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The 1993 National Population Policy of Ethiopia: The Guiding Theories

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Abstract

The National Population Policy of Ethiopia was finalized in 1993. The pace of its implementation has however been slow. It is posited that the theoretical basis of the policy could have played an important role in slowing implementation. A discourse analysis of the content of the policy document is made to analyze theories that guided the policy per se. The roles of global theories expressed as pessimistic and optimistic discourses influence policymaking. However, the former (neo-Malthusianism), which claims that rapid population growth is a menace to development processes, has had the upper hand in Ethiopia, regardless of the resistance it receives. This resistance indicates the lack of and/or weaknesses of locally established theories to guide the policy framework. There is thus an obvious need for rigorous research to initiate debate and establish consensus, and in this way allow the cultivation of home grown theoretical frameworks that could provide guidance to the policy and enhance its implementation activities.

Keywords: Population policy, theory, discourse, discourse analysis, theoretical frameworks, homegrown theoretical framework.

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Justification and Importance

The National Population Policy of Ethiopia (NPPE), drafted during the final years of the Derg regime (ONCCP, 1990), was finalized in 1993 at a time when the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) was about two years old and steadfastly focused on a number of policy concerns. It came at a time when preparations were underway for the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and just nine years after the Mexico International Conference of 1984. It may be assumed that the theoretical content of the NPPE is based on the content from the two international conferences, Mexico and Cairo, as much as it was driven by domestic socio-economic and political circumstances. The objectives and strategy of the NPPE were largely framed from the ICPD draft document. Since the TGE was only about two years old when it finalized the policy, one might expect that the policy provided an opportunity for the TGE to project its domestic and international image. Like other policies of the time, NPPE has to be understood in part while considering that historical backdrop.

Despite serving as a framework for government and donor interactions related to population issues, the NPPE has not been rigorously reviewed nor its impacts significantly evaluated although there have been some attempts (Assefa and Sisay, 2003; Getachew, 2008). As a result, the NPPE has not been updated regardless of various programmatic activities and the involvement of a number of stakeholders. Nevertheless, it is claimed that the NPPE has led to, in conjunction with regional population policies and programmes, an increase in use of family planning services, in particular contraceptives, and hence in the decline of the total fertility rate of the Ethiopian population.

The NPPE seems ambitious in terms of content and institutional structure for implementation. This reflects the cross-cutting nature of population issues which demands the involvement of a number of sectors, as well as social and cultural change. With six general objectives, eight specific objectives, and 16 strategies, it seems that the NPPE attempts to encompass almost all domains of peoples' lives. On the implementation side, six ministerial offices, six high level organizations and two prominent persons in the field of population were expected to participate at the national level.

A similar type of organizational structure was to be set up in regional, zonal, and district offices. At the national level, the National Office of Population (NOP) was mandated with the role of facilitation and so were population offices in the regions for implementation.

Whatever the nature of the content and institutional structure the NPPE had, expectations loomed large from various stakeholders as to the expected attainment of stated policy objectives. However, years of attempts at implementing the policy have yielded minor and insignificant results in the eyes of observers who are very close to the issues of the Ethiopian population (Getachew, 2008; Sahlu 2004; Assefa and Sisay, 2003). What really transpired from the comments of these observers is that there is lack of government support to implement the policy as stipulated. For instance, the National Population Council (NPC) has not yet been established. However, the NPC is believed to play a key role in policy implementation.

Another case is the downsizing of NOP from the Office of the Prime Minister, its initial privileged seat, and a further decline in its status to a Department level and in 2010, a "Population Core Process" and "Population Affairs Directorate" in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED). However, there are positive statements in other policy documents including "A Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty" (PASDEP) (MoFED, 2006) to establish the NPC and strengthen related population activities. It is notable that there has been an ambivalence characterizing the NPPE.

An attempt is made in the analysis sections to make an assessment of the theories that guided the main frameworks of the policy in conjunction with the discourses that have been predominant in Ethiopia as well as elsewhere. The major purpose of the present assessment is to unravel what theories and discourses really drove the policy, their consistency and coherence in relation to the major goal, objectives and strategies of the NPPE.

Demographic and Socio-economic Statuses of the Ethiopian Population

This section deals with the demographic and socio-economic features of the Ethiopian population that could have served as a base for the policy and elevated concerns for its implementation.

Demographic Indicators

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa with a population of 73,918,505 as enumerated during the 2007 Population and Housing Census (PHC), the third round following the 1984 PHC with a population of 39,868,572 and 1994 PHC with a population of 53,477,265 (Population Census Commission, 2008:1). Comparison among the three PHCs indicates that the Ethiopian population has shown a steady growth from 1994 to 2007. An increment of 13.6 million people between the first PHC of 1984 and the second of 1994, and 20.44 million between 1994 and 2007 PHCs is recorded. Thus, there was an annual increment of about 1.32 million people between the 1984 and 1994, and 1.60 million between 1994 and 2007 PHCs.

Interestingly, the 2007 PHC result shows an average annual growth rate of 2.6 per cent in the population between 1994 and 2007 which is a little less (by 0.2 per cent) than the average annual growth rate recorded between the two preceding PHCs (1984 and 1994) (CSA, 2008:11). This has implications for the hitherto held view that population keeps on growing at the same high rate. Nevertheless, a slight decline in the national annual growth rate need not mask the prevailing regional variations for there are factors of particular interest region-wise. The cases of Amhara and Gambella regions, the former for low and the latter for high growth rates, deserve perusal simply because the growth rates of the populations carry messages related to the state of affairs in fertility, mortality and migration against the base population. These variations in the growth rates among the Ethiopian regions require further analysis, differentiated discourses and policy approaches (see Table 1).

Table 1. Annual population growth rate by region between 1994 and 2007

S. No.	Region	Annual Growth Rate (1994-2007)
1	Tigray	2.5
2	Afar	2.2
3	Amhara	1.7
4	Oromia	2.9
5	Somali	2.6
6	Benishangul-Gumuz	3.0
7	SNNP	2.9
8	Gambella	4.1
9	Harari	2.6
10	Addis Ababa	2.1
11	Dire Dawa	2.5
	Country Level	**2.6**

Source: CSA, 2008

Looking at the extent to which the proportion of the age group 0 - 14 has changed over the last three PHC periods is informative. Two declining trends are observed regarding this age group; inter and intra PHC periods. The proportion of this age group with respect to the base populations has declined from 48.2 per cent in 1984 to 45.4 per cent in 1994 to 45 per cent in 2007, and has in total declined by 3.2 per cent between the first and the third PHCs, covering 23 years (Table 2). The major decline in the 0 - 4 age group in the first inter-censal decade is related to the decline in fertility in that period, and the lack of decline in the second period (of 13 years) is when there was a decline in fertility and mortality but at a different magnitude (see Teller and Assefa, 2011).

Table 2. Percentage distribution of the population of Ethiopia by broad age groups and changes: 1994 and 2007

Age Group	1984	1994	2007
0-14	48.2	45.4	45.0
15-64	47.2	51.4	51.8
65+	4.7	3.2	3.2

Source: CSA, 2011

Age structure of the population is important to compute age dependency ratios.[1] A rising age dependency ratio is a concern in many countries, including those confronted with an aging population, since both types of populations have to be supported in upbringing and pensions by the disproportionately few working age people in the population. On the basis of data from CSA in Table 2, the overall age dependency ratios for the 1984, 1994 and 2007 PHCs are computed to be about 112.07, 94.6 and 92.9, respectively. Age dependency ratios reveal that the proportion of working age population had increased slightly overtime. However, the burden was observably too high on the productive age group of the population since for each 100 persons in this age group there had been 112.07, 94.6 and 92.9 young and old dependents to be supported during the years 1984, 1994 and 2007 census periods, respectively.

Available evidence demonstrates that fertility and mortality rates have changed but little overtime. In fact, total fertility rate (TFR) had shown a steady but small decline over time (6.4 in 1990, 5.5 in 2000 and 5.4 in 2005). Between 1970 and 1990, crude birth rates declined only by 2 per 1000 people while between 1990 and 2007 the decline was in the order of 11 per 1,000 people (UNICEF, 2009). Infant and child mortality rates[2] have also shown major improvements but this has not resulted in much increase in life expectancy which can be observed from the little changing proportion of the elderly population among census periods.

Contraceptive prevalence rate nearly tripled since 1990 (from 4 per cent to 15 per cent) (CSA and ORC Macro, 2006), but is still at a very low level. It might be generalized from here that existing conditions for the decline of births and deaths and increment in life expectancy have improved between 1990 and 2007 as compared to the previous times. In fact, as shown in the source, total fertility rate (TFR) had shown a steady but small decline over time (6.4 in 1990, 5.5 in 2000 and 5.4 in 2005).

Socio-economic Indicators of the Ethiopian Population

Ethiopia remains to be one of the developing countries known to have been bogged down with the lowest socio-economic conditions in the world. The exigencies of survival are numerous and admittedly deplorable. Although some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) indicators reveal

improvement (MoFED, 2008), a lot needs to be done to improve the overall livelihood situation of the population.

The foremost basic need that has not been met for decades in Ethiopia is ensuring food security, that is, sufficient production and access to quality food all year round (FAO, 2009). Evidence indicates that Ethiopia has been structurally food deficit since at least 1980, and that there are a number of factors that are on record for this structural food deficiency. Some of these factors are: small sizes of landholdings, low soil fertility, recurrent droughts, and limited opportunities for off-farm employment in diversifying livelihood portfolios (Devereux, 2000:1). Weak extension and advisory services, wasteful postharvest crop management, lack of a proper marketing system, and absence of or inadequate rural-oriented credit facilities are other factors that hamper the development of smallholder agricultural production.

As a whole, the daily food intake for an average Ethiopian has always been lower than the World Food Programme's minimum standard of 2100 calories per day. In 2009, a total of about 7.5 million people were chronically food insecure, and other 4.9 million required emergency food assistance, while an additional 200,000 people, displaced from their homes as a result of ethnic clashes, needed food assistance (USAID, 2009). The important documented forms of malnutrition in Ethiopia include protein-energy, vitamin A, iodine and zinc deficiencies (Kaluski *et al.*, 2002:374). The consequences of structural food deficits could be observed in malnourished women and children. The implications of malnutrition for the health and education of children is tremendous, calling for massive and well coordinated efforts as part of the MDGs or other national strategies.

Ethiopia shows increasing economic performance often demonstrated by the gross and per capita domestic product (GDP), and gross national income (GNI) per capita (Table 3). Some changes do exist, however minor they might be, but whether or not improvements in peoples' livelihoods in fact follow these minor changes has not been rigorously examined. Given the minor improvements made in the production of the GDP and its annual growth rate, the pace at which GNI per capita increases in the face of a growing population deserves some attention. Likewise, questions of equity in accessing the national gains are important in poverty reduction, but

attaining equity is a remote possibility in Ethiopia given the level of development and the structure of the economy.

Table 3. Indicators as measured by GDP, GNP and income per capita over years, Ethiopia

Indicators	Year		
	2000	2005	2007
GDP (million current US $)	7,837	11,354	16,712
GDP growth rate at constant 1990 prices (annual %)	5.9	10.3	11.2
GDP per capita (current US $)	112.9	143.7	201.1
GNI per capita (current US $)	112.5	143.6	200.5

Source: Tabulated from UN data, 2009

A relatively comprehensive measure of progress made by a given country is measured by the Human Development Index (HDI), because of bringing together important dimensions of human development such as long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), access to education (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level), and a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income).[3] As a result, HDI goes beyond GDP to a broader definition of the relationship between income and well-being. With an HDI of 0.389 in 2006, Ethiopia stands at 169th out of 179 countries (UNDP, 2009).

Summary

The demographic and socio-economic indicators of the population of Ethiopia signal low level of economic development and enormous efforts are required to improve peoples' lives. The NPPE is one of the several policies stipulated to redress development challenges that are being attempted by the government. The global and national interface in the early 1990s could have shaped the justifications, theoretical frameworks and related discourses set to guide the policy goals, objectives and strategies. However, the practical implementation side of the NPPE has been one of ambivalence and/or observable reluctance.

This then leads us to some intriguing questions as to the fundamental basis of population policy discourses in Ethiopia. It is from this observation that the present enquiry originated and was framed.

Methods, Research Questions and Objectives

Framed by the above evidence, the first question addressed in this enquiry relates to the global discourses on population and development. The basic line of approach pursued to answer this question rests on the analysis of population and development discourses prevailing at the global level that are expected to shape regional and national discourses on population and development. The purpose here is to acquire an in-depth understanding of these theoretical subjects.

The second question pertains to the identification of dominant theoretical discourse that has guided the NPPE which solely focuses upon an analysis of the various sections of the policy. By finding the answers to these two questions, the main objective of this enquiry that is to analyze and understand the theories that guided the design of the population policy of Ethiopia, is attained.

Conceptually, this enquiry rests upon discourse analysis. Discourse is defined as '[a] body of ideas, concepts and beliefs which become established as knowledge or as an accepted world view. These ideas often translate into a powerful framework for understanding and action in social life' (Bilton *et al.,* 1996:657). In major sources of social science research, a discourse is seen as an institutionalized form of thinking and reflection in fact by using language, a social boundary defining the peculiarities of a specific topic or issues underlying what have to be said about its truth. Basically, entities behind discourses are intended to assert what they assume or believe or want to be a truth. In this intension to assert, discourses bring in people, institutions, rules, values, concepts, and other tools that could help in the construction of knowledge or 'a regime of truth.'

At the heart of the enquiry lies the analysis of the NPPE document to figure out the theories that guided it. The sources of information utilized include books, journal articles, study reports, policy documents and information available through the internet. Given the large volume of these sources of information, a selected reading is made with particular focus on vocal discourses streamlined towards developing countries in general, and discourses linking population and the agricultural and rural context of Ethiopia in particular. Reference is also made to other potent discourses which dominate scholarly debates on the population and development

nexus. As is evident from the above, the enquiry is based on secondary sources of data/information, with both qualitative and quantitative data/information utilized, and is multi-method in its analytical approach.

Discourses on the links between population and development in the global context

A very wide range of roles is attributed to population numbers and its spatial and temporal changes. These roles vary extensively from the view of pessimists to forecasts of the optimists. However, both give attention to the interesting subject matter of the population and development nexus that requires, as they see it, policies. These policies focus either on the birth control side of the discourse arguing for a reduction in fertility rates and hence population size (pessimists) or the development side of the discourse claiming the possibility of increasing the production of material goods and services to satisfy the increasing needs of the population (optimists). A brief sketch is made of these two opposing strands of discourses with the intent of figuring out their relevance.

Population pessimists

The usual starting point of scrutinizing population thought from pessimistic *stance* and *debates* is the Malthusian theory. This *stance* began its widespread acclaim and disapproval immediately after the publication of Reverend Thomas Malthus' First Essay on Population in 1798. Population pessimists are overwhelmingly against a rise in the size of population. Much of the population literature produced since then has been controversial and polemic in nature (Hutchinson, 1967) alluding to class interests and ideological view points. At the center of the controversy and polemics of the Malthusian Essay are two propositions that *population would grow geometrically* - due to a lack of conscious restraints on fertility, and that *food would grow arithmetically* - (linearly) - due mainly to diminishing returns to increasingly scarce land (Malthus, 1926). His tone rests upon couple's production of children without restraint, the inadequacy of means of subsistence, mainly food because of land scarcity, and 'inept' technologies to produce more food. These forces, according to Malthus, create a widening mismatch between population and food supply.

The mismatch created between the two 'forces', according to Malthus, would lead to severe 'consequences' like famine, misery and vice. Possible checks of population he saw at the time were the positive and preventive. The former check, he believes, 'represses an increase which is already begun, is confined chiefly, though not perhaps solely, to the lowest orders of society' (p. 71), which appears in the form of food shortage, poverty, and misery. The latter check includes *man's* reasoning ability and prudential considerations that restraints child bearing (pp. 28-29). This Malthusian stance has been understood as 'traditionalist' pessimism and challenged from time to time by population optimists as revealed in section 4.2 below, and also Keynes (1963), Kelley (2001), Simon (1977; 1981; 1984; 1992), Kuznets (1960), Murdoch (1980), and Tiffen (1995). And later it is criticized due to the spread of 'revisionism' (Kelley and McGreevey, 1994).

Nevertheless, Malthusianism has been acclaimed by some (Coale and Hoover, 1958; Boulding, 1959; Ehrlich, 1971; Ehrlich and Ehrlich, 1972; Meadows *et al.,* 1972; Ehrlich et al., 1993, among others). It has thus been used as a theoretical frame of reference to initiate and implement population policies and programmes in developing countries.

Population optimists

Population optimists uphold two strands of discourses; one that discredits the pessimists on the grounds that they lack empirical validity and farsightedness, and another that provides evidence for the positive contribution of a large size of population to economic growth and development. Right from the outset, Kuznets (1960) stressed that available statistical records do not show secular declines in per capita product following a growing population. What is known instead is a rise in aggregate output accompanying a growing population, which often leads to a rise in per capita product.

Easter Boserup (1965) also sets out to establish fundamental relationships between population growth and density on the one hand, and agricultural change and economic growth on the other. Departing from what she reckons as *necessity is the mother of invention*; she upended the belief that lingered since the time of Malthus. She argues that large population size determines agricultural systems and that an increase in the size of population means the adoption of more intensive systems of agriculture and

an increase in total agricultural output. A decline in per capita output following 'persistent population growth does not, as in Malthusian theory, imply a decline in per capita food supply, since that can be prevented by using available labour for other purposes either on on-farm or off-farm activities (Boserup, 1999:20-1). A sustained growth of total population and total output in a given area can lead to economic growth with a similar rise in per capita output. Hence, in a nutshell, population growth is an independent factor while agricultural systems (technologies) are dependent ones contrary to the Malthusian theoretical framework.[4] In fact, a further note reveals that the population-pull theory of Boserup, which fits labour using inventions, while invention-pull theory of Malthus which fits labour saving inventions are both important in technology history. Thus, the two theories often complement rather than oppose each other (Simon, 1977: 475).

With a Kenyan case study, Tiffen (1995) argues that population density plays crucial roles in increasing the productiveness of agriculture and greater specialization of work and exchange. Specialization of work obviously results in improved efficiency and better productivity. This is a corollary to what Boserup (1965:118) notes as increasing population density facilitates the division of labour and the spread of transport and communication networks and education. Tiffen (1995) makes the point that increased population density is of paramount importance in inducing the required changes in social life and techniques of production under the condition that a policy environment exists that encourages trade, supports the dissemination of knowledge and gives security for investment.

A key issue in overall judgments about whether population growth is good or bad is, says Simon (1977), the discount factor one uses[5], that is, the relative weighting of the shorter-run and the longer-run futures. The effect of population growth upon the standard of living (putting aside the pleasure that children give to their parents) is clearly negative in the short run. In the years while children consume but do not produce, additional children means less food and less education for each person, and/or additional effort on the part of the parental generation to satisfy the needs of additional children. If one's horizon is short and gives importance only to the early childhood period, then it is clear that additional children are negative economic forces. But if one gives weight to the more-distant future, then the overall effect of

the additional child may be positive. The positive effects will last much longer than the negative effects and hence can outweigh the short-run effects even though it is natural to put less weight on a given period of time in the far future than to an equal period of time now.

As indicated above, propelled in the main by population pessimists and optimists, there are controversies and lack of consensus on topical population variables in development processes among various stakeholders involved with population issues. Thus, measures taken in terms of policies or strategies are seldom reliable. This implies that population policies and programmes lack an agreed upon theoretical basis making their acceptance low and implementation activities weak. Probably, what Warwick (1982) and Eager (2004) attempt to figure out reflect this fundamental issue though population policies and programmes are still being designed and implemented in developing countries. Most policies and programmes have a good flavour of the neo-Malthusian discourse and hence mainly focus on fertility reduction activities. The development side of the discourse advanced by the population optimists is yet to come prominently up-front. Reproductive rights issues are nevertheless promoted since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) of 1994, resulting from the influences mounted by the feminist theories and discourses of that day.

Critiques of the National Population Policy of Ethiopia

The opening statement to the background of the NPPE spells out the historic stumbling blocks of development processes in Ethiopia. In this regard, endless wars, changing climatic conditions and declining productivity of the main sectors of the economy are identified. The mismatch between the growth rate of the economy and that of population over a long period of time is further underlined. In the introduction to the NPPE, it is stated that it is expected that the prevailing high fertility rate will continue along with a declining mortality rate as would be the case under normal conditions, and hence the size of population will keep on growing during the rest of the last century and the early decades of the present century (TGE, 1993:1). Nevertheless, fertility has not continuously increased as expected and the growth rate of the population has declined over time reaching 2.6 per cent by 2007. The initial sense one can make from the background statement of the NPPE is that there is a flavour of neo-Malthusian discourse although related fundamental development challenges are also mentioned.

One of the commendable approaches of the NPPE is the considerable recognition it accorded to inter- and intra-regional variations of fertility rates in the country and between rural and urban areas, and the significance attached to the distribution of population by such characteristics as age and space. Understanding variations in each of these variables is important to prepare appropriate strategies that fit the perceived needs and existing problems of a particular area. A special case is the spatial distribution of the population which indicates structural differentiation in the economy that provides population/resources ratios. Ratios are relevant information for comparing resource access and for planning purposes. There is also recognition given to the old age structural problems of the economy (TGE, 1993: 1-3) where changes are taking place but with a slow pace and having little effect on population dynamics.

Moreover, it is suggested that '[t]he age dependency burden is and is likely to continue to be heavy even during the first few decades of the next century if no significant and immediate changes begin to take place in the present high fertility regime' (TGE, 1993:4). Although there could be some grain of truth in the fear expressed, this is synonymous with the neo-Malthusian discourse such as given by Coale and Hoover (1958) in the global context and Hurni (1988, 1990) in the Ethiopian case: both assume that population growth will eat up everything being produced and put a rein on economic growth that inevitably breeds poverty and poverty reproduces itself since population never stops growing. The other assertion that has to be seen as a neo-Malthusian conception is the recall made to some measures to reduce the tempo of high fertility without mentioning the efforts needed to speed up development processes.

Indicating that '[t]he country was ravaged by both manmade and natural disasters,' (TGE, 1993:5), the often known discourse of alarming situations are stated as follows:

1. The proportion of land with forest coverage has been diminishing at alarming rates. The land area covered by forests has gone down from approximately 40.0% at the turn of the century to approximately 3.0% at the present time. The annual rate of deforestation is estimated at 88,000 hectares per year while the rate at which this loss is being replaced through afforestation is estimated at 6,000 hectares a year.

2. The soil has been and continues to be eroded in the absence of coherent and sustained conservation efforts. Popular awareness of conservation issues is, still, in its embryonic stage. It is estimated that over two billion cubic meters of soil is being washed down annually by torrential rains down the Nile Valley leaving most of the Ethiopian highlands with seriously eroded landscape and severely reduced population carrying capacity.

As to the causes of these alarming discourses, again the usual explanations are offered by implicating mainly population (TGE, 1993:5-6):

> As population increased the demand for fuel and construction materials increased resulting in the practice of reckless tree felling. State ownership of forests and the exclusion of local communities from the management and legitimate utilization of forest resources may have contributed to the lack of any consistent effort to replace trees cut for various purposes.

The fact that deforestation has been a long-term and continuous process deserves particular attention both to understand its pervasiveness and to figure out inclusive remedial measures. This is because, as often is the case, a host of problems prevail on the same place at the same time or at different times and accordingly shape peoples' behaviour and related actions.

A doomsday scenario is also made which draws a line that is difficult to cross under continuing high fertility situation simply because high fertility is believed to thwart national goals such as achieving food self sufficiency, universal primary education, improving the accessibility of health services, increasing employment opportunities, reducing under-employment and improving housing conditions (TGE, 1993:6). This scenario is not different from what neo-Malthusians reiterate overtime and suggest a strategy or programme to reduce high fertility. In addition, nomadic pastoralist communities who move from place to place with their herds in search of grass and water for subsistence are pointed out as creators of havoc on the environment. This havoc on the environment is suggested to have affected the lives of the pastoralists themselves, non-pastoralist groups residing in the territory where pastoralists roam purporting frequent resource conflict between the two and creating deleterious consequences to peace and stability (TGE, 1993:6).

It is ironic that pastoralists whose livelihoods are at stake as a result of pressures imposed upon them by outsiders and the changing environment

are construed to be ravaging their environment and are potent forces for insecurity. What is special here is that the fertility of the pastoralist population is not to blame but the mode of lifestyle they pursue. Other factors that are external to this mode of life but which influence the interactions between the pastoralist community and the resource base are not mentioned.

Factors contributing to the croplands' declining productivity have thoroughly been enumerated. These include lack of agricultural policy that could stimulate dynamism in crop production, forced collectivization and the pre-eminence of large scale farms practiced during the *Derg* regime, limited availability of modern farm inputs and machinery particularly for small farmers, and weak agricultural extension services. Further, there were ineffective organizational set-up of the agricultural sector, relocation of part of the population, the utilization of only 12.7 per cent of potential arable land in the period 1985-87, technological backwardness, and increasing man/land ratio occasioned by rapid population growth (TGE, 1993:6-7).

Two questions maybe posed following this enumeration; whether there is still unutilized arable land for crop production in areas appropriate for human existence, and whether there is any hard fact that shows the effect of increasing man/land ratios on cropland productivity.

As a natural sequel of the above enumeration, the seriousness of the problem of achieving the goal of food self-sufficiency is assessed in relation to population dynamics under three variants of population growth assumptions. The basic premise applied is '... that the growth in demand for food (cereals only) is primarily a function of population growth and only secondarily, a function of the increase in per capita consumption' (TGE, 1993:7). Hence, under high variant population growth assumption, there is no hope of attaining the goal of food self sufficiency before the first few decades of the 21st century. However, significant reduction in the level of fertility accompanied by increased effort in increasing the rate of growth in food production will allow for a coming close to achieving the goal during the first two decades of the 21st century. Under the low variant population growth assumption, demand for food is expected to grow at the rate of 2.3 per cent a year between 2015 and 2025 while under the high variant assumption demand for food would increase at over 5 per cent a year (TGE,

1993:7). In both cases, the question of providing food for the population is taken as a function of population growth.

Education, Health and Employment

Regarding education, it is indicated that because of increased enrolment as a result of the large size of the school age population group, available educational resources and facilities are overstretched and hence the quality of education has gone down (TGE, 1993:8)[6]. Given this and considering budgetary constraints, the likelihood that the goal of universal primary education is attained and facilities at secondary and teritiary levels are fulfilled is noted as a serious challenge. This again takes us back to the neo-Malthusian discourse that under increasing fertility situations there would always be a mismatch between population and socio-economic infrastructure.

Also mentioned is the very limited budget allocated to the health sector which likely continues into the foreseeable future due to resource constraints in the country and competing interests for meagre resources. The easier approach sought as a solution is 'significant reduction in the rate of growth of the population' which is expected to 'ease the future burden of rapidly increasing demand and help in bringing the country a step or two closer to the attainment of the goal of health for all by the first decade of the next century' (TGE, 1993:10). What stands out as a surprise here is not only the overdue emphasis placed on family planning as a solution to various kinds of health related problems, but also the expectation that a bigger change can take place within less than two decades though it is known that a long period is required to attain significant reduction in the rate of population growth. The attention directed at reducing maternal, infant and child morbidity and mortality is commendable given the prevailing rates and the consequences although again it is related to the management of population dynamics in general. Here, it is understandable that family planning is seen as good contribution.

The gravity of unemployment and underemployment problems that have characterized the country for a long time is mentioned as an outcome of the ill-fated policies of the previous government and that they are intensified by the rapid rate at which population is increasing. With a consideration of middle variant population growth assumption, the economically active

group of the population continues growing at the rate of 3.6 per cent a year, and is expected to shrink to 3.2 per cent a year between 1995 and 2000 (TGE, 1993:11-2). Again, implicitly, rising fertility is held responsible for the growing size of an economically active population and hence for the creation of unemployment and underemployment.[7]

The Rationale of the Population Policy of Ethiopia

The overarching position of the population policy document with little doubt demonstrates how demographic factors, in this case high fertility, have contributed to the low state of development in Ethiopia. What is interesting here is that the high fertility situation played a role only as an intermediate force and hence as a catalyst, not as an independent force, in weakening development processes in the country. The fairly straight forward implication of this position is that fertility is not given high priority as much as development issues. As far as seeking solutions to some of the above-mentioned challenges is concerned, however, a significant fertility reduction agenda has been underlined repeatedly. Whether this position of the rationale is adhered to is an interesting note to make in the sections that follow.

Congruent with the above stated position of the rationale, the manifestations of underdevelopment in Ethiopia are believed to include low economic productivity resulting in high rates of unemployment and underemployment, low accessibility of basic social services, food insecurity, high prevalence of maternal, infant and child morbidity and mortality, and low life expectancy at birth (TGE, 1993:17). It is after stating these manifestations of underdevelopment that the position of the policy's rationale retracted from emphasizing demographic forces as a low priority to a high level problem which could be discerned from the statement:

> The situation in Ethiopia clearly illustrates the truism that demographic and developmental factors reinforce each other. High fertility and rapid population growth exert negative influences on economic and social development and low levels of economic and social development provide the climate favouring high fertility and hence rapid population growth. Because of an unholy combination of these forces, Ethiopia finds herself in a vicious circle of failure and defeatism (TGE, 1993: 17).

Notwithstanding the above, the TGE claimed to have identified two critical points to deal with the then economic and social crises. Firstly, through adopting economic policy aimed at introducing fundamental structural changes in the economy. Secondly, the devolution of power to the regions and subordinated administrative units to leverage the role of grassroots participation in development processes. This is expected to allow the utilization of resources and opportunities on the basis of the comparative advantages regions have and exchange among themselves on the basis of reciprocity (TGE, 1993:17-8). Critical points seem to have shifted from the already stated high fertility to economic and politico-administrative ones where one can easily see the pendulum of the discourse moving. Nevertheless, it is out of this discourse that 'effective and realistic population policy' is trusted as a means to ensure that 'the rate of economic and social development is ahead of the rate of population growth.' However, this is with a belief that 'if population programmes are planned and implemented in the context of integrated and holistic development' (TGE, 1993:18).

Conflicting discourses on goals and objectives

The major goal of the NPPE is the 'harmonization of the rate of population growth and the capacity of the country for the development and rational utilization of natural resources to the end that the level of welfare of the population is maximized over time' (TGE, 1993:18). This goal coincides with the integrated and holistic development approach indicated above simply because it attempts to address itself to the two sides of the required endeavour: population and development. A statement that follows however seems to have diluted this two-pronged approach to development:

> Significant reduction of the rate of population growth by, primarily, addressing the problem of high fertility will, in the long run, be helpful in easing the pressure from contending demands on development resources (TGE, 1993:18).

One can observe two conflicting trends here. On the one hand, a neo-Malthusian discourse pushing for a population policy which is overwhelmingly focused on fertility reduction, while on the other hand, a genuine and broader approach to redress development challenges in general and high fertility in particular. It can be guessed from such observation that different interests are behind the NPPE who are attempting to influence and assert particular points of view[8]. Perhaps, these interests and the ideas they

hold could be reconciled in the later part of the policy document which otherwise must leave a rift in the document *per se*. One of the major achievements that could be noted in this part of the document is the realization of the two-way interactions between demographic factors and development indicators. It appears that this realization, a theoretical and empirical reflection in itself, serves as a springboard in directing the objectives and strategies of the NPPE (TGE, 1993:19-20)[9].

A closer look at the six general objectives gives the impression that only the first one addresses itself to the question of direct fertility reduction. The remaining five deal with various questions and/or implications in the processes of development and are less neo-Malthusian in content. To what extent this bias towards development translates itself into specific objectives and strategies is important to make note of. Out of eight specific objectives, the first two signal that there is a revisit of a neo-Malthusian discourse even if they can be taken to mean the direct and indirect outcomes of the last six specific objectives. Out of 16 strategies only strategy number seven deals with development issues while the rest address fertility reduction and what the document attempted to reveal as development bottlenecks is left out. The strategies are overwhelmingly neo-Malthusian in nature seen in discursive premises. This whole issue then takes us to the broader subject of the population policy, be it at the global or national levels. The development side of the policy which demands tremendous resources and concerted efforts is not adequately, as it should have been, upheld in practical terms. The work of Eager (2004) provides confirmation of such situations.

The Political Economy of Fertility Change

Despite the existence of a variety of discourses based on theories like wealth flow, demographic transition and others, it is the political economy of fertility change that appears to reveal realistic assessments of the reasons behind fertility changes under different circumstances. Here poverty, believed to be caused by political and economic structures, significantly contributes to fertility changes. In other words, an individual's decision to have or not to have children is in the main a function of the forces of socio-economic conditions. This conceptualization has a clear policy derivative. To influence decisions about fertility and bring about changes in its rates of growth requires a prior change in the matrix of socio-economic conditions which in turn demand changes in the political and economic structures

causing poverty (Murdoch, 1980; Chowdhry, 1988; Ghosh, 1988; Anand and Murdoch, 1999; Nakibullah and Rahman, 1996). Notably, therefore, defining poverty and designing strategies to do away with it without questioning its fundamental base has no substance.

Actors, networks and evolving discourses in Ethiopia

The two subjects that received tremendous attention in Ethiopia throughout the1980s and 1990s were the *continuous shortage of food and the notable degradation of resources* evolving discourses on the causes and remedies of these problems. Some discourses made population an issue of concern and others not. Sooner or later discourses evolved which were intertwined within the contemporary policy debate in Ethiopia. Each of these discourses originates from different premises and appears to have provoked conflicts over the nature of policy in terms of decisions, laws, programmes and actual implementation practice (Keeley and Scoones, 2003). Nevertheless, discourses were grounded within actor networks and available policy space given the prevailing situations.

The main actors noted in advancing discourses in Ethiopia with regard to population were donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOS) and responsible government units located at various levels. The actors often network to include conceptual and theoretical frames of reference which could play determinant roles in the choice of a given policy option. In this dynamic, the nature and reliability of the concepts and theories that are guiding the policy option are of paramount importance. Here, data are at the core of formulating the concepts and theories and then the policy option. No less important is the power of the actors in terms of generating resources and influencing the policymakers.

The dominant actors under various circumstances could be the donors particularly when it comes to population issues and related development agenda. Donors are well positioned to anchor discourses and persuade others to follow them (Grillo, 1997), and at times they do speak louder than the empirical evidence. Development knowledge is in the hands of the donors, which renders them power to excel in advancing and spearheading a given idea as a fact. This knowledge appears to be a means of controlling and ruling, and is in essence a neo-colonial power[10]. Unfortunately, this is where the perspectives or experiences of local inhabitants and the agenda set by

governments suffer most, since donors may remain unaware of and unresponsive to the local situation. In most cases, local communities are understood as less knowledgeable and need to obtain support from outsiders in knowing themselves. In fact, this is what Chambers labels as '[t]he ignorance and inabilities of rural people have been not only an illusion, but an artefact of our own arrogance and ignorance[11],' whilst Marsden tells '[i]t is not the 'native' who is backward, nor is it a failure to incorporate the 'human factor' which is at fault, but the essential inappropriateness of the western package that was on offer[12].

Examples of the above are two dominant studies made in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Highlands Reclamation Study (FAO, 1986a; 1986b) supported by FAO, and Soil Conservation Research Project (SCRP) supported by a Group on Environment and Development at the University of Bern. Both carried out an analysis of soil erosion and its impact on agricultural production. This analysis depended on mere technical approaches. The findings and conclusions that came out of this *natural scientific analysis* of soil erosion and its consequences, as grasped by the actors, entered policy debates. The actors, the government, NGOs and donors alike embraced the findings of the studies and opted for respective interventions. Both the opening and the closing statements of most findings implicate the roles of population growth and hence carry a generalized Malthusian discourse. Thus, it may be argued that the Ethiopian Population Policy, and also the Environmental Policy, to a significant degree are influenced by these two studies.

In his popular article, Hoben argues that the neo-Malthusian narration could inform thinking and planning in Ethiopia as a result of the institutionalization of this narrative through various avenues that include training, institution building and investment. Hoben further argues:

> These activities attract and create elite interest groups which, in turn, become its constituency making it politically difficult to discard. The [neo-Malthusian] paradigm is further reinforced as it is used to define the parameters of legitimate research methods and what is to be considered credible data ... It is infused into urban-based national culture through media campaign and associated with national symbols and political figures and agendas. It permeates to local level development narration, as community leaders learn what to say to get assistance, even if it is in stark contradiction to their experiences and knowledge of local conditions ... The paradigm has thus become culturally, institutionally, and politically embedded ... (1995:1009).[13]

The existence and at times prevalence of neo-Malthusianism is borne by these circumstances as a dominant development discourse in Ethiopia. As often is the case, it exaggerates the rate and magnitude of the impacts of population growth and size in relation to environmental resources, infrastructural services and food supply.

Discussion: Discourses, policy, government and stakeholders

The NPPE was approved during the first few years (1992-93) of the transition period[14]. This period was characterized by political turmoil and civic strife which put the TGE under pressure in terms of securing legitimacy and anchoring international and domestic acceptance. Towards that end, NPPE was one of the critical subjects seized by the TGE. As a result, high support was provided by the TGE to the preparations of the NPPE, including the setting up of responsible institution, such as the 'National Office of Population' (NOP), which was provided a seat in the Prime Minister's Office to be followed by the establishment of a National Population Council (NPC) chaired by the Prime Minister or his/her designate. Such a privileged position existed for some time but the NPC has not been established although it is expected to guide and coordinate population policy implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, among others activities.

Also, there has been no comprehensive population program, action plan and legal framework though there is a National Population Plan of Action (2009/10 to 2015/16) produced in 2008 by MoEFD. Donors including UNFPA, WHO, USAID, Packard Foundation and others that have been providing funding, though UNFPA has often been playing a leading role. The amount of funding has nonetheless declined over time. Even though lack of capacity on the part of the implementing agencies in utilizing allocated funds has been indicated as one of the major reasons for the drop in funding (Assefa and Sisay, 2003; Getachew, 2008), the government's ambivalent position towards population issues could be another factor.

Later, NOP was removed from the Prime Minister's Office and housed in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) office, both in terms of its base and organizational attachment, and after some time, its status was reduced to a Department of Population. Whether the displacement and diminution of status of the NOP, which certainly affects

the status of regional population offices as well, would mean undermining the contribution of NPPE to development processes or not is a bigger subject that demands a separate study of its own. What can be hypothesized here is that there is an indication of a change in the government's discourse of the role of population in development. Recently, Prime Minister Meles has been heard on television saying that '*babies come with two hands and with one mouth*[15].'

The hypothesis is supported by the government's inadequate commitment to establish NPC, to prepare support documents for the NPPE such as a comprehensive population programme, action plan, and, more importantly, legal frameworks with various sectors and other stakeholders involved in the implementation of population policy. In the absence of these measures, one could think that the government thought that the then NOP was just a focal point for promoting family planning (World Bank, 1998:73) through the coordination of the activities of both governmental and NGOs, and having no arm to stir up the development side of the population policy. Arguably, lack of commitment manifested by the 'Ethiopian leaders' towards effective implementation of population policy (Sahlu, 2004:48-9) might have its own root in historic discourse.

In fact, a few years after the formulation of the NPPE, a social sector study report of the World Bank (1998:75) on Ethiopia, referred to above, indicates that any future changes in the rate of population growth in Ethiopia will depend on ... the country's ability to address economic and social factors that influence women's status and the demand for children, the use of family planning services, and a range of other factors that determine fertility.

The report more or less concurs with the main intent of the ICPD where reproductive rights and choices obtained acceptance as an exclusive subject that women need to harness. Perhaps, building up the status of women to high levels would have a direct bearing on the number of children couples properly raise, the use of family planning services, etc. In this context, the strong latitude provided to addressing the plight of Ethiopian women and changing their status needs to be understood as a move in the right direction when looking at the reduction in the growth rate of population.

Nevertheless, the more recent Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), the leading policy document as of now in Ethiopia, implicates the high fertility situation, large family size and the growing population as the reins to improve income, health and the general wellbeing of the population. Without duly recognizing NPPE, PASDEP set out its own agenda during its planned operational period (2005/06 to 2009/2010). The agenda mainly focuses on increasing the educational level of girls and women, and on improving family health in rural areas by delivering better services on demand particularly for child spacing where the help of health extension workers is believed to be important. Other issues mentioned in PASDEP include the preparation of a reproductive health strategy, population and development sub-program, advocacy sub-program and the establishment of population databases and conducting research, and, interestingly, the establishment of NPC (MoFED, 2006:165-70).

This seems to suggest that the government is reconsidering the need to deal with population issues. But it also appears to be a response to demands exerted by important population stakeholders and their networking. Nevertheless, the building up of educational and health infrastructures, among others, demonstrates the government's focus on the development side of the NPPE. If that is the case, then, the NPPE is promptly guided by eclectic theoretical bases and discourses; (1) the neo-Malthusianism, which is also embraced by some donors and stakeholders; (2) feminist theory that advances the issue of women to its highest level which was a bedrock of the ICPD Programme of Action, and (3) the political economy theory that usually addresses the political and economic structures that hamper or facilitate development processes.

Ambivalence in the Neo-Malthusian Agenda

The ambivalent position of the government and the strong interest and roles of various stakeholders in the NPPE and challenges encountered in the process of implementation particularly in relation to the coordination or facilitation of the constellation of implementing institutions and their coordination are noted. Of paramount importance here is the inability of the government to live up to the initial planned set up through establishing the NPC, and later the reduction of the status of NOP to the level of department. These developments have created a situation where various stakeholders talk

past each other and the government, while top policy makers, who seem to remain outwardly passive but in effect are active in shaping the course of population policy to become inconsistent with the neo-Malthusian discourse without nevertheless avoiding the prevalence of this same discourse.

Conclusions and implications for research and improving the knowledge base

It is to be noted that the main purpose of this enquiry is to analyze and understand the guiding discourses, and thus framework(s), that guided the making of the population policy in Ethiopia. And tuned to this purpose are some key questions that have been raised and answered. This section of the article contains brief concluding remarks and identifies implications.

Conclusions

To begin with, the demographic and socio-economic status of the Ethiopian population indicates that there are inadequate basic amenities for the people to obtain decent livelihoods. In spite of some progress made overtime, a lot is still expected in order to improve and change the quagmire in the modes of life the people who are forced to survive under very poor conditions. The importation of theoretical frameworks attuned to neo-Malthusianism clearly originates from what can be visible from the indicators revealed as the demographic and socio-economic status of the Ethiopian population. For neo-Malthusians, the basic cause of most, if not all, of these weak indicators is population, and the solution is family planning, if not "population control." For political economists, the explanation would be political and economic and hence identify the more structural stumbling blocks.

A survey and analysis of the discourses on the links between population and development at the global level shows the prevalence of the usual contentions between population pessimists and optimists. These contentions often influence and thwart the theoretical frameworks and discourses of population establishments, global population conferences and developing countries on the way they define the links between population and development processes. The population establishments however are better placed in anchoring their own frameworks and discourses as compared to the global population conferences and the developing countries. Furthermore, population pessimists and optimists obtain tremendous conceptual and theoretical support from various demographic/population

theories in strengthening their viewpoints. Similarly, in addition to population pessimists and optimists, global population conferences are directly or indirectly influenced by the politics of the day and emerging theories such as reproductive health and rights as well as feminist theories. Also, the debates on the links between population dynamics and development processes in Ethiopia are, in themselves, in the course of development in defining theoretical frameworks and hence the discourse. The NPPE manifestly contains eclectic theoretical frameworks and hence discourses although the neo-Malthusian discourse seems to have taken precedence over the political economy, and at times the mixture of the two. Besides, the focus on reproductive health and rights and the feminist theories have also taken part particularly in bringing the gender dimension into the NPPE portfolio.

Implications for research and improving the knowledge base

The knowledge base on the links between population and development processes in Ethiopia is inadequate and not up-to-date, even though the contribution it made to the theoretical frameworks and discourses that guided the preparation of the NPPE is significant. Nevertheless, debates on the links between population and development are not strong enough, and as a result of this there is no consensus as to how population and development are directly linked in Ethiopia. Reliance on the neo-Malthusian theoretical framework and discourse might arise out of a lack of such debates and related consensus, among others, which is partly an outcome of the weak empirical base. In view of this, it is doubtful if and whether existing theoretical frameworks have originated from empirical findings, or if the theoretical frameworks have led to the generation of empirical evidences. In case of the latter, then theoretical frameworks and discourses are often based on anecdotal evidence, obtained at one point and in one place, or are speculations which are so subjective opinions rather than evidence.

As spelled out in the NPPE, an immense effort is required to conduct research and get to know what is really going on at the ground level, so that the debates can spring out of those research outputs. There is also a conviction that such empirically grounded debates would allow opposing groups to listen to each other and establish a consensus, which in the long-run, being enriched by fresh empirical evidence and perspectives, will allow a full-fledged home-grown theoretical framework to flourish.

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