

The 1984 Kilimanjaro Programme of Action on Population: the birth of a mountain

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-Introduction

It is only fair to acknowledge the contribution of the Tanzanian Team in servicing APC3. In a nutshell, the authors want to thank Ambassador Georges Makogne and ask him to convey our gratitude to his colleagues who, under his guidance and authority, made the third African Population Conference (APC 3) a success.

It is also important to recall the contribution of UNFPA, under its Executive Director, the late Rafael Salas that funded the Project RAF/83/P02 in support of the holding APC3.

The former ECA Executive Secretary, Mr Adebayo Adedeji played an important role of guidance and supervision.

thinking and Mualimu Julius Nyerere inspired, through his philosophy the KPA, like many other important historic documents such as the Lagos Plan of Action adopted by Africa at the 1980 OAU Summit, which, in fact, preceded the KPA.

JULIUS NYERERE'S Concept of 'self-reliance' calls for specific policies that aim at obtaining results by combining the use of one's own resources and potentialities with technical skills without calling for someone's else intervention. Relying on others may lead to the loss of control and independence - a case that had been lived before in various countries of the continent.

Of course, self-reliance does not mean autarchy or absence of any form of assistance and cooperation. It identifies such policies that would help make the best of the use of local resources, both physical and human - whenever possible.

Tanzania did give Africa and the World an illustration of what its leaders and people could undertake by themselves with their own limited resources and almost no managerial expertise, little education, and no experience. Its major living asset was its people with their sense of solidarity and readiness to share the little they could afford.

This 3rd African Population Conference, resulting in the KPA, was and still is! - A historic achievement for African Demographers and, more so, for Tanzania and the African Continent as a whole¹. The African Team who conceived, prepared and conducted this Conference, which successfully equipped Africa, for the first time, with a common position on population issues, is submitting a paper describing the circumstances, the context, the activities, the issues on the table, as they related, at that time, to the problems of economic and social development in Africa and the cooperation of all parties, mainly the Government and People of Tanzania. This achievement did not go without difficulties and problems. This is exactly what made this event more interesting to remember and to appreciate.

The reader may be interested to assess the progress achieved in the area of population and development since 1984. Even if today's population problems in Africa may be different and differently perceived from what they were in 1984, the lessons drawn from experiences of the past could still be a source for analysis, brainstorming and formulation of recommendations and action.

At the onset of independence, most African countries, except for a few like Mauritius, Kenya or Ghana, did not have an explicit population policy. The widely held position was in favour of high birth rates, in spite of the high fertility and mortality rates. Demographic phenomena as population distribution and migration were ignored or covered up. There was a general lack of awareness, ignorance, and belief that these problems could be solved by themselves without Government's intervention. Fertility, in particular, was deeply rooted in cultural values. It was by all means a most touchy issue!

1. The context

The prevailing environment was characterised by a general suspicion of the values and recipes recommended by the West for the development of Africa. The frequently heard motto that 'family planning' was the key to all development problems generated a strong opposition among people and policy makers in general, as it was confused with the very touchy issue of 'population control'- another concept that was misunderstood. In those days massive family planning campaigns were conducted all over the world, in particular in Latin America and Asia, sometimes without either the knowledge or the consent of the people involved.

A balanced view to explain the issues in a broader context of population and development away from the Malthusian paradigm, was simply neither at hand nor available to African politicians and decision makers, opinion leaders and the like.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa was established in 1958 with the Mandate to promote economic and social Development through dialogue between Nations, Studies and Research, Advisory Services. Among its achievements was the adoption in 1980 of the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos (LPA).

Obviously, Population issues in the LPA did not receive the attention they required, as many were still convinced that Population was an exogenous variable, on which governments had no control. Many people, including policy makers and high ranking executives, were unaware of the issue and its intricate relationship with other development variables.

2. Activities

The entire process of organizing the APC 3 was far from easy, starting from the time it was decided to convene the Conference in Arusha, to the adoption of the KPA report and its submission to the ECA Conference of Ministers, the ECOSOC Population Commission, the 1984 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, and ultimately the United Nations General Assembly. Generally, people would not believe that the African Region could present its own contribution to the World on an issue that used to be considered as taboo and, on top of that, a contribution that was not aligned behind the dominant thinking of that time!

The organizers faced many challenges it should also be borne in mind that this took place before the introduction of personal computers and automated data processing. Therefore secretariat work was slow, very demanding and tiresome on the

Conference secretariat staff of the ECA. It could take days to produce a good document. Draft Reports to be adopted by Country Delegates needed lengthy advance negotiations and discussions. With limited budgets, it was just not easy to pack conference sessions within the set time limits. Night sessions were necessary.

For the African Population Conference, the organisers tried to deal with those constraints by saving on resources, avoiding waste and by minimising human stress! The key factor of success in dealing with Member State representatives was to prepare concise documents for negotiation. Some Country delegates were not aware of the benefit a meeting could draw from this. This would lead, very often, to unnecessary time loss and energy consuming confrontations between delegates.

3. Issues considered at the Conference

It would be interesting to compare the emerging issues of concern, as perceived in 1984 with those considered today.

These are listed as referred to in the KPA with few comments.

- Population dynamics and development strategy and policy
- Fertility and family planning

Awareness on the need to control couple's fertility, combat infertility and sub-fertility, infant and child mortality was uncommon. Bad or no information were prevailing. A good excuse was not to interfere in personal matters. People

were not concerned with the implications of frequent pregnancies, and even less with the health of women, who were condemned to bear the consequences!

On the other hand, there was a genuine concern regarding sub-fertility and sterility in some parts of the Continent, like mainly Gabon, Congo, Central African Republic and Cameroon. Action was also needed there.

- Morbidity and mortality

The poor health status of the majority of the population in both rural and urban areas was far from permitting normal life. Most people used to rely on traditional medicine that was mostly practiced by healers and witch doctors. However, it did not show tangible results in preventing and curing transmissible diseases, malnutrition, child and maternal diseases.

High infant mortality was fuelling numerous pregnancies and births in a race for compensating the losses. The child in African societies has traditionally always been considered as an asset for social security and labour force reasons.

- Urbanization and migration

In the 1980's, the urbanization rate was still moderate, but it was increasing rapidly. With the exception of traditional urban centres, African towns were in fact looking more like vastly extended rural settlements, without a proper 'downtown' area and lacking the infrastructure so characteristic on an urban area in the real sense of the word.

What we now call 'Migration' consisted, that time, in many cases, of a set of intra-tribal natural movements hindered by artificial boundaries arbitrarily drawn up during the colonial times. The concept of 'documented' migration did not have a meaning except for foreigners from remote countries, outside Africa.

- Role of Women in Development

In most, if not all, African Societies the status and role of Women required attention and action for improvement. Fertility was evidence of a woman's capacity to play the role expected from her in Society. Moreover, the number of children born alive and raised in the group would strengthen her position and guarantee respect from all.

- Children and youth

Very low school enrolment rates and high numbers of drop-outs were one the major reasons why the African school System could not play a significant role in education. School did not meet the hopes vested in it by the people. The money invested by governments and communities did not give many tangible returns.

People came to realise that, perhaps, children who did not attend school would have a better chance in taking part in farming or finding small, but money earning, jobs in the informal sector that would help alleviate the burden of their parents and large families.

- Data Collection, Analysis, Training and Research

Under this category many important activities for better knowledge of social and economic settings were lumped together. The paucity and bad quality of data were general. Only few countries did have reliable statistical data. Census results were hardly analysed. Estimates of population data provided rough results with significant errors. Population projections would usually be carried out in an erratic way, and could be considered guesstimates *at best*.

- Population Information

It was found to be essential to undertake the dissemination of population information directed at the public in general as well as at policy makers, opinion leaders, target groups, scholars, professionals of the media and the like.

- Community Involvement and Cooperation

A successful population policy would require the involvement not only of individuals and couples, but also of the communities and their organisations, be it private or public.

4. Difficulties and problems

It was obvious that the whole undertaking was a challenge, first and foremost, for ECA. Under the cover of cooperation, some people were used to have other partner- institutions do the work and co-sign the output. The problem with this is

that, in case of failure, ECA would not be held accountable for the shortcomings.

A case in point: the first African Population Conference that took place in Accra, Ghana in 1971. The meeting was generally considered a success. However, the Executive Director of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population kept repeating that "it was the IUSSP Secretariat that did the job but it was the ECA that took the credit for it".

Assuming that this could happen again, we opted for arranging in advance to take full responsibility for APC3. This has guaranteed accountability and has avoided unnecessary discussions in scientific circles! In a way, it was a breakthrough as it corresponded not only to the will of the African Ministers but was also in line with the orientations of the ECA and the practice in its other Divisions, not to mention that it was in line with the Terms of Reference of the ECA Secretariat and the normal business of its Staff.

For its part, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities did not provide assistance with strings or conditions attached. Nor was there any pre established orientation. In other words, Member States and their Institutions were free to adopt any policy. Obviously, such a policy should be in line with both the U.N and the UNFPA Governing Council Resolutions and Decisions.

Besides this need for clarification, there was the doubt that ECA would be able to submit its Report of the Third APC in time for consideration by the relevant U.N. Bodies. Usually, after its adoption by the plenipotentiaries or Country Delegates, the Conference Report was finalised at a

speed determined by the Secretariat for its processing and production into an official UN Document.

In Arusha, thanks to the commitment and devotion of the ECA Staff, only one day after its adoption on Friday night, the report was hand-carried to reach UN Headquarters on Monday afternoon, for finalisation and submission on Wednesday to the Opening Session of the Population Commission of ECOSOC.

The secret behind that success consisted in a number of elements: the preparation of a concise documentation, anticipating and addressing the usual discussions raised by Delegates of different language backgrounds, investing a dose of physical efforts, and, last but not least, the commitment and help of all colleagues in ECA, UN Headquarters Population Division, Conference Services and UNFPA.

5. Conclusion

The authors would like to submit to APC5 these few remarks that could stimulate discussion among African Demographers and Participants.

Overall, African population problems remain acute in spite of the priority given by the Countries and the International Community to other pressing issues like AIDS, Environment, high maternal and infant/child mortality.

Donor agencies priority has switched to more alarming and pressing issues, Population problems remain, however, unsolved in spite of some progress in their perception and awareness generated by the efforts of all.

¹ . Associating the name of a famous mountain, Kilimanjaro, with a Programme of Action did serve a purpose. As anticipated it had a ‘marketing’ effect as it sold this instrument among the public at large.