non-neoliberal gatherings and sympathetic to World Social Forum, post development and alternative development. Corbridge (2007: 179-180) says that development studies is committed to the principles of difference and similarity. The first principle mentions that the Third World is different and hence it needs a separate field of study. The second one declares the goal of development is to make 'them' like 'us'. This was meant in the 1950s a process of Americanization (Westernization) while contemporary version is industrialization. Ethiopian case is different as it began with Agriculture Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) in 1992.

Schuurman (2009: 831) describes development studies as uneasy discipline: there is no consensus even on what the object of development studies, the fact that development studies is seen as policy oriented applied science and the interdisciplinary nature of the subject.

According to Pieterse (2012: 1), the twenty-first century globalization is markedly different from the twentieth century globalization. The trends in development studies show that the Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) are the drivers of the world economy; that the agencies of development shifted to the developing countries and that state capacities are determinant. The writer stresses that the South has escaped from the lectures and disciplines of the West, has repaid its debts to the International Monetary Fund (IMF); in fact, the South has begun lecturing back.

Pieterse (2012: 2) clarifies that the 1990s (20thc) was characterized by neo-liberalism dominance, flow of capital to capitalist centers and crises were on the peripheries. In the 21st century, the landscape of capitalism and development has changed. For instance, the US is in a series of crises: data com collapse, the September 11 attack, a Trade war with China and other countries, President rump's anti-migration policy, scandals, Hurricane Katrina, mortgage crises, etc. The crises have exposed the covered faces of neo-liberalism because we have practically seen the market failing to heal itself. The recent huge government bailouts to save the sinking ship of the West are living witnesses. All these indicate that Ethiopia should implement its population policy before it reaches to a point of no return.

XI. Conclusion and Recommendation

The discussion in the previous sections has revealed that the implementation of population policy of Ethiopia has plagued with a number of challenges such as lack of political will and commitment, lack of consistency in the implementation of plans, weak coordination and evaluation, absence of specific policy for each region and lack of adequate financial support to various organs.

XII. RECOMMENDATION

In order for the population policy to be implemented well, the following issues should be addressed

1. The Prime Minister's office should lead the responsibility of coordination, follow-up and monitoring and evaluation of the policy;
2. Design an alternative specific population policy for each region as regions have unique culture;
3. The role of the private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders should be enhanced in the implementation of the policy

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