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ON FAMILY PLANNING, AFRICAN VALUES AND ECONOMIC REALITIES

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ABSTRACT

The rate of growth in population is an integral part of national and human development. When a nation's population grows at a high rate, it leads to massive unemployment, food shortages and consequently inadequate social facilities, while a low growth rate leads to underdevelopment and eventual extinction of races (Mcsweeney, 1985:107).

This article identifies two basic types of Family Planning - natural and artificial. Embedded in each type are various methods with which family planning methods are analysed. Given the social value system in Africa, children are accorded very high premium. Thus, traditionally Africans pay little or no attention to the various methods of family planning, breeding children into the economy, with the attendant prevailing consequences.

The paper posits that apart from certain factors which act as natural checks to the growth rate of human population - e.g. poverty, famine, earthquake, windstorm, thunderstorm - that often leave in its wake fatal consequences, economic realities within the precincts of contemporary times serve as means of planning the contemporary families in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Demographers, Development Economists, Sociologists and Political Economists, interested in population issues, have in recent times analysed the dangers of an uncontrolled growth in the population of most societies of the third world, particularly impoverished Africa. The Rev. Thomas R. Malthus

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had blazed the trail in the 19th century when he expressed the fear and drew attention that the rate of population growth which increases in geometrical progression may exceed economic growth which progresses arithmetically.

The rate of growth in population is an integral part of national and human development. When a nation's population grows at too high a rate, it leads to massive unemployment, food shortages and consequently inadequate social facilities, while "too low a growth rate leads to under development and eventual extinction of races" (McSweeney 1985:107). However, a reasonable growth in the industrial sector of a population coupled with a strong productive capacity will invariably check McSweeney's Proposition. Belsham (1956:450), for instance, observes that while "developed societies with technological innovations can reasonably accommodate population increase, under developed countries are likely to suffer the effects of over-population because of their low level of technological advancement". In the light of these socio-economic observations, it becomes imperative for studies and researches on African population to warn that since an increase in population is likely to deter economic development, it is important that Family Planning Programmes be integrated into the Development Plans of African Societies.

Two basic types of Family Planning can be discernible - Natural and Artificial. The use of any of these methods depends on the individual's personal value and sometimes on social values. Methods of Family Planning, whether Natural or Artificial and from whatever perspective one looks at it, contradict African values. In the olden days, pre-industrial, non-literate traditional societies of Africa children, especially males, were needed for the cultivation of farms and defence of the society/community from incursions by aggressive and territorially ambitious neighbours. Thus, large families were desired for economic, military, communal and Political purposes hence the control of birth was absolutely unnecessary and unaccepted.

Today, African culture and values are increasingly adapted towards Western technology and thus the need for large families are redefined or have decreased. In addition, given their present stage of development and economic realities, Africans can not afford to have very many children due to the high cost of living. Given all the above, it is the considered position of this author that while African values affect the use of birth control devices, it is itself influenced by the economic realities of contemporary Africa.

(a) **FAMILY PLANNING: Meaning, Types and methods.**

The philosophy of family planning has varying connotations and meanings to various authors but all centre on a central theme namely that there is need to limit family sizes to match the level of the family and national economy. Golden (1981:21), for example, takes a naturalistic view point of family planning when he sees it as "an attempt to explore the full depths of all the relationships which constitute the family and in particular to study the male and female physiology so that in union with the creator, children may be born in love and adequately cared for". As can be discerned in this definition family planning is not primarily concerned with birth regulation. Love of God constitutes a basis of natural family planning. Golden's definition, one conjectures, accepts family planning intoto in the sense that if children must be born in love and cared for adequately, it follows from sylogical reasoning that such a family must be planned.

Artificial family planning, on the other hand, is viewed as a deliberate act of using any method for delaying a pregnancy for a short or a long time. It involves the prevention of conception or birth and this view makes no pretence in recommending abortion when other methods fail. We should note that natural birth control methods is incorporated into the Artificial family planning definition because they also delay or postpone, pregnancy.

i. **METHODS OF NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING**

The well-known methods of Natural Family Planning can be classified as follows:

- (a) The Calendar or Safe Period Method
- (b) The Basal Body Temperature (B.B.T.) Method.
- (c) The Sympto-Thermal Method (S.T.) and
- (d) The Billings Ovulation Method (B.)M).

As known already, the oldest method of natural family planning is the Calendar Method. Ogino in Japan and Knaus in Austria, independently discovered in the 1920's that ovulation always occurs in women about two weeks before the onset of the following menses. A knowledge of this enables the women to calculate times of probable fertility and infertility in accordance to her menstrual dates of the previous six months. This then gives rise to the name Calendar Rhythm. This method becomes very successful where a

woman has a fairly regular menstrual cycles and good grasp of the workings of the method as originated and popularised globally by medical scientists in the area of Gynaecology.

With reference to (b) - the Basal Body Temperature (B.B.T.) Method, Father Golden (1981:68) attributes the discovery of this method to Dr. John Marshall. Marshall observed that a woman's temperature when taken before rising each morning is normally from 0.2° to 0.4°F higher after ovulation and remains high until the next menses. The indication here is that ovulation has taken place and shows the late infertile days which start after the third rise in temperature. The B.B.T. method has a success rate of 99.5% if it is strictly followed.

The Sympto-Thermal (S.T.) Method from findings, is the more recent discovery in family planning. It is shown that the success rate is 99%. A number of pointers, including the Calendar Dates and Temperature, are used in this method to indicate the approach of ovulation. A cross cultural findings from researches indicate that many women prefer this method over the use of pills.

Billings Ovulation Methods (B.O.M.) is another equally important method of natural family planning. This method is attributed to Dr. John and Lyn Billings who, in association with others conducted a research in 1953 and perfected what they called the "Mucus Sign". This method has been proved to have a 98.5% accuracy when used correctly in that the changes in the colour of the Mucus when observed in a precise way, can accurately indicate the fertile days (McSweeney 1985:103).

ii. METHODS OF ARTIFICIAL FAMILY PLANNING

We have so far highlighted the various ways in which natural family planning could be observed. There are however other family planning methods which fall within the precinct of Artificial devices and they include.

- (a) The pill (Oral Contraceptives).
- (b) Diaphragm with Jelly or cream
- (c) Intra Uterine Device (I.U.D.)
- (d) The Condom.
- (e) The Vaginal Jellies and Depositories.
- (f) The Three Monthly Depo-provera Injection

- (g) Tubal Ligation and Vasectomy.
- (h) Withdrawal or Coitus Interruptus.
- (i) Abortion.

The first of the Artificial Methods listed here - the contraceptive pill comes in the form of tablets. These tablets contain chemicals which closely resemble the natural hormones the female body produces and if taken on a daily basis can prevent ovulation and therefore conception. Demographers and Medical Scientists in the area of fertility believe that this method is 99% effective in preventing conception if taken daily and as directed. Others are of the opinion that contraceptive pills used over a period of time can sterilize a woman. Conversely, specialists such as Professor Melvin Zelnik of the Department of Population Dynamics in Maryland (U.S.A.) still question the effectiveness of the contraceptive pills.

Another method of family planning in the Artificial category is the Diaphragm. Diaphragm itself, is a thin sheet of rubber stretched over a collapsible metal ring which is inserted into the vagina to cover the cervix. Diaphragm may be used with contraceptive jelly or cream as lubricants or for additional protection. Added to the above is the Intra Uterine Device (I.U.D.) which is an important method of artificial birth control. The I.U.D. are small plastic devices which come in a variety of shapes and sizes as spirals, loops, rings, bours and double coils. Any of these devices, when present in the womb, prevents conception.

The Condom, as a method, may be used as a measure of family planning. As a member in the family of the artificial methods of family planning, the condom is a rubber sheath designed to be placed to cover the penis just before sexual intercourse. This method, it is asserted, becomes effective when the woman uses contraceptive cream or jelly but the success rate is generally low as the rubber may slip off from the penis during peak period of sex. Beside serving the family planning function as highlighted in this article, it is noteworthy that the condom serves as means of scuttling contact through indiscriminate sex with the HIV infection (or AIDS - Acquired Immuned Deficiency Syndrome) e.g. Gold Circle condom, etc. are useful channels of artificial family planning device and safety valve against AIDS as always advertised in our Radio and Television media.

The injection of Depo-Provera once every three months to prevent conception is another method preferred by some women. Following this, where conception occurs, abortion may be procured to evacuate the foetus. It needs be pointed out that there have however been arguments as to whether abortion is a contraceptive or not. But solace is taken from Webster's New World Dictionary (College Edition) which pitches tents with proponents of the view that abortion is a contraceptive when it defines contraception as "the intentional prevention of fertilization of the human ovum, as by special devices or drugs". This definition does not however, contradict the common place or ordinary meaning of abortion as the removal of already fertilized ovum. Even the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria recognises abortion in the context prescribed by Webster's approach.

The Withdrawal or Coitus Interruptus is another very potent method of family planning. This method, as the name implies, involves the removal of male organ (penis) from the female organ (vagina) just before ejaculation of the sperm.

In the situation or event of the non-practicability of these methods, one may preferably turn to Tubal Ligation (in the case of women) or Vasectomy in the case of men. Both involve simple operations to tie the fallopian tubes or obstruct the flow of sperm as the case may be. This method, as well known, is 100% effective and the operations are irreversible for "good" or "bad".

Considering the use into which all the above methods have been put, they have been proved to contain varying degree of success. And, of all these methods, we fall back on Malthus in agreeing that the safest and most effective method of family planning is that of abstinence from sexual relations, until and unless conception is desired. Eventhough one may have cause to agree with this Malthusian position, we know also by extension, from Sigmund Freud and other Developmental Psychologists as well as the moral values of most contemporary societies that abstinence from sexual relations as a method of family planning becomes weak to defend. This is so because psychologists like Abraham Maslow and others believe that sex, among other variables, belongs to the hierarchy of needs of man.

(b) AFRICAN VALUES

Every society has some objects, attitudes, beliefs, world views and ideas considered to be more important than others. An individual, for

example, who has completed a University education, despite the change in economic fortunes, is accorded greater social status and prestige than say a fisherman who may appear more radiant in health. Also, a man who has acquired greater material wealth, in our society, is accorded greater recognition in the society irrespective of how he acquires his wealth. This relative importance is determined by the values that exist in the society concerned. Within the context of African societies, values directly influence human behaviour. There are, in Africa, personal as well as social values but the social values are more likely to affect a person's behaviour since they have been inducted or taught through the process of socialisation from early childhood. In the words of Chitamber (1973:250), these "values in a society can make it easy or difficult for people to adopt new practices and to form and operate any new organizations necessary for the promotion of improved practices". This position is not too far away from Edward Tylor's (1891) classic conception of culture in his two volume work titled Primitive Culture.

There are various ways in which one could look at values in Africa. Among these ways is that values in this perspective may be analysed in terms of Africa's fundamental religions. These religions, three in number, see human life as sacred, mysterious and unending. To these religions which are themselves greatly entrenched in Africa, influence African values immensely. Life, in African value, does not belong to man but comes to him each day from God. This is aptly expressed in the Islamic Koran in the following words:

Do not kill your children from fear of poverty. We provide for you and for them; surely killing them is a great sin..... do not kill anyone, except in the course of justice, for God has made human life sacred") Koran 17:31-33).

The Holy Bible, on the other hand, states in Genesis 9:6 and Exodus 20:13 that

"Whoever kills man, by man shall his blood be required"

and

"thou shall not kill" respectively.

These biblical injunctions are non-accommodating and provide no conditionalities. Both Islam and christianity forbid "killing" and consider all methods of contraception either as method for obstructing a pregnancy or

otherwise as killing. Among the Ibibio of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, human life is held very sacred to the extent that any deprivation of life either by the use of herbs to cause abortion by a woman or ritual killing will evoke instant anger of the gods and consultation with cult priests (Abia Idiong) for reprisal or revenge (Ekong, 1983:50-56).

Traditionally, Africans believe in the marriage of many wives (Polygyny) and are also known for keeping large families. In the pre-industrial, non-literate traditional societies of Africa, the main economic activity was characterised by subsistence agriculture and small-scale extractive industrial activities. This type of economic life demanded a lot of human resources or man power potential. Because of this, it became inevitable and imperative for polygyny (or Polygamy) as a value in African social system to be practised. Consequently, as noted by Eyo Ndem (1988), "a contingent of wives and numerous children was an economic investment and a sign of affluence".

Large families provided a store for labour as men were needed to clear the bushes and till the soil for cultivation. The values of African societies and their work ethic supported and encouraged the procreation of many children and barrenness, especially on the part of the women, was regarded and viewed with embarrassing consequences for the woman. Some communities in Ibibioland of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, even classify women with one or two children as "infertile". Clad by this value for children, the people of Akwa Ibom North-East (comprising Uruan, Uyo, Ekpe Atai, Itu, Etinan, and other Ibibio sub-cultures hold the same believe that:

- (a) "EYEN EDI INYENE"
- (b) "EYEN EDI OKOT ADUBOK" meaning
"children are wealth"
and
"Fully grown children are supposed to care for their parents' needs at old age".

Since children are seen as economic assets and as a source of social security, family planning is regarded with suspicion.

Barring therefore the use of family planning Africans, influenced by their values, beliefs, attitudes and world views, are forced to increase their population by the desire to reproduce. The lack of constraint on this urge brings about an increase in the population growth rate which is currently a source of worry for governments in Africa, WHO, FAO, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNPF and many other concerned international organizations and their agencies.

(c) ECONOMIC REALITIES

It is to the economic sphere that we address ourselves in this analysis. It is a truism that the realities of the current trend in African political economy has pervasive influence on the knowledge and use of family planning devices viz-a-viz African values. By a stroke of luck, certain factors act as natural checks to the rate of growth in the human population. Poverty and famine stand out as the most important of these. As is well known in economic analysis, the Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus (1834) fired the first salvo in the spirit of inquiry on population issues in relation to economic development where he observed that populations tend to move more rapidly than does the food supply. While population can increase in geometrical progression, agricultural production in reality can only increase in Arithmetic progression. The implication here is that despite innovations in technology and the opening of new agricultural lands, (NALDA), etc., there is a limit to the natural and agricultural resources available. This may sound a disappointing revelation to Africans who believe that there will be enough food for as many children as they reproduce. This is saying in effect to the Africans that unlimited, unbridled and unplanned population growth will have a depressing effect on economic growth.

African societies such as Ethiopia, Sudan and most of Nigeria, including Akwa Ibom State, are already experiencing the effects of lack of family planning, as human pressure on the land means that they cannot produce enough food for the teeming populations. In the case of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, at least, conclusions reached at the National Conference on the priorities for the Development of Akwa Ibom State (1988), agree essentially with the above observations. As starvation may be regarded as a

measure of inadvertent population control, these African societies may comfortably be said to be planning their families, though most unintentionally, through the phenomena of hunger and death. A visit to most villages and rural communities in South Eastern Nigeria (Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Abia, part of Imo, Rivers States) present clearly to a careful observer, a sad story of hunger, deprivation and disillusionment on the biblical injunction of "Go Ye into the world and multiply abundantly". This biblical injunction to which our forebears complied without raising an eye brow now has a boomerang effect on their communal land holding, exploitation of the resources of the sea and forest. The people in their societies/communities are trapped into bearing the effects of the apparent "errors" of their forebears who believed in keeping harem of women. That the scripture enjoined us to "Go into the world and multiply"; did not imply multiplying without planning.

In all of Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general, the high cost of basic food stuff have forced people to turn to "Akara", foofoo and cocoyam as substitutes for bread, garri and yam respectively. A loaf of bread which sold at five naira (N5.00) a few years back now sells at between forty and fifty naira (N40 & N50.00) hence the logic of the people in turning to "Akara (bean cake), which is comparatively not cheap either. By the present cost of garri (at 5 - 6 cigarette cups for N20.00), it now costs a family of five about one thousand three hundred naira (N1,300.00) a month for garri alone if they adjust themselves to consuming only twelve cups at two meals a day between them. And so, people turn to cassava foofoo with consistent regularity. Other food items that could be consumed during the intervening hours of the day are far from their reach. Even if they were within reach, the money to buy them is not just there and the lands are increasingly unproductive for lack of use of Agricultural Extension Workers who could act as agents of change in attitudes, beliefs and applications of crude agricultural technology in the rural farms that are already communal. Apart from some communities in Nigeria, other African societies and communities, like Ethiopia, Sudan and neighbouring Chad and Niger are also experiencing high cost of living which results in malnutrition if not starvation (K. Edwards et al 1995); (F. Olize 1995).

Consequent upon this high cost of living, some African values towards child bearing have changed. Moreso, due to innovations in

technology, Africans have less need for physical labour and numerous children. Industrialization and modernization, the twin view held by most political economists as prescribed by the modernization paradigm (H. Alavi 1982: 1 -8) have positively encouraged the knowledge and use of family planning devices. This is so because salary earners inevitably have to plan and budget their spending to last till the next pay day and from demographic and economic stand points, the larger the family size, the greater the financial burden and responsibility. The up bringing of healthy children (physically and mentally) is an expensive exercise thus the more dependents one has, the greater the demand on one's limited resources and hence the lower the standard of living. This, in itself is an important check, along side modern education in variety of forms, on African values concerning the breeding of too many children.

CONCLUSION

The thrust of the paper has been to re-echo the existing methods of family planning. These methods - Natural and Artificial - have been carefully analysed and have been seen to be polar opposite to the values placed on children by the African on the eve of industrialization, modernization and a depletive recessive economy hence economic realities that force him to plan his family.

However, our discourses show that African values influence the knowledge and use of any of the family planning methods. Hitherto, Africans attached much importance to large family sizes as economic assets but with the improvements in technology and allied agents of change, more Africans are now changing their attitudes towards family planning. More people now plan their families to correspond with their level of income. Poverty, hunger, and the desire for the "finer things of life" have catalysed and conditioned many Africans into planning their families inspite of their social values.

Economic realities such as high cost of living, pressure on natural and social resources, alarming poverty, hunger, starvation, etc. are a leverage in encouraging the knowledge and use of birth control devices thus changing traditional opinions about family planning. Consequently, there exists a vicious cycle between family planning, African values and Economic Realities.

A number of African nations like Nigeria, are advocating family planning for meaningful economic growth and development. In Nigeria, for example, Family Planning Units are set up in hospitals and Primary Health care centres.

Apart from the views held thus far in this article, one suggests in addition that since Africans are relatively very religious, almost more pious than the Arabs and Europeans who introduced Islam and Christian religions to them, it would be easier to appeal to different religious organizations. The Mosques and Churches could serve as useful channels to mobilize Africans in the knowledge and use of Family Planning Methods to check our populations. The idea of calling on religious organizations here is that campaigns for moral decency which are contained in the great books will be preached to adherents to ensure a change for the better.

Also, the various governments should create more job opportunities for the youths and provide challenges in order to safe guard the health and morality of the society. From this, it is believed that when people are actively involved in economic activities, the family will plan itself and the health of the nation will be less in jeopardy.

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