

Moderation, and the three corrupt disciplines

Demography, development economics and family planning

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Google for 'disentrapment'

A distinguished colleague advises moderation - so moderate that the problem - 'demographic entrapment' - is not addressed at all! I reply that what we want is *maximal* 'benign uproar' - intense, creative, mind-changing argument. Only if there is violence - which there must not be - does it become 'malignant'. The danger he points out is that this argument will backfire, and become negative with much ill feeling. I reply that this is a risk we have to take. So I suggest that we leave any blame there might be to the Almighty (it is very widely shared), *and think mightily about what we have all got to do*. As a physician who did his first day's work in Africa in 1953, I still have it very much at heart.

The three disciplines are corrupt because they don't accept the reality of 'demographic entrapment'. In 1995 I asked Jack Caldwell, at that time the most eminent demographer of Africa, how much of [Middle] Africa he thinks is demographically trapped? He replied, without a moment's further thought, and without discussing the definition, that most of it is, except perhaps Ghana. [1] When I repeated this to Ofosu Amaah, then Professor of public health in Accra, he replied: "Why don't you think we are?"[2]

Since the entrapment of Middle Africa is now the major challenge to all three disciplines, and they never discuss it, they have to be considered gravely corrupt. They are of course good in parts. [3] Since the UN agencies, the World Bank, and the NGOs don't discuss it either, they also have to be declared corrupt. However, since they rely on what should be the integrity of these disciplines, their corruption is secondary, because the intellectual responsibility lies with academia.

Alas, there is good reason to think that Jack Caldwell is correct. Unfortunately, we don't have systematic studies to document the severity of severe entrapment in Middle Africa, because it is *taboo!* - forbidden from discussion by informal agreement. We urgently need data for (a), (b), and (c) in the definition of entrapment below for particular communities. However, there are studies which go a long way towards documenting it for Niger [4], Ethiopia [5], Rwanda [6], North Kivu [7], and Malawi [8], etc.

The three corrupt disciplines commonly avoid discussing entrapment by not discussing 'carrying capacity' - the ability of the land to produce food, particularly for subsistence farmers. Tabooing demographic entrapment requires that carrying capacity be tabooed also, because the problem soon arises as to what happens when it is exceeded? If people are able to migrate to new land elsewhere, or if they have goods and services which they can exchange for food and other essentials, there is of course no problem. But what if they don't?

Entrapment defined

Since there is no formally accepted definition of demographic entrapment, I have had to devise this one:

*A subsistence community is demographically trapped if it exceeds: (a) the carrying capacity of its local ecosystem (too many people for the land to support), AND (b) its ability to migrate to new land, AND (c) the ability of its economy to produce goods and services, which it can exchange for food and other essentials. The outcome of entrapment is the direst poverty, starvation, and violence. Entrapment has a **definitive stage** when there already is starvation and perhaps violence, and a **warning stage** when these can be confidently expected, because the population is increasing fast.*

The two 'ands' are important, because a community is only trapped if all three (a), (b), and (c) are exceeded. If any one is not exceeded, it can be assumed to solve the problem.

When I asked Jack Caldwell if I could quote him, he replied “ No!”, to which I answered “ Whose interests do I put first, yours or Africa’s? He was maintaining the taboo. However, he did say that I could quote him as saying that, for a long list of countries in Middle Africa, the chances of their economic and demographic transitions interacting are ‘pretty bleak’. What he meant was that their fertility will not fall fast enough to allow them to develop, and they won’t develop fast enough to allow their fertility to fall – *before their rapidly increasing populations have exceeded the carrying capacities of their ecosystems.*

Two definitions of ‘demographic entrapment’ - hash sign and asterisk There is an alternative and highly confusing use of the term ‘demographic entrapment, which takes no account of carrying capacity, and which it is most important to distinguish. I suggest we do this by using the asterisk and the hash sign. The definition above is for the asterisked version “*demographic entrapment’. ■ The idea behind the hash sign version is that the poor have more babies than the rich, and that having more babies, helps to keep them poor, thus trapping them in poverty. This is one of the principal mechanisms of the poverty trap. Hash sign #Demographic entrapment, has no implications for carrying capacity, or the possibility of its being exceeded, so it is not taboo, the assumption being that communities which are trapped according to this definition, can increase in population indefinitely without being in danger of starvation. ■ Why #demographic entrapment’ is not taboo whereas *demographic entrapment is taboo, is not clear. It is probably because exceeding the carrying capacity one’s ecosystem to the point of starvation and violence, is a very unhappy thought, and is likely to be the one of the most important Demons of the taboo (see below). ■ Not to distinguish them allows no less an authority than Jeffrey Sachs to refer to demographic entrapment using the #definition, which has no implications for carrying capacity being exceeded, when he should be using it according to * definition. It also enables Sir Andy Haines, Dean of the London School of Hygiene, and Martha Campbell, by quoting him, to argue that demographic entrapment is not taboo. This shows how important it is to have these definitions sorted out.

Why is entrapment so taboo? For at least 39 reasons - so far! It is useful to call these reasons the ‘Demons of the taboo’. For example, *Demon 6* is the many problems of one- child families. Are they better or worse than the starvation and violence, which is the likely alternative? The Chinese thought they were better. *Demon 16* is ‘political correctness’. The fear of the benign uproar referred to above, is *Demon 2*. For more, Google for ‘disentrapment’.

Should demographic entrapment be ‘named’?

Malcolm Potts argues that “... even if everybody at [the forthcoming] Arusha [meeting] unanimously agreed that the continent is demographically trapped , it would not make one iota of difference because the vast majority of African decision makers do not see the problem...” *Of course they don’t,* because the term ‘demographic entrapment’ has been tabooed out, so that they have never heard of it. Garrett Hardin argued that, if a term is tabooed out, the thinking behind it also goes, [9] so this is what we should expect. Not only have the decision makers never heard of it, but I can only assume that, since I cannot find it in any of the papers for this meeting, even though it is the major demographic threat to Africa, it has, until now, been taboo to your good selves also! Since demographic entrapment is not discussed at Harvard, or Hopkins, or at the London School of Hygiene, you can be forgiven for assuming that it doesn’t exist. *You received a corrupt demographic education!* You have been ‘conned’ (deceived)

Martha Campbell argues that although: “...[I] may call it “entrapment”, ... the language doesn’t matter (and must not be hammered into [you])...” I reply that, if Hardin is correct, *language is all important* and if necessary it must be hammered into you! I originally heard the term ‘demographic entrapment’ in 1988 from a senior figure in US public health, Jack Bryant. It is said to have been first used by Harvey Liebenstein in 1954.[10] However, Jack Bryant must have heard it from someone. We must therefore assume that the *cognoscenti* (people in the know) *have been aware of it for many years*, perhaps since the early 1960s. Interestingly, many senior demographers have not heard of it either. For example John Cleland says that he first heard of the term from me quite recently! The taboo is therefore extraordinary patchy. Since it is taboo, there has been no need to think about what should be done about it, so it was necessary to invent the term ‘disentrapment’, which is getting out of the demographic trap, by any means.

The corruption of two disciplines

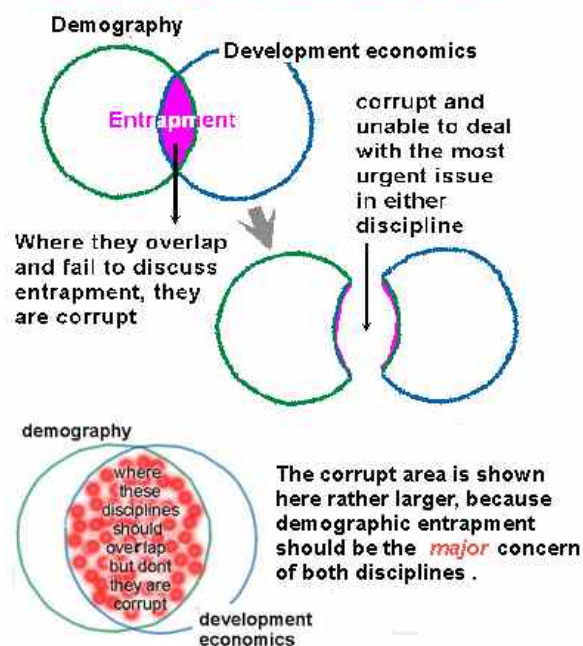


Figure Two. THE CORRUPTION OF TWO DISCIPLINES. Demographic entrapment overlaps the fields of both demography and development economics. Because it is called ‘demographic’ entrapment, the development economists consider it no business of theirs. Demography is a very narrow subject mostly concerned with counting people, and very loth to step outside its borders. However, there are no sharp borders to any of the social sciences. Demographic entrapment should therefore be the property of both disciplines - *and the family planners!*

Should villagers be told they are trapped?

Unfortunately, the villagers who should have heard of demographic entrapment, and now be acting upon it by reducing their fertility, have never heard of it either. The big question now is: *If they had heard of it, would they now would be reducing their fertility? We don't know - and we must find this for as many communities as possible soon as we can.* This is critical. I argue that they would. For example, Frank Notestein argued that: "...most people, however uneducated, are far from stupid... they may be counted upon to be interested in understanding the nature of situations that present problems in terms of their own values, and to seek solutions to such problems".^[11] *What is important is that they should be given the chance, since if they are not given the chance, the alternative will inevitably be starvation and violence.*

'Passive' and 'active' family planning

The president practice is to supply family planning services, and expect fertility to fall, which it will – *slowly!* - far too slowly for trapped communities, especially if they have already exceeded the carrying capacities of their ecosystems. This is the traditional 'passive family planning.' The big question now is: *'Can it be speeded up and if so how?'* in what one might call 'active family planning'. The Chinese speeded it up mightily, and with great success, with their Draconian measures for one-child families. So the question now becomes: *'Is there any form of specifically African 'active family planning', that would speed fertility reduction, induce a crash demographic transition, and prevent or at least mitigate starvation and violence?'*

Sticks, carrots, and 'coercion'

'Coercion' here means using 'force' in matters of fertility. What is important is what kind of force and how much? Except in China, coercion of any kind is completely abhorrent, in that a woman has the right to have as many children as she wishes – even if it does mean that her community will progress to starvation and violence. Since demographic entrapment is taboo, the human rights movement has never debated a woman's reproductive rights under conditions of entrapment. *Until it has actually done this,* all its rulings in this field should be considered invalid.

To drag a woman to the abortion table late in pregnancy is surely not allowable. On the other hand, to give a village health worker a dollar for each mother she brings into have her tubes tied surely is allowable. Both are commonly considered 'coercion'. I argue that the human rights movement should now debate the appropriate 'sticks and carrots' for fertility reduction under conditions of entrapment, 'carrots' being the incentives, and 'sticks' the disincentives. I also argue that the decision of the communities themselves should be final, because it is they who are going to experience the starvation and violence of entrapment.

One child families in Africa?

How far and how fast does fertility need to fall? I argue that, if one has already exceeded the carrying capacity of one's ecosystem, and the opportunities for migration and economic development are bleak, *one-child families are required as soon as possible* – as the only alternative to starvation and violence. However, although Malcolm Potts tells me that, all the senior demographers at this meeting are convinced that the outcome for their rapidly growing communities is likely to be starvation and possibly violence, he also tells me that there is not a "snowball's chance in Hell" (his term) of one-child families in Africa. Is he correct? A snowball's chance in Hell is zero. I argue that the prospects for one-child families are very far from zero. However, we will never know what they are unless we try.

Unlike Malcolm Potts, who seems to be far out of touch with what the possibilities now are on the ground, in that he has never discussed entrapment with the trapped, I have been busily finding out. Twenty times in Congo DR recently, I have addressed communities with the following message in general. It is called 'a crunch message', because messages of this kind need a generic title. This one is only an example.

A Ugandan editor chose this title The MONITOR • December 07, 1996

Go for 1-kid per family, or the ^{population} bomb' will hit Uganda

By Malcolm King
... 1970s, the population of Uganda had reached 7.6 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 10 million by 1990. The population of Uganda is now 12.5 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 15 million by 2000. The population of Uganda is now 17 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 20 million by 2010. The population of Uganda is now 22 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 25 million by 2020. The population of Uganda is now 27 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 30 million by 2030. The population of Uganda is now 32 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 35 million by 2040. The population of Uganda is now 37 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 40 million by 2050. The population of Uganda is now 42 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 45 million by 2060. The population of Uganda is now 47 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 50 million by 2070. The population of Uganda is now 52 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 55 million by 2080. The population of Uganda is now 57 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 60 million by 2090. The population of Uganda is now 62 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The government had set a target of 65 million by 2100. The population of Uganda is now 67 million, with a growth rate of 2.5 per cent.

"Should I or should I not, say to you my friends in Africa, that if you don't reduce your fertility, if necessary to one child only, you can expect the direst poverty, starvation and violence, if indeed you are not experiencing it already. I argue that I have to, and that not to do so is gravest dereliction of duty in public health [I am a physician!]. If you want to lynch me, you are welcome, I trust that I will proceed to my martyrdom with a good courage. It sounds better in French, "...a ma martyre, avec un bon courage!"

As you see, I have not been martyred - anyway not yet! On one occasion I was even given a bunch of flowers! As for the 'snowball's chance in hell', about a third of the girls I spoke to in a slum in Kinshasa indicated that they were only going to have one child. Whether they were actually do so is another matter, but this was their stated intention. I was greatly heartened and much amazed. *It does indicate that the dialogue can at least be opened.* Where it will get to, is for the future to decide. *What is certain is what will happen if the dialogue is not opened - ever increasing starvation and violence.*

I sense that trapped communities know very well what is going to happen to them, and are happy to have somebody to discuss it with. Twice, after I have lectured in the Congo, members of the audience have said "Please do come and see us!" On one occasion it was because villagers had been burning one another's huts for lack of land, and on another occasion it was because they had been killing one another for the same reason.

So far, I have met with no hostility, although I did have one 'sticky moment', at the church in Vanga in the Congo, where I was asked to say a few words to the congregation. A mother asked me why I, as an expatriate, I should be interested in the size of her family? I replied that since I am a doctor, I am interested in health, and that since this requires food, it depends on the size of her garden, and the number of mouths it has to feed. This was well taken.

In 1995 I wrote a paper for the Uganda Monitor called '*Will Uganda follow Rwanda?*'. The editor, David Ouma Balikowa, removed my title, without my permission, and inserted his own. '*Go for one kid families, or the [population] bomb will hit Uganda*'. [12] It seems that he is in no doubt about the reality of starvation and violence, or about the need for one-child families.

On whose authority?

On whose authority do we allow trapped villagers to proceed to starvation and violence by default without letting them know what their predicament is? Family planners in America? Journal editors in London? Or ourselves at this meeting? I argue that what matters is what the villagers think - and they must be asked - and not left to proceed to starvation and violence by default without anybody asking them. I get the feeling that many of them would be most happy to be "disentrapped" - and to at least start to think about one-child families.

This is a question that can easily be answered. I therefore suggest an experiment just as soon as we return home. It is that everybody here should try out the crunch message, in one form or another, on several occasions in severely trapped communities. I should be delighted to assist, but I do need an invitation. I am particularly interested to see how well the crunch message is received in what I take to be the epicentre of demographic entrapment -- Niger. Will Malcolm Potts and Martha Campbell join me there?

It has been argued that, since the international community has failed to fund clean water and immunisation, etc. on the necessary scale, it cannot be expected to fund family planning either, so why bother? I reply that, *if the 'publicity bang' was loud enough*, it would - banner headlines in all the dailies - **"Middle Africa demographically trapped !!!"** The generation of this publicity is therefore absolutely crucial *and is something which the meeting must discuss.* As far as I can see, there is only one danger, it is that 'grandfather' ('mzee') will burst into tears - *of tumultuous joy and transcendental hope!*

References ■1, Caldwell, J, personal communication. ■2, Amaah O, personal communication. ■3, du Maurier George, The Curate's egg. Punch 09/11/1895. ■4, Aïssitou DY, Boureïma AG. Histoire des crises alimentaires au Sahel: cas du Niger. Université Abdou Moumouni de Niamey, Niger. ■5, Myers N, Kent Jennifer. Food and hunger in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Environmentalist 2001;21:41-69. ■6 Andre Catherine PJ-P. Land relations under unbearable stress: Rwanda caught in a Malthusian trap. Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organisation 34, 1-47. 1998. ■7, Wils W Le Kivu Montagneux: surpopulation, sousnutrition, érosion du sol, étude prospective par simulations mathématiques. Acad Roy Sci Outre-mer. Classe des Sciences Naturelles et médicales. Mémoire in-8 Nouvelle Série. Tome 21, Fasc 3. Brussels 1986 ■8, Fisher N. Food Security in Malawi: A crisis waiting to happen. Action Against Hunger - Malawi. 2006. ■9, Hardin, Garrett, Living within limits. Oxford University Press. 1993. ■10, Liebenstein H A theory of economic development. Princeton University Press. 1954. ■11 Notestein F. 'Discussion' in Interrelations of Demographic, Economic and Social Problems in Selected Underdeveloped Areas. Millbank Memorial Fund 1954.