



NIGERIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION AND IMPLICATIONS ON THE ATTAINMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a time-bound global development agenda with 17 goals which targets 169 social, economic, and environmental indicators agreed upon in 2015 by UN member states to be achieved by year 2030. The SDGs includes many targets and references to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, improved health for women and children, enhance universal access to quality education, and gender equality, among others. This study utilised the reports of Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys from 1990 to 2018 and the 2006 national population census results to understand and analyse Nigeria's demographic trends (age structure, fertility and mortality rates) with the intention to understand how they may affect the country's efforts towards realising the set targets of the SDGs relating to eradication of poverty and hunger, ensuring health of the people, providing quality education and empowering women and girls. Findings showed that Nigeria's demographic trends is characterised by slowly declining mortality and fertility rates with high population growth rate, and a dismal performance in the SDGs targets relating to poverty, hunger, health, education and women empowerment. The country will have to slow down its population growth rate and invest heavily in education, healthcare and job creation to be able to achieve the targets of the SDGs by 2030.

Keywords: Demographic transition, Fertility, Mortality, Sustainable Development Goals, Demographic and Health Survey

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa and the 7th in the world, and has been projected to have a population of over 400 million people in 2050, which is expected to be the 3rd largest in the world (UN, 2015). Nigeria's population is growing at an inter-censal rate of 3.2% and has total fertility rate (TFR) of more than 5 children per woman. The country has a very young population with over 40% under the age of 15. The country has had high rates of fertility and mortality since she gained independence in 1960.

Mortality and fertility rates are however declining, although slowly. Even though mortality and fertility are declining, the country's population is projected to continue growing (Reed & Mberu, 2014), which will affect her efforts towards meeting the targets of the 2030 sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The sustainable development goals (SDGs), also known as the 2030 Agenda, is a development framework that covers 17 goals and 169 targets across social, political, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development agreed upon in 2015 by UN

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member states to be achieved by year 2030 (Maishanu et al 2019). The SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which ended in 2015. The 2030 Agenda includes many targets and references to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, improved health for women and children, enhancing universal access to quality education, and promoting gender equality, among others. This study examines how attainment of the SDGs targets can be affected by Nigeria's demographic changes (the demographic transition). The paper examined Nigeria's demographic trends: age structure, changing rates of fertility and mortality and attempts to show how they can affect efforts towards achieving the SDGs, particularly relating to goals on poverty and hunger (goals 1 and 2), health for all (goal 3), quality education (goal 4), gender equality and women empowerment (goal 5), and environment-related (goal 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation and goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities).

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized data from the reports of Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS) from 1990 to 2018 to examine the trends of fertility and mortality in Nigeria to understand the level of changes in the demographic trends. The DHS, which is usually undertaken at an interval of 5 years, provides timely data that can easily be compared. Between 1990 and 2018, Nigeria conducted five series of the DHS in 1990, 1999, 2003, 2008 and 2018. The results of the surveys were examined and compared to understand the changing fertility and mortality levels in the country during the period.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION.

Nigeria's Population Age Structure

Nigeria's population is still young with about 42% under the age of 15 (and only about 5% above 60 years) as the results of the last census in 2006 showed (see Figure 1) (NPC Nigeria, 2009). The age structure shows a very young population with a very large number of children below 15 years of age (see Figure 2).

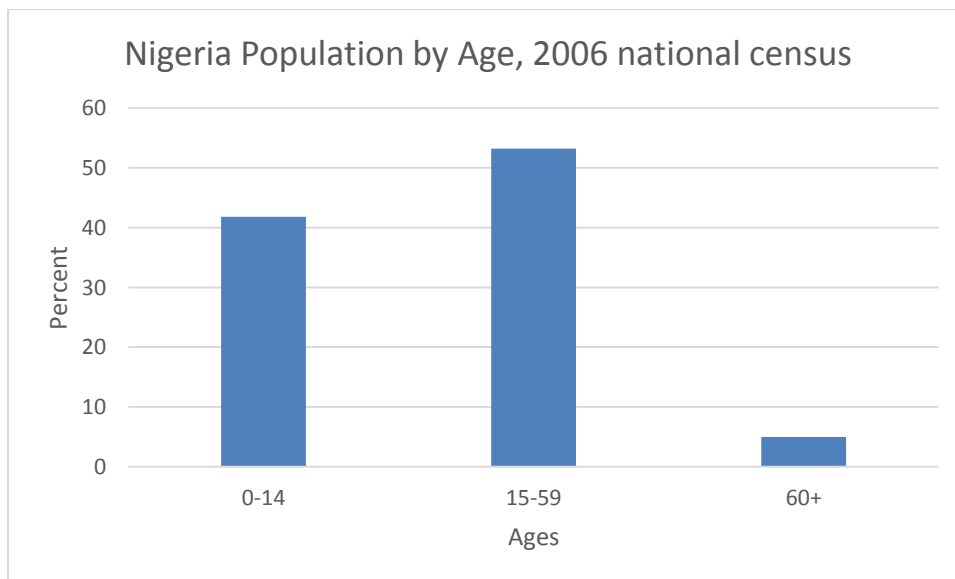


Figure 1: Percent distribution of Nigeria's population, 2006 census.

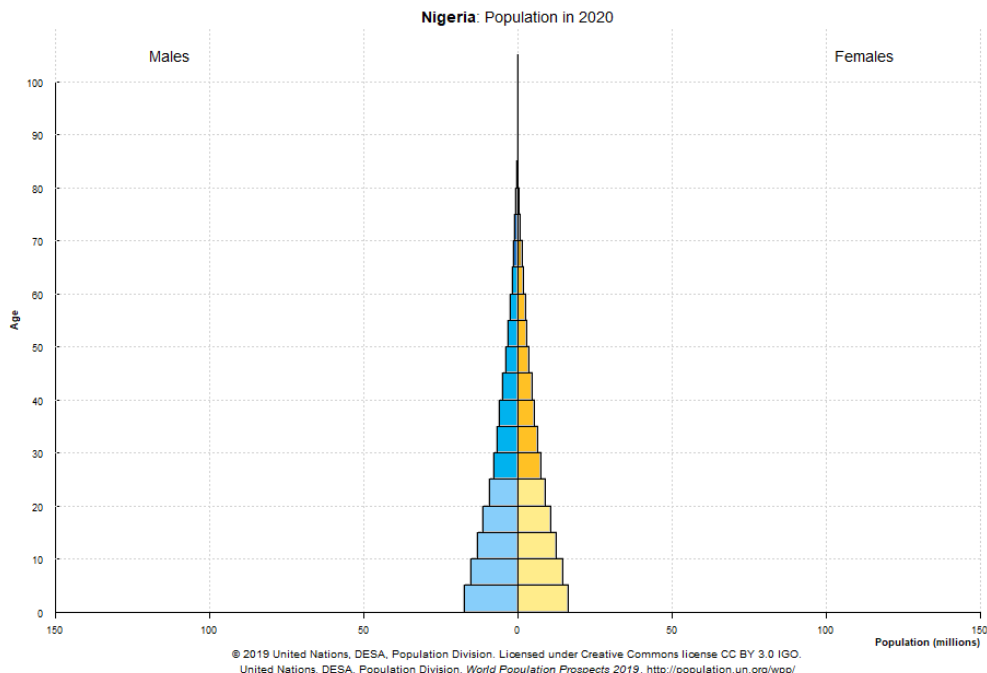


Figure 2: Population pyramid of Nigeria, 2020.

This age structure is projected to sustain through 2030 (see Figure 3), the year set for the attainment of the SDGs, and until at least 2050 (see figure 4).

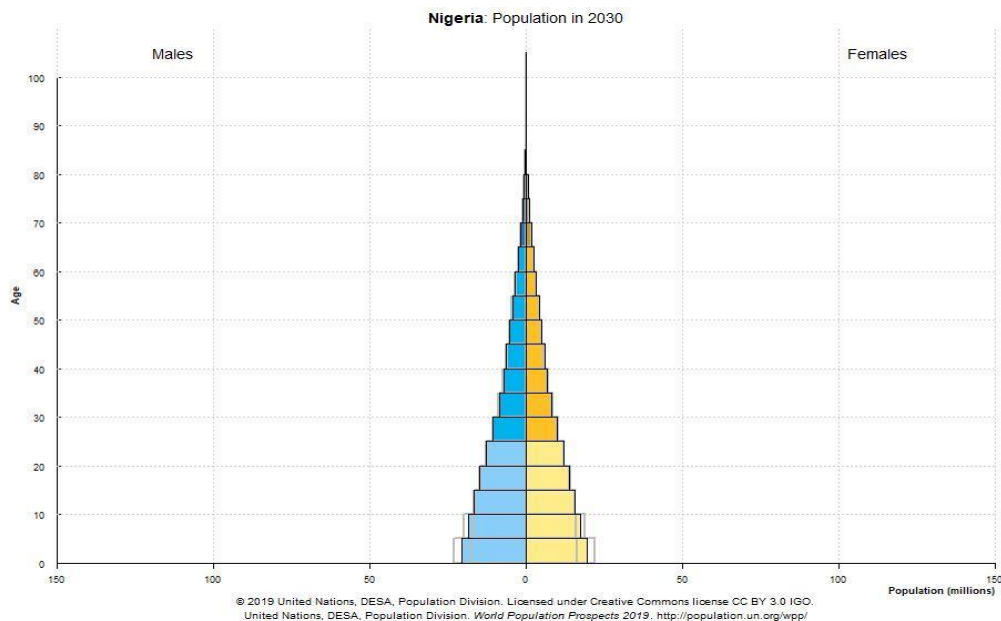


Figure 3: Population pyramid of Nigeria, projected for 2030.

Nigeria's age structure reflects the country's high fertility rates. Nigeria is among countries with the highest total fertility rates (TFR) in Africa; with higher fertility rates in the rural areas and in the northern regions of the country where majority of

women have more than 6 children which is among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa (Jimenez and Pate, 2017). Nigeria's current TFR is 5.3 children per woman (NPC Nigeria and ICF, 2019), and despite steady declines, the country's

fertility is not expected to fall to replacement level before 2050 under the medium-variant projection

of the United Nations (Reed and Mberu, 2014; United Nations, 2009).

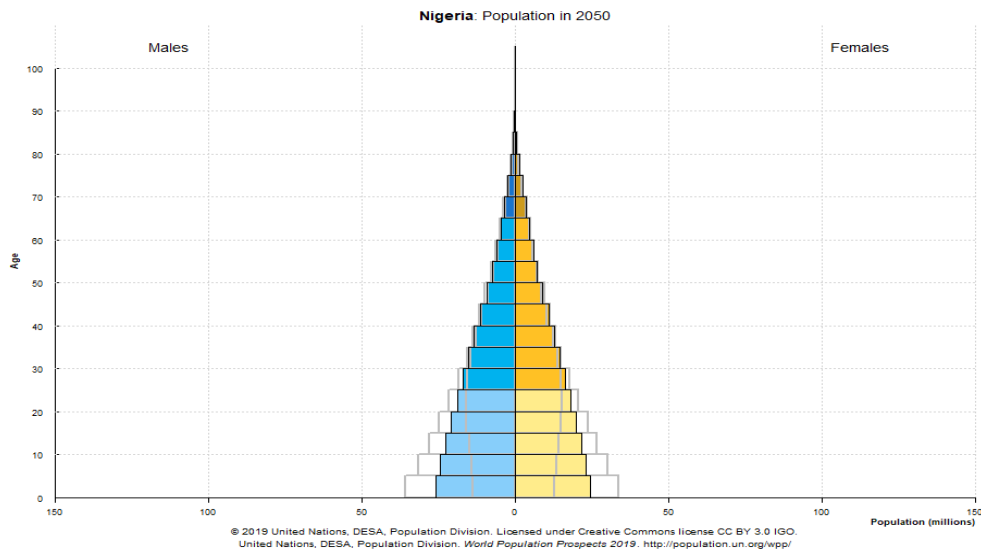


Figure 4: Population pyramid of Nigeria, projected for 2050.

A country's age structure has a direct bearing on education, healthcare, job creation, social security among other factors (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014), and huge investments will be needed to cater for the needs of the young population. While the young age structure of Nigeria can present a challenge to be able to provide the necessary investments to cater for the population, it however provides an opportunity for the country to reap from the demographic dividend (UNFPA, 2014; Bloom & Humair, 2010). The demographic dividend is "the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older)" (UNFPA, 2016) when supported with appropriate and effective public policies.

According to the United Nations Population Fund, "a country with both increasing numbers of young people and declining fertility has the potential to reap a demographic dividend" (UNFPA, 2016).

The dividend results from a period of sustained fall in fertility leading to change in the age structure of a population with increased proportion of people in the labour force. It emerges as people desire fewer children due to low mortality rates. The fall in fertility allows families to invest in the health, education and

skills of their children and for the adults to save for their retirement as such reducing old-age dependency ratio. It also gives women more opportunity to engage in income generating jobs and boosting labour force participation due to reduced child rearing responsibilities (Oluwasola & Terfa, 2014). All these impacts positively on national economy by generating more resources for investing in socio-economic development. However, to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend is not automatic (Olaniyan, Soyibo & Lawanson 2012; Wongboonsin & Guest, 2004), as huge investments must be made in health, education and provision of jobs for the large number of working age population (Bloom, Canning & Malaney, 2000). Wongboonsin & Guest (2004) have argued that the demographic dividend occurs only for few decades and does not last forever as the structure of population keeps changing. This means that Nigeria must take advantage and exploit the opportunity while it lasts.

NIGERIA'S FERTILITY RATES

Nigeria's current fertility rate is above both the Africa and global average (Jimenez & Pate, 2017). However, the country's total fertility rates have continued to decline, albeit slowly, from an average of 6 children in 1990 to 5.3 in 2018 (see Figure 5).

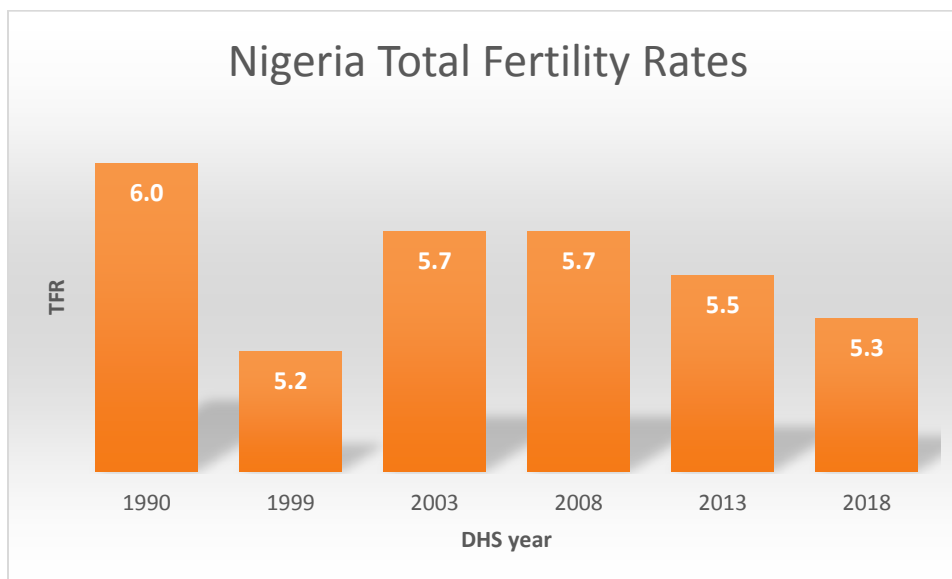


Figure 5: Nigeria Fertility Trends 1990 to 2018 DHS

The high fertility rate in Nigeria, especially in the northern regions, is as a result of high desired family size, low contraceptive acceptance and use (Avidime, Aku-Akai, Mohammed, et.al, 2010), high infant and child mortality especially in the rural areas which has been shown to continually make people to desire more births (Jimenez & Pate, 2017; Canning, Raja, & Yazbeck, 2014), low women's education, early and child marriage, among others. These indirect determinants of fertility have continued to slow down the impacts of programmes aimed at reducing fertility level in the country. Notwithstanding, the fertility rate in the country is expected to continue declining which will lead to increase in the proportion of people in the labour force (ages of 15-59) and by the year 2050 there will be more working age people than dependent population which when engaged productively, will drive economic growth, even more so with the case of skilled individuals (Bloom et al, 2015).

MORTALITY RATES IN NIGERIA

The mortality rate as well as general health condition in Nigeria is among the worse in Africa and the country's health system is in a state of shambles (Nwakeze & Kandala, 2011; Blattner, Dakum, Osotimehin, et al., 2008). Evidence suggests however that infant and child mortality rates have continued to decline since 1990 (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Data from the NDHS reveals that infant deaths fell from 87 deaths per 1,000 live births to 67 deaths per 1,000 live births between 1990 to 2018, child and under-five (U-5) mortality also fell with a drop in the U-5 mortality from 192 in 1990 to 132 per 1,000 live births in 2018 (see figure 6). There was however, an increase in the infant, child and under five mortality estimates in 2003; this was because the data collected in 1999 had higher age heaping and there was significant underestimation of the mortality according to the National Population Commission (NPC Nigeria and ORC Macro, 2004).

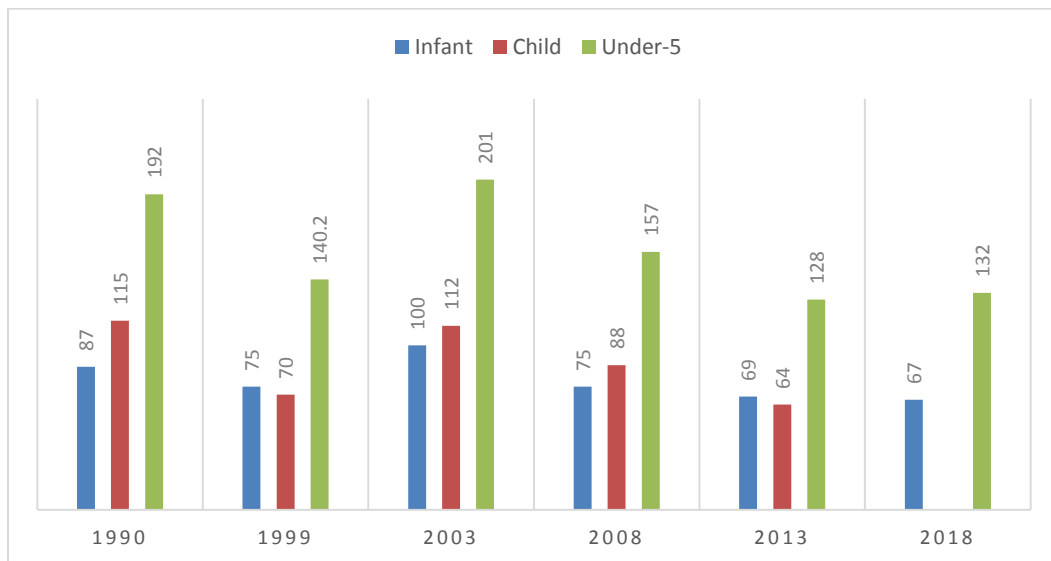


Figure 6: Infant, Child and Under-5 Mortality rates 1990 to 2018 NDHS

Maternal mortality has also continued to decline even though still above acceptable level; the MMR for the country dropped from 800 to 512 deaths per 100,000 live births from 2003 to 2018 (see figure 7). Although there was a sudden rise in the MMR from 545 in 2008 to 576 in 2013, the

National Population Commission attributed it to sampling variation (NPC Nigeria and ICF International, 2014). Meanwhile progress in reducing maternal deaths in the country has been slow since 2008.

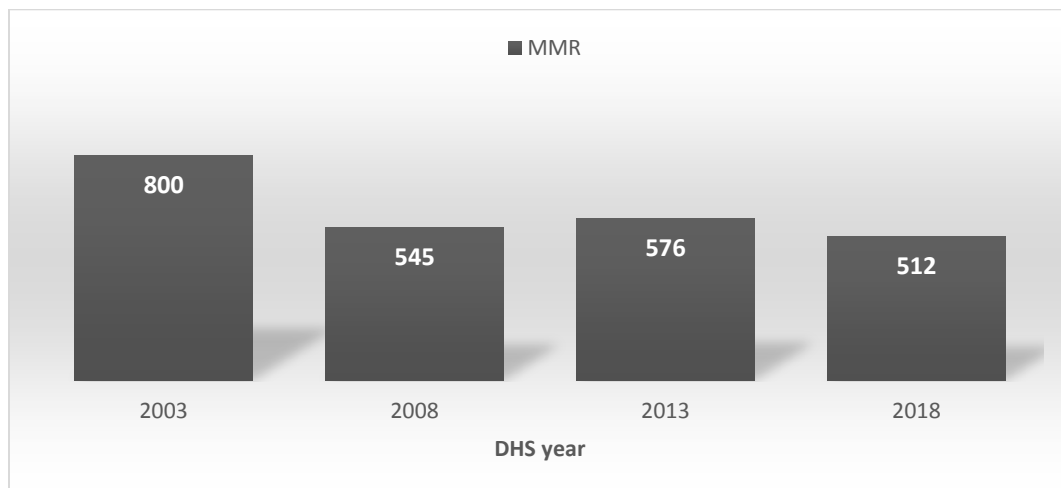


Figure 7: Maternal Mortality Trends in Nigeria 2003 to 2018 (NDHS)

Implications of Nigeria's Demographic Transition on the attainment of the SDGs

Data from the NDHS (1990 to 2018) have shown some evidence of decline in TFR in Nigeria, however, the rate of decline in fertility is slow which means the country's population will continue to grow partly as a result of the momentum already built in the population (Reed & Mberu, 2014) and due to the high desire for

children still existing in the country, especially in rural areas. One major factor for the continued population growth is the low contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) in the country which is lower than what is observed in many developing countries especially in Asian countries with CPR above 60%. Nigeria, like much of sub-Saharan African countries have CPR below 20% (Groth & May, 2017; Cleland & Shah, 2013), with Nigeria's

CPR at a very low of 17% (NPC Nigeria & ICF, 2019). This has continued to enhance high fertility rates leading to increase in the population size of the country.

The high population growth rate in Nigeria will affect efforts aimed at meeting the targets of the SDGs. Binswanger-Mkhize & Savastano (2017) have argued that increasing population of a country leads to unsustainable exploitation of food and land resources to cater for the increasing demand for food, and that can result to low productivity and land degradation which will further lead to poverty and hunger which the SDGs aims to eradicate. Also, the continued increase in Nigeria's population is leading to increased urbanization which the UN projects will grow at 3.26% annually between 2025 and 2030 (UN, 2012). Reed and Mberu (2014) have argued that it will be a major challenge for the government to address the increasing needs of the increasing number of urban people with respect to education, housing, jobs and food in the years leading to 2030. This will have implications on the attainment of especially goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 of the SDGs in the country.

Data from the 2019 Africa Index country profile showed that there is progress towards goal 1 as poverty have decreased in Nigeria. However, the data showed stagnation in all goals 2 and 3 in the country (SDG Center for Africa and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2019); meaning progress is not being made. Goal 1 of the SDGs targets to eradicate extreme poverty and reduce the proportion of persons living in all dimensions of poverty among others. However, Nigeria is currently among countries with highest numbers of poor people in the world with recent report released by the national statistical agency showing that 40 percent of the country's population were living below the national poverty line in 2019, translating to about 83 million people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Goal 2 set to bring an end to hunger and provide access to food and to end malnutrition in all forms for all people. To achieve these goals (1 and 2) will require investments in job creation and in agriculture, for the teeming population in the labour force to create wealth needed to end poverty and hunger and to ensure adequate nutrition for the large number of children in the

population. Goal 3 targets reducing maternal deaths and to end all preventable deaths of infants and children below five years old. Huge investments in health care facilities and means of transportation to access such facilities will be required to ensure this goal and targets are achieved. At present not much progress has been made in providing adequate and quality healthcare for the growing population in the country, especially for pregnant women in rural areas who experience difficulties in accessing maternal healthcare services.

With 42 percent of the population below the age of 15 years in Nigeria, massive investment in education is required to ensure goal 4 of the SDGs is achieved. The goal targets to ensure complete free, equitable and quality education and equal access for boys and girls. To achieve this goal requires increased investment in educational infrastructure and recruitment and training of qualified teachers. The federal government recently approved an improved welfare for teachers as well as increasing the retirement for teachers. Cultural norms that continue to prevent girls from being enrolled in schools or preventing them from completing education is one other challenge to achieving the target of equal access. Ensuring equal access for women and girls is also very important to address goal 5 on gender equality which targets ending discrimination against girls and women of any form and eliminate violence and harmful practices such as early, forced and child marriages. Goals 6 and 11 are interrelated as they set to address environmental challenges and ensure accessibility to clean and affordable drinking water, sanitation and hygiene and access to housing and basic services as well as an inclusive sustainable urbanization and human settlement. At present only 26.5 per cent of the population use improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities and the country will be required to triple its budget or at least allocate 1.7 per cent of the current Gross Domestic Product to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) according to UNICEF and World Bank (www.unicef.org).

The high proportion of young people (young age structure) in Nigeria implies higher dependency ratio which can bring about reduction in economic capital and affect the country in different ways:

more children requiring education, healthcare, food, clothes, housing, etc. by their families, and high number of young family members not engaged in income-generating jobs requiring social services by government and increasing the demand on the nation's economy. The young age structure as Augusto puts it, means increased demand for schools and teachers, for vaccines to inoculate children and keeping them healthy and creating jobs for them after school (cited in The Vanguard newspaper, 14 April 2018).

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's demographic transition which is characterised by high rate of population growth presents a major challenge towards meeting the sustainable development goals targets in the country. The country's mortality rates are declining faster than fertility rates resulting in higher rate of population growth; the population has been projected to continue growing even after 2050. With increasing numbers of children below 15 years, measures must be put in place to provide quality education, basic health care and immunization for children, among others. The country has a potential to reap the demographic dividend as a result of her changing age structure as such she has to invest in reproductive health and making contraceptives more accessible to people that needs them which will facilitate more declines in fertility. With reduction in fertility leading to declining population growth rate, it will more likely improve health of children, and free more resources for use to improve education, job creation and other economic activities. However, as a high-fertility country with life expectancy of 55 years presently, Nigeria's demographic transition imposes strain on the country's meagre resources as much of it is expended on consumption rather than production activities. Meanwhile Nigeria's economy is not growing in a way it can cater for the large number of mouths to feed. This can serve as impediment towards attaining the sustainable development goals in the country.

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