

The Republic Of Uganda

POPULATION GROWTH IN UGANDA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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NATIONAL POPULATION COUNCIL (NPC)



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BTVET	-	Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training
UDHS	-	Uganda Demographic and Health Survey
CPR	-	Contraceptive Prevalence Rate
FP	-	Family Planning
TFR	-	Total Fertility Rate
UPE	-	Universal Primary Education
USE	-	Universal Secondary Education
NPC	-	National Population Council
UBOS	-	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
ENR	-	Environment and Natural Resources



1. Introduction

The Government of Uganda through the Vision 2040 aims at among other things increasing per capita income from US \$500 in 2013 to US \$ 9,500 by 2040. However, achieving this goal depends on a number of measures and how the country manages its population resource. Uganda's population is estimated to be 42 million people in 2021 and at the growth rate of 3.0%, the population is expected to reach 71.4 million people by 2040. The Uganda Vision 2040 recognized the high fertility rate (5.4 children per woman) and the resultant high population growth rate (3.0% per annum) and unfavorable population age structure as key constraints in the realization of the vision. Almost half (47.9%) of Uganda's population is below the age of 15 years.

Uganda's population dynamics however, present both opportunities and challenges for achieving sustainable economic growth and human capital development. For the country to set itself on the path of sustainable economic progress, there needs to be a match between the pace of growth in population and development otherwise if left unchecked, high population growth can frustrate development efforts. Currently, population growth in Uganda is outstripping the growth in vital services including among others health care, education, housing and employment. A burgeoning population of young people with no clear employment opportunities can increase the country's vulnerability to civil unrest.

The Government of Uganda however, recognizes the intricate and fundamental inter-relationships between population and development and therefore harnessing of the Demographic Dividend has been identified as one of the strategies for attaining the Vision 2040 and has been emphasized in the revised National Population Policy. Sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved unless population issues are integrated in all development programmes.

2. Key population issues in Uganda

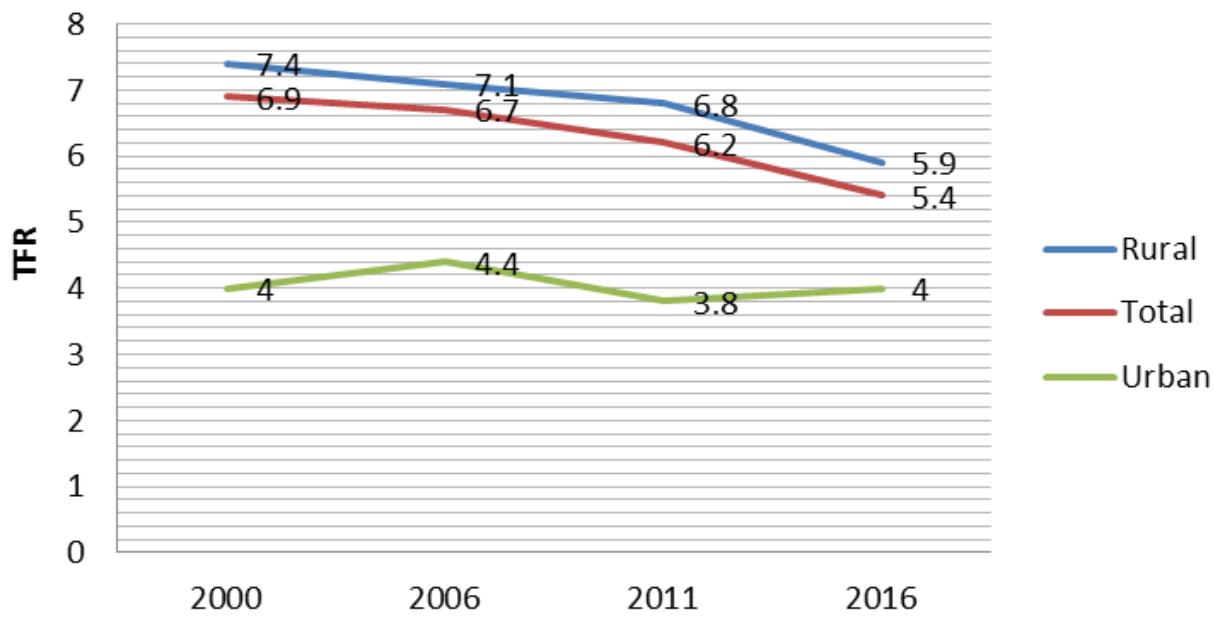
a) High population growth rate

Uganda's population problem is not its size but the rate at which it is growing . The rate of growth is 3% per annum which makes it one of highest globally. Uganda's population is estimated at 42 million people in 2021 and projected to be 71.4 million by the year 2040. The factors fueling this high growth rate are many and complex but the major ones include; persistent high fertility coupled with the high unmet need for family planning services, teenage pregnancies and child marriages. Factors contributing to the high population growth rate are discussed below.

Fertility rates are still high

The Uganda Demographic Health Survey (UDHS) reports indicate that fertility rate has been declining at a slow pace over the last three decades from an average of 7 children per woman in 1991 to 5.4 children in 2016. This rate is still high for the country to realize sustainable development but the negative implications of high fertility on social economic development can be turned into an advantage through harnessing the demographic dividend.

Trends in fertility by residence



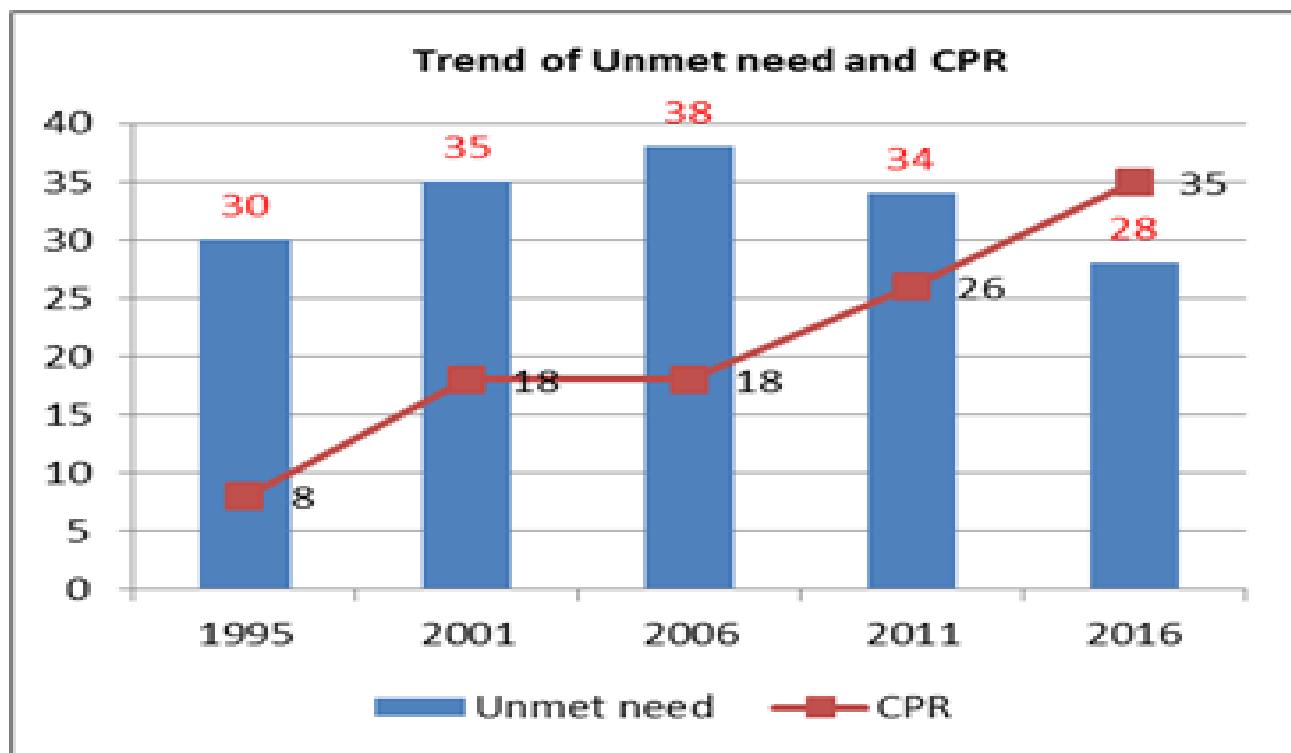
Source: UDHS 2016

High teenage pregnancies & child marriages

Teenage pregnancy in Uganda has remained very high at 25% for the last two decades. This has contributed to child marriages and consequently to high fertility, school drop outs and low empowerment of women. There are regional variations in teenage pregnancy, island districts have the highest teenage pregnancies (48%) followed by Teso, Tooro and North West regions where teenage pregnancy is at 30%. Kigezi and Kampala regions have the lowest teenage pregnancies (16% and 17% respectively) (UDHS, 2016).

Unmet Need for Family Planning

The overall demand for family planning has increased in recent years, and with this increase, the unmet need has declined steadily from 38% in 2006 to 28% in 2016, while Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) increased from 24% in 2006 to 39% in 2016 (UDHS 2016). Though the unmet need for family planning (counting all methods) has reduced, it is still very high in a sense that almost 3 in every 10 women who would want to use family planning cannot access the services contributing to high unplanned/unintended pregnancies in Uganda.



Source: UDHS 2016

b) Population age structure that has led to high dependency burden

Uganda has a predominantly young population, which forms a broad base of the country's population structure. About 16.6 million people (47.9%) are aged 0-14 years, while 17 million people (49.2%) are aged 15-64 years, constituting the economically productive age group and only 34,856 persons (2.9%) are aged 65 years and above. Having a predominantly young population creates a high population momentum which means that the country's population will continue increasing because of the large cohorts of young women entering their childbearing years, with 53.9% beginning child bearing by age 19.6 The dependency ratio remains unfavourably high at 103, indicating a heavy burden on the economically productive population as well as impacting government's efforts to provide adequate and quality social services. However, a young age structure can create an opportunity for economic growth if well nurtured. (See Uganda's population pyramid below).

- Unfavourable population age structure
- High dependency ratio

Uganda has a very young population . . .

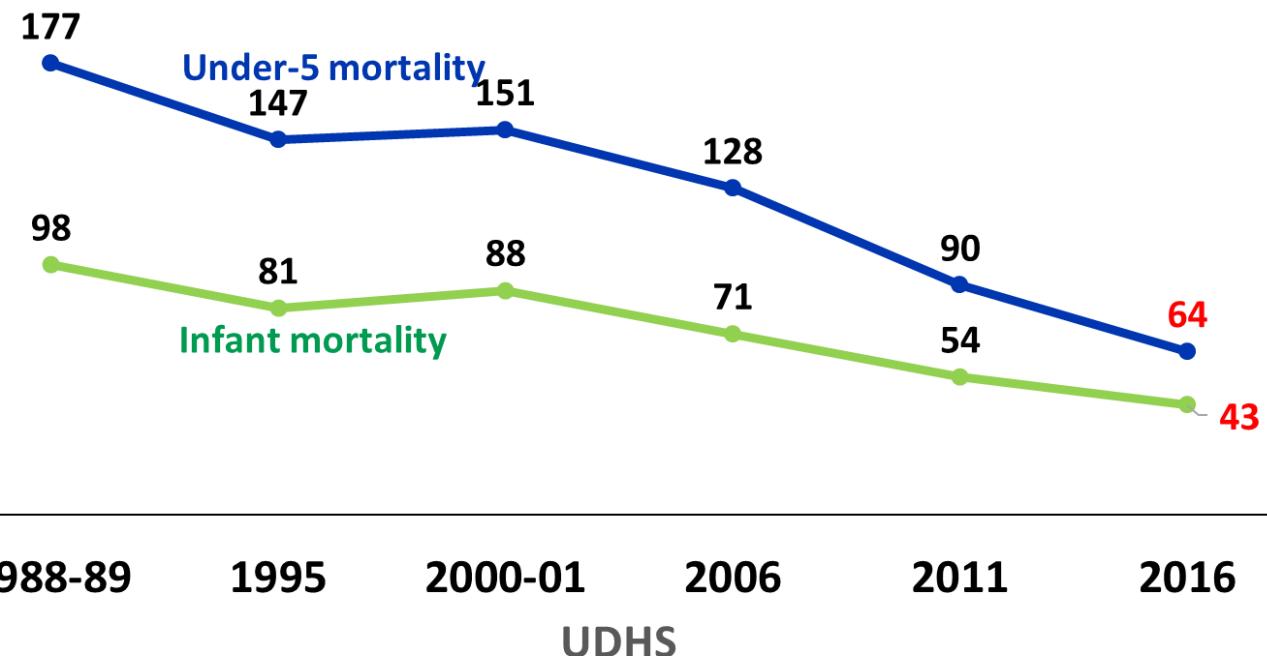


c) Mortality

Infant & Maternal Mortality

Infant and child mortality rates are basic indicators of a country's socio-economic situation and quality of life. Generally, there has been a decline in mortality levels. The Infant Mortality rate drastically declined from 97 deaths in 1995 to 43 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2016, but the challenge still exists in the universal access to immunization, malaria control and, proper nutrition. Despite the decline in infant mortality, neonatal mortality has stagnated at 27 deaths per 1,000 live births for the last ten years. This high and persistent neonatal mortality undermines national efforts to reduce infant mortality (Neonatal mortality accounts for 63% of infant mortality in Uganda). It is worth noting that child survival is linked to better maternal health outcomes as a result of improved attendance of antenatal care, skilled birth and postnatal care. Since infant and child mortality have an impact on fertility decline and vice versa, further reduction in fertility and mortality are critical if Uganda is to accelerate the demographic transition. Maternal Mortality however, remains a big challenge at 336 deaths per 100,000 live births as of 2016.

Trends in Childhood Mortality



Life expectancy

According to the 2014 National Population and Housing Census, Uganda's life expectancy was 63.3 years (62.2 years for males and 64.2 years for females) an improvement from the 50.4 years recorded in 2002, but still low compared to developed countries which have life expectancy of 70 years and above.

d) Education and skilling

The Government of Uganda recognizes that education of its population is a priority. This is reflected in the nation's Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education(USE) programmes which have led to a significant increase in the number of students enrolling in schools at both primary and secondary levels. Additionally, Government introduced BTVET (Business, Technical, Vocational Education Training) to absorb young people who drop out of school or who may want to attain specific skills.

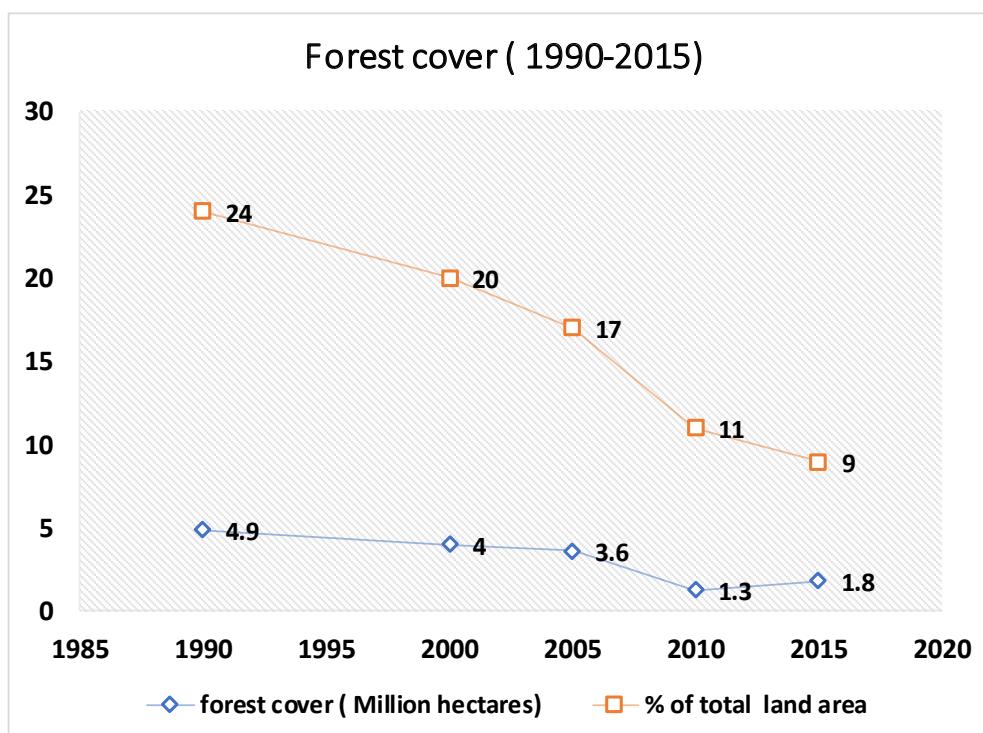
Despite all these efforts, the average years of schooling in Uganda has remained very low at 4.2 (AFIDEP 2019). Both UPE and USE are characterized by very high drop out rates. Although, many students enroll in primary, the majority do not complete primary education. Girls are especially affected by the high drop out rate due to child marriages and teenage pregnancies. More so, the type of education on offer in Uganda largely focuses on theory as opposed to building practical and entrepreneurial skills which has contributed to growing youth unemployment.

e) Unemployment and Poverty

High levels of unemployment and under employment coupled with a high dependency burden have denied the country the potential contribution of a significant proportion of its population to national social economic development. At household level unemployment perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty. High unemployment and underemployment levels will make it very difficult for Uganda to meaningfully address its major development challenges and meet its aspirations in the third National Development Plan and Vision 2040. Besides, growing levels of unemployment especially among young people can be a cause for instability in future. Employment and job creation are essential to Uganda's development, the World Bank 2018 report highlights that Uganda needs to create more than 600,000 jobs per year before 2030 to keep up for labour force entrants.

f) Environmental degradation

Owing to a rapidly growing population in Uganda, natural resources including wetlands and forests are being degraded at a faster pace. Evidence also shows that failure to sustain the population-natural resource balance results in increasing poverty, conflict, economic and political instability and, migrations among other adverse effects like climate change and land slides.



Source: National Forest Authority Data 2016

3. Policy options to address population issues

The current population profile presents a situation of very high child dependency. However, in this challenge of the burgeoning population, are opportunities of a demographic bonus, but the benefits can only be realized if appropriate social and economic investments are made in the young people. The strategic choice Uganda makes to invest in the youthful population will determine the rate (how soon the dividend is reaped); level (how high the dividend is reaped) and the sustainability (how long benefits from the dividend will be maintained) of the country's benefits. For this turn around, from demographic burden to demographic bonus to happen, Uganda has to put in place certain policy and programme measures such as:

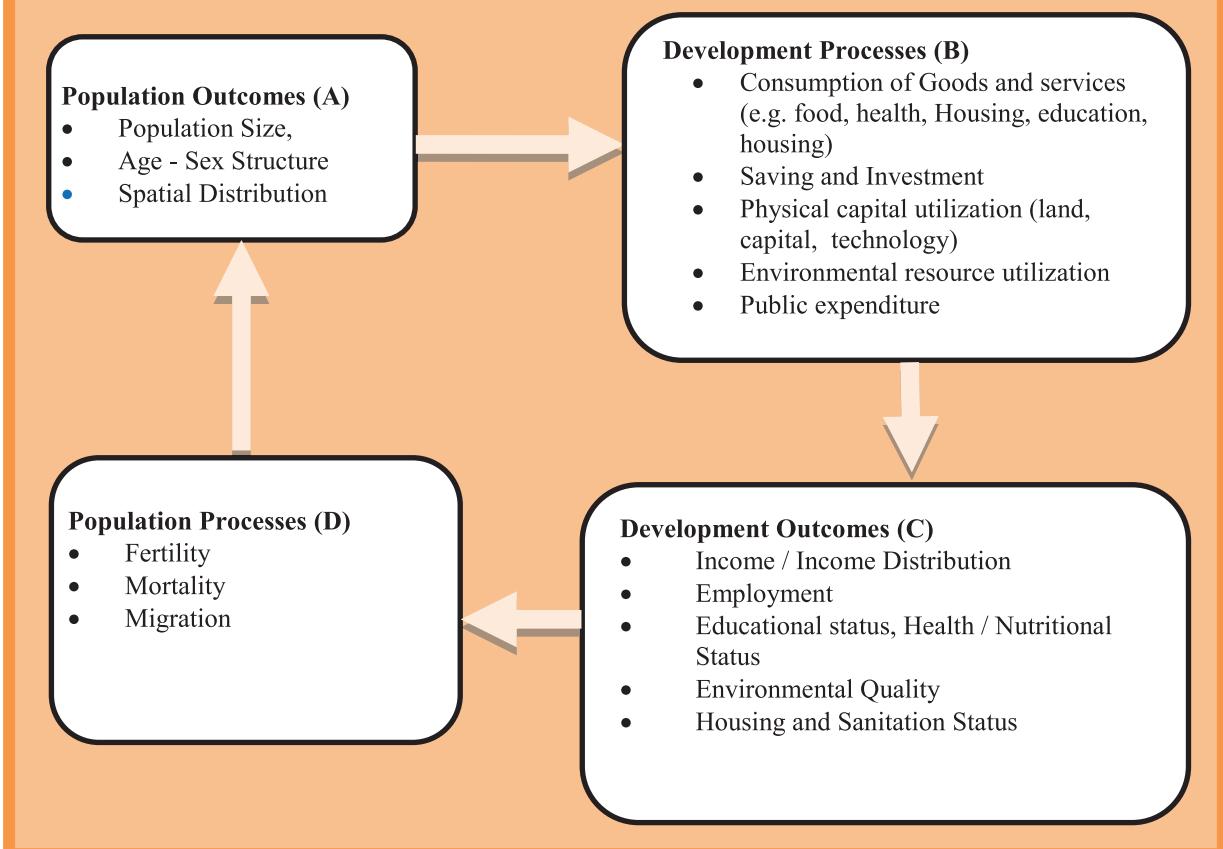
- i. Massive investment in education (competence based education)
- ii. Targeted investment in health and family planning
- iii. Comprehensive but informed investment in strategic skills development.

4. Key strategies

- o Multi-sectoral approach- integration of population issues in other programmes
- o Promote voluntary family planning
- o Strengthen the health system to curb down mortality
- o Strengthen community systems to address teenage pregnancy and other salient reproductive health issues.
- o Improve the quality of education & promotion of BTBET to enhance skilling.
- o Support efforts to end child marriages
- o Keep children , especially girls in school for at least 13 years
- o Fully operationalize the early childhood development policy
- o Invest in stronger preventive and curative health care services.
- o Advance healthy newborn care practices
- o Invest in job-multiplier industries.
- o Promote equity and inclusion

Population and development interlinkages

Figure 2: Overview of Population and Development Interrelationships



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National Population Council
Statistics House, Plot 9, Colville Street
P. O. Box 2666, Kampala, Uganda

E-mail: npcsec@npcsec.go.ug Website: www.npcsec.go.ug

 NPC Uganda  @NPC.Uganda