

# MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIAN THROUGH FAMILY PLANNING

*Nwalado Emmanuel N.; Nwalado Sinriku H. and Obiekae Philomena .O.*

## **Abstract**

The fact that when a nation's population increases fast, the provision of social amenities like housing, good health services, education, water, electricity, employment and improved science and technology cannot meet the needs of the citizenry was the source of the problem that necessitated this paper-meeting the challenges of nation building in Nigeria through family planning. This paper therefore, discusses inter-alia the meaning of family planning, birth control methods and benefits of family planning to the nation. The paper recommends among others, that individuals and couples should have the number of children they can adequately feed, educate, cloth, provide good health services and good moral upbringing. The paper concludes that family planning is a sine-qua-non for nation building in that it ensures the production of healthy and educated citizen that will in turn, contribute positively to the achievement of nation building in Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Public debate and official concern about the need for family planning are a recent development in Nigeria. Over the years, rising population has not been seen and treated as a serious development problem in Nigeria. With the abundant natural and other resources including petroleum, Nigeria was assumed to have the potentials to accommodate and support rising population. Beside, large population was believed to be an asset to a country in building political, military and economic power. However, as the country continues today to struggle to survive the adverse effects of a global economic recession and faced with the task of accelerating the economic and social development of the country, rapid population

growth is now perceived in Nigeria as one other factor, which is gradually impeding her economic recovery.

According to Federal Ministry of Health and Human services (1994), Nigeria is by far the most populous country in Africa but only fourth in Arable land area. The most recent census result stated that, the 1991 population of Nigeria was estimated to be 88.5 million persons. According to the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (1994), the crude birth rate was about 43% resulting in a population growth rate of nearly 3 million persons per year. It advocated that, it is the rapid growth of the population that affects social and economic well-being of the nation. That Nigeria population is growing at an alarming rate, adding about three million people annually and will continue to grow at that rapid pace unless family planning services are made available throughout Nigeria.

The government of Nigeria places priority on educating children and preparing them to meeting the needs of the growing economy. Given the present situation, achieving the national goals of Universal Basic Education, will be difficult. According to Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (1999), in 1991 Nigeria has 4,500 health clinics serving its 88.5 million citizens or only one clinic for every 20,000 people. With high fertility, twice as many new clinics, not to mention doctors, nurses and other health personnel will be required for a total about 12,200 clinics. For over twenty years, Nigeria has imported large quantities of food because domestic production has been inadequate to meet domestic consumption needs, and in 1988, the government issued an agricultural policy calling for improved production of agricultural land, improvement on

the quality of life of the people and self-sufficient in basic food commodities. Achieving these goals will be more difficult with continued rapid population growth that places severe pressure on natural resources by increasing the demand for energy, food and water, as noted by Federal Ministry of Health and Human services (1994).

This analysis further demonstrates that the rapid growth of the Nigerian population has wide spread implications for its present and future citizens, hence National Policy on Population (1992), asserted that earning from the sales of petroleum products will be shared among nearly twice as many people in only twenty years time. The country will need new schools and new hospitals. Unemployment will increase because new jobs will not keep pace with the growth of the labour force. Food imports will increase drastically. Deforestation, already a severe problem, will worsen as more and more families consume fuel wood. In short, rapid population growth makes the already challenging task of economic development even more difficult. The role of family planning in nation building cannot be over emphasized. However, some nations have allowed sentiments to prevent their citizens from recognizing the importance of family planning in nation building.

Thus, the economic problems which now plague Nigeria could have been partly minimized if steps has been taken to educate the Nigerian people about the benefits of family planning, the effects of population pressure on nation building and the relevance of family planning in nation building. This is the thrust of this paper.

### **The Concept of Family Planning**

Family planning tends to have different meanings to different people. It may mean birth spacing, fertility regulation and birth control. It may also mean tailoring family resources to meet family needs. Family planning may also be

viewed as dealing with responsible parenthood, conception, mother and child health and family welfare. It means a method of assisting couples that have difficulties in having children. In fact, family planning should probably mean all these. According to Fajobi (1998), family planning means children by choice and not by chance, adequate spacing of pregnancies for health reasons and small families for economic reasons and end to abortions or child dumping. It means having the best care, best feeding and best education for all the children.

Schuyer (1988), is of the view that family planning means an educational programme of informing people and encouraging them to plan their family's size according to their economic, moral, personal and social capabilities for raising their children. For Enuenwosu (1996), family planning is a method employed for preventing conceptions whether it involves the female or male and comprises of method of fertility control including abortion and sterilization.

Oduze (1990), viewed family planning as a decision for couples about the art of caring for one's family, knowing about one's body, setting standards, choosing a life style and the art of setting goals and planning to achieve them. Dalano (1997) saw family planning as a means by which individuals or couples space the process of conceptions, pregnancy and child birth at interval mutually determined by both husband and wife in order to have the number of desired children they can conveniently maintain.

Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (P.P.F.N) (1995), asserts that family planning is a means by which individuals, couples and family exercise their basic rights in family formation process to improve their living standard, health and life expectancy by deciding freely and responsively on using birth control methods to achieve child bearing choices, so as to ensure family well being and happiness, socially and economically productive living as

well as prevention of undesirable pregnancies and poverty. The World Health Organization (WHO) Technical Services (1971) No. 483 defined family planning as a way of thinking and living that is adopted voluntarily upon the basis of knowledge, attitudes and responsible decisions by individuals and couples in order to promote the health welfare of the family group and thus, contribute to the social development of a country. In summary, family planning means the act of helping the individuals and couples to have the number of children that they can comfortably care for and a means of assisting infertile couples to have children. From the meanings of family planning, we deduced that, the various concepts of family planning confirms that family planning is any method accepted by individuals, couples and families to help them have the number of children they will be able to care for by providing good foods, adequate housing, clothing, qualitative education, good health care as well as employment and good moral upbringing (Nwalado, 2000). A critical analysis of the above definitions also suggests that family planning is beneficial by ensuring a better quality of life for the individuals, the couples and families so as to contribute effectively to the achievement of nation building.

### **Family Planning Methods**

It should be noted that birth control is as old as mankind. It is true that our fore-fathers recognized need for child spacing through traditional methods such as prolonged breast feeding, taboos that frown at sexual intercourse before the new child or baby is weaned encouraged birth spacing. Herbs, concoctions, coitus interruptus were also used. It therefore means that birth control is nothing new in the modern world today especially in Nigeria. The knowledge of family planning methods is of importance to the individuals, couples, family and nations practicing birth control. This is because the knowledge of the various methods of

birth control would assist individuals, couples, families and nations to choose any method that appeal to them. To this end, the various methods of birth control that are approved by the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (P.P.F.N) are examined as follows:

**1. The Condom:** This is a sheath made of the rubbery material that covers the penis. It prevents the ejaculated sperm from entering the vagina. When placed over an erect penis, it prevents the semen from entering the vagina. The condom must be placed on the erected penis before any contact with the vagina. A little room must be left at the tip for the ejaculation. When the penis is removed from the vagina, the bottom of the condom should be held to make sure it does slip off. It should be noted that the condom is 85-97% reliable according to P.P.F.N (1996). Some of the advantages of the condom is that, it

protects one against sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and it is available without prescription. If it fails as prevention, it could be as a result of method of usage, just as when the condom has expired or been exposed to heat (P.P.F.N, 1996)!

**2. Fertility Awareness:** Fertility awareness is some time called natural family planning method on which couples abstain from sexual intercourse at certain periods during a woman menstrual cycle. In order to determine the safe days each month, the woman must keep

a record of her menstrual cycles and take her temperature first thing every morning and keep a chart of the changes. In addition, at least once a day, she should check for changes in her cervical mucus. In terms of effectiveness, the fertility awareness or safe period is 70-90% reliable according to P.P.F.N (1996). Some of the advantages of the safe period is that, there is no chemical devices needed and it is acceptable to the Christians and traditionalist because it is morally upright. However, not keeping careful track of signs of fertility, not abstaining from intercourse when an egg is present and emotional

stresses are some the reasons for failure (Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria, 1996).

**3. Coitus Interrupt:** Coitus interrupts, also called the withdrawal method of family planning involves waiting until ejaculation is about to occur at which the man withdraws his penis from the vagina. Ejaculation thus occurs completely away from the vagina thus preventing the possibility of conception. The withdrawal method is only about 77% reliable as stated by P.P.F.N (1996). Coitus interrupts requires no devices or chemicals and it is available at no cost. However, the disadvantages of this method is that preliminary ejaculation can occur and it requires a lot of self control to eliminate high percentage failure rate as noted by P.P.F.N (1996).

**4. Diaphragm and Cervical Caps:** The diaphragm is a dome shaped rubber device that fits over the cervix. It is used with creams or jellies that kill sperm cells before they enter the uterus. Some creams or jellies spread around the rim inside of the diaphragm. The sides of the rim are then squeezed together and inserted into the vagina and over the cervix. It should be noted that the diaphragm must be left in place and creams or jellies should be inserted with an applicator. This birth control method is highly effective in that it is 82-98% reliable as asserted by the (P.P.F.N, 1996). Some of the advantages of this method is that creams and jellies act as lubricants and therefore the impact is not felt by either partners during the sexual activity. However, some of the reasons for failure include lack of adequate cream or jelly, hole in diaphragm and if not been used correctly (P.P.F.N, 1996).

**5. The Pill:** The pill is referred to as oral contraceptive. The pill is made of synthetic hormones which are similar to those naturally produced by the woman's body. The hormones in the pill prevent the ovaries from releasing eggs. The pill must be taken according to specific instructions and according to the type of pill

used. In practice, this means taking a pill everyday at about the same time regardless of whether or not sexual intercourse occurs. It is helpful to eat before taking the pill. It must be stressed that the pills is an effective method of birth control in that it is 98-99% reliable as asserted by the P.P.F.N (1996). Some of the advantages of the pill is that menstrual cycle is regulated, decreases menstrual flow and cramping. There is no operation before sexual intercourse and it is highly effective. Some of the disadvantages of the pill include sporting, weight gain and missed period, and its failure may be attributed to inconsistent usage and not taking it accordingly to the instruction.

**6. Intra-uterine Contraceptive Device:**

This is made of plastic of different sizes. It is believed that they speed up the egg as it travels through the fallopian tube and prevent the eggs from implanting in the wall of the uterus. They act as foreign bodies in the uterus thus preventing pregnancy. A trained clinician inserts the IUCD in to the woman's uterus usually during her menstrual period. The string attached to the IUCD must be checked weekly to make sure it is in place. Some IUCDs can be left in place indefinitely and some types be replaced every one to five years. This birth control method is 76-98% reliable. In addition, the advantages of this method is that, it is inexpensive and highly effective as well as preparation before intercourse. However, the disadvantages of this method is that it can cause cramps, spotting and heavier and longer menstrual periods and medical supervision is required (P.P.F.N 1996).

**7. Permanent Method of Vasectomy:**

This is permanent birth control method for men. Vasectomy is the cutting or blocking of the tubes through which sperms from the testis travel to penis. Once the tubes are cut, sperms are prevented from entering the semen. It must be stressed here that, this method of birth control is 99.9% reliable. Some of the advantages of this method is that it is more effective than other

methods of contraception, long-term health effects reliable, very safe and effective. However, this method requires adequate infrastructure and the services of skilled medical practitioner. This method is irreversible and not acceptable in some cultures (P.P.F.N, 1996).

**8. Permanent Method of Tubaligation:** Is a birth control method for women in which the fallopian tubes are closed so that the female's eggs are prevented from traveling to meet the sperm. This is done surgically using band, clips or cutting and tying. This method requires simple operation under local anesthesia. This method is highly effective in that it is 99.9% reliable. This method is more effective than any other contraception. However, this method is irreversible and not acceptable in cultures and religions.

**9. Norplant:** Is one of the methods of birth control recently introduced. It is a long acting method in the form of a silastic capsule implanted in the upper arm of a woman to prevent pregnancy for a period of five years. Norplant works by slowly releasing a small amount of hormone, a substance like the one naturally produced by the woman's body. The hormone stop the woman's body from releasing an egg each month until Norplant is removed. As soon as the Norplant is removed, a woman can become pregnant again. If she does not want to become pregnant, she can have a new set of Norplant inserted immediately or she can use another method of family planning. Some of the advantages of this method is that, it is highly effective, convenient, reversible and does not interfere with sexual intercourse. However, it is not easily available and only specially trained doctors can administer and remove it (Delano, 1987).

**10. Injectable Contraceptive:** is a long acting hormonal contraceptive, similar to the pills but contains only one of the female body hormones known as progesterone. Its action is similar to that of the pills. The types of the

injectable commonly used are Depo-Provera given at three monthly intervals and Noristerat given at two monthly intervals. This method can only be administered by family planning trained doctors and nurses who are competent to provide the method and manage its side effects. The disadvantages of this method are spotting, weight gain and delay in return to fertility. But it is highly effective, long acting, decreased menstrual bleeding, does not suppress lactation and usage does not affect sexual intercourse. (Delano, 1987).

Based on the above examination of the various methods of family planning, it is very clear that every method is associated with some advantages and disadvantages. It therefore means that the choice is left for the individuals, couples, families and nations because the choice of birth control is a personal matter. Thus, the knowledge of the various birth control methods would assist the individuals, couples, families, communities and nations to choose any method that suits their needs. More so, the knowledge of the various methods of birth control is important in that, the man and the woman can make an informed choice of the different methods, their efficiency in protection against pregnancy and their advantages and disadvantages. This is because the choice is helpful if each partner has an idea of how efficient the method chosen is in preventing an unwanted pregnancy.

### **The Effect of Population Pressure on Nation Building**

Rapidly growing population exerts considerable pressure on nation building through its influence on slowing down of economic growth, high dependency ratio, and pressure on such socio- economic system as agriculture, education, health, communications, transportation, housing, employment, sanitation, industry and individual welfare. The effects of population pressure on nation building cannot be over-emphasized in that population pressure has

hindered many nations from achieving nation building, hence, Delano (1987) asserted that when population increases fast, the provision of social amenities like housing, good health services, education, water, electricity, employment and improved technology cannot meet the needs of the people. This position has already been reached in many countries, for example in India, Japan and West Indies. It is estimated that two thirds of the people in these countries are ill- clad, ill- housed, ill- fed, and unable to earn a decent wage as a result of population pressure (Muanya, 2000).

Nwalado (1996), stated that, population pressure in Brazil has increased rural poverty and decreased average agricultural land holdings, in effect, pushing people to seek opportunities in urban areas as well as better access to education and health care. Commenting on the effects of population pressure on nation building, Iyama (1995) opined that, high rate of population has made Democratic Republic of Congo to be associated with high dependency ratio, high rate of poverty, low per capital income, low gross domestic product and high rate of crime and social vices.

Adebo (1993) stated that the republic of China which is now "home of the largest" is faced with problem of inadequate provision of employment, housing, education, health, service to her highly populated citizens, and in the capital, Peking, the one child family is said to be the norm. United Nation population funds (1993), commented that in many developing nations, 40% of the work force is already unemployed and throughout the developing world, more than half a billion people are either unemployed or underemployed as a result of population pressure. More so, Lacet (1992), stated that, the pressure of increase in population, mainly confined to the highly populated nations like Brazil, Indonesia, Japan and India compounds enormously the task they face, million will spend their lives uneducated,

unemployed, ill-housed, and without access to elementary health, welfare and sanitary services, and unchecked population increase is a major factor.

Sagoe (1990) advocated that, population pressure hinders developments in West India in that millions of people are hard pressed to feed and clothe their families and government finds it increasingly difficult to provide adequate housing, school, sanitation facilities, road and health services to the highly populated citizens. Thus, population pressure affects the achievement of nation building.

The above views on the effects of population pressure on nation building have shown that over-population has hindered nation building. This is due to the fact that the high rate of population increase makes it difficult to maintain education, health and services provisions, because of considerable increase in the number of schools, teachers hospitals and doctors, water pipelines and other amenities which are necessary to keep a constant ratio facilities to the people.

Moreso, population pressure has created problems of food supply and increased unemployment in the urban centers in countries like, China, Japan, India, West Indies, Brazil, Indonesia just to mention but a few. It therefore means that, Nigeria must endeavor to control her over-growing population through a well-articulated family planning programme if she does not want to be associated with those problems that have plagued the highly populated nations of the world.

### **The Benefit of Family Planning in Nigeria**

Family planning is very important for the health, survival and the development of the individuals, the families, the couples and the nation. More so, since family planning is concerned with ensuring a better quality of life for the people of the nation, it therefore means that its benefits to nation building in Nigeria

cannot be over-looked, hence, the state of the world's children (1992), assert that, family planning could bring more benefits to more people at least cost than any other single technology now available to the human race. This would still be true even if there were no such thing as population problems. To this end, the benefits of family planning in Nigeria shall be analyzed in the following ways:

#### **Benefits of Family Planning to the Man**

Family planning helps a man to become physically, socially, mentally and economically matured before he starts having children. Family planning helps the man to have the number of children he can properly care for by providing good food, education, adequate housing, clothing, quality health care as well as employment and good moral upbringing. Commenting on the benefits of family planning, Nyerere (1969), stated that giving birth is something in which mankind and animal are equal but rearing the young and educating them for many years is something, which is a unique gift and responsibilities for man. It is for this reason that it is important for the man to put emphasizes on caring for children and ability to look after them properly. Moreso, family planning promotes the health of the man and helps the man to enjoy sexual relationship with his wife without the fear of unwanted pregnancies as well as helping him to prevent contracting venereal diseases and HIV/Aids (P.P.F.N, 1996).

#### **Benefits of Family Planning to the Woman**

Family planning improves the standard of living and health of the woman. This is due to the fact that it helps the woman to avoid having children too early, too often, too many and too late (P.P.F.N, 1996). Moreso, family planning helps a woman to develop herself and share her time between child bearing, social and economic productive life as well as to give more love, care

and attention to her husband and each of her children. Family planning helps a woman who desires to have children to get them, hence, Ashiru (1993) commented that, family planning should not be seen to ignore infertility but to promote responsible parenthood. That is, family planning assist woman that needs children to have them and be responsible to the children and husband. Family planning helps to keep the woman happy and afford her the opportunity to enjoy sexual relationship without the fear of unwanted pregnancy.

#### **Benefits of Family Planning to the Children**

Family planning enables the children to have adequate food to grow up properly and develop strong and healthy bodies. It also helps the children to receive proper care, love and attention from both parents, receive good education and contribute to nation building. Delano (1987), commented that, family planning enables the planned and wanted children to live in comfortable houses, have necessary care and attention, good career in life, self-reliance, and independence, all of which ensure that they grow up to become responsible citizens. Moreso, family planning promotes the health of the children and ensures their quality of lives. It is on this note that Ashiru (1988), noted that, what matters is the quality of the children. A man is not remembered by the number of children he has but by whatever he has done on earth. Thus, family planning helps the children to have better future and quality of life, good health, good education, good moral upbringing and thus, contribute to national development

#### **Benefits of Family Planning to the Nation**

The importance of family planning to any nation cannot be underscored in the sense that family planning ensures development by balancing population growth with resources generation as well as surplus for capital and social investments. Federal Ministry of Health

and Human Services (1994) asserted that family planning by reducing the rate of population growth and helping couples space and control birth will improve the health of the children and mother and will also drastically reduce the cost of producing universal health care in Nigeria. Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (1996) noted also that family planning would slow the rate of growth of the number of persons seeking employment and thus, reduce the number of unemployed. The states of the World's Children (1992), stated that family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race. The National Health of Policy (1986), is of the view that slow population growth through family planning would accelerate social and economic development by permitting larger investments by both government and individuals families in education, healthcare and economic enterprises as well as further raise the standard of living by reducing unemployment, slowing environmental degradation and deforestation and reducing food deficit. Commenting on the benefits of family planning to the nation, Obasanjo (1993) asserted that, we cannot improve the quality of life of our people if we continue to increase and multiply indiscriminately and irresponsibly without adequate provision for foods, healthcare, educational and training for our children. Thus, family planning improves the quality of life of the citizens of a nation by ensuring that social amenities are in accordance with the number of the people of the nation. Family planning ensures equality of opportunity, social justice, even distribution of amenities and better future for all the citizens and thus, promotes nation building. The relevance of family planning in nation building cannot be over emphasized in the sense that family planning helps to produce healthy, educated and strong citizens that will contribute to national development. This is because no nation worth the name can be built out of a

predominantly hungry, homeless, sick and dying ignorant and jobless population. Thus, family planning ensures nation building by producing healthy and educated citizens that will in turn contribute to the political, social, economic, cultural, scientific and technological development of the nation. This is because, it is only healthy, educated, well fed, well paid and well sheltered citizens that can contribute meaningfully to the achievement of the nation building in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

If the government must meet the challenges of nation building in Nigeria through effective family planning, the following recommendations become imperative.

1. The government should ensure the availability and accessibility of family planning services to couples and individuals seeking such services at affordable prices or on voluntary basis.
2. Adequate resources and appropriate training should be given to family planning personnels to make its programmes more responsibly to local cultural values and individual couples preferences.
3. Family planning and sex education should be included in the Social Studies, Business Education and Guidance and Counseling Curricular.
4. Government should strengthen the political commitment of top leaders at the Federal, State and Local levels to a strong population policy and family planning programme.
5. Government should provide ready access to a broad range of contraceptives through ready access to a broad range of contraceptives through government and private sector channels.
6. Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria should be well financed and



- funded by the government in order to have viable family planning services for couples and families.
7. Religious leaders and organizations should counsel couples on the dangers of indiscriminate child bearing.
  8. Government should expand information, counseling and communication programmes on sex education, family planning and reproductive health issues to all segments of the population including adolescent.
  9. Individuals and couples should have the number of children they can adequately feed, educate cloth and give good moral upbringing.

### Conclusion

It is essential that the Nigerian people understand that family planning is critical for the health and well being of Nigeria children and their families as well as for the development of the nation. It should be noted that, when population increases fast, the provision of social amenities and improved technology cannot meet the needs of the people. Thus, the economic problems that now plague Nigeria could have been partly minimized if steps had been taken to educate the Nigerian citizens about the benefits of family planning. A strong family planning programme would have saved millions of lives especially of children and mothers simply by helping couples space birth and avoid unplanned pregnancies. Slower population growth would accelerate social and economic development by permitting larger investments by government and individual families in education, health care and economic enterprise. It will further raise the standards of living of the citizens by reducing unemployment, slowing environmental degradation and deforestation and reducing food deficits. Family planning is a *sine-qua-non* for nation building in that it ensures a better quality of life for the children, couples, the families and

the nation. Family planning therefore helps to produce healthy and educated citizens that will in turn, contribute to the achievement of nation building

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*Nwalado Simiku*  
*Accounting Education,*  
*Federal College of Education (Technical)*  
*Asaba*

Joseph, S & Schulyer S. J. (1988). Family planning ' and population controls as instrument for nation building *A journal of the Nigerian Medical Students Association* 3 (1)23-24.

*And*  
*Obiekae Philomena O.*  
*Educational Psychology Department,*  
*Federal College of Education (Technical)*  
*Asaba*

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*Nwalado Emmanuel N*  
*Primary Education Studies,*  
*Federal College of Education (Technical)*  
*Asaba*