

# The Impact of Rapid Population Growth on the Socioeconomic Development of Makurdi Residents, Benue State, Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

*Rapid population growth presents serious socioeconomic challenges in urban areas, especially in developing regions. This study explores how rapid population growth affects poverty levels, unemployment, and public services in Makurdi town, Benue State, Nigeria. Data were gathered from 400 respondents who were adult residents of Makurdi town, including employed and unemployed individuals, business owners, students, and civil servants, selected to represent various socioeconomic backgrounds. Using a survey research design, with participants selected through stratified, systematic and simple random sampling methods. A self-designed questionnaire facilitated data collection, and the responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that increasing population pressures lead to rising poverty levels, higher unemployment, and strained public services, resulting in poor living conditions, economic instability, and infrastructure deficits. These results support the Malthusian Theory of Population Growth, which posits that unchecked population growth outstrips resource availability, worsening socioeconomic issues. This research concludes that the rapid population growth in Makurdi town is a key factor contributing to rising poverty levels, growing unemployment, and mounting pressure on public amenities. In light of these findings, the study suggests implementing poverty alleviation programs, job creation initiatives, and expanding public services to lessen the adverse effects of population growth in Makurdi. Effective urban planning, investment in human capital, and infrastructure development are crucial for achieving sustainable socioeconomic progress in the town. This study adds to the existing knowledge on urban population dynamics and provides a foundation for policy development and urban planning strategies in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Rapid population growth, poverty, unemployment, public services, socioeconomic development

## Introduction

Population growth is a compelling global issue as the world's population has been growing phenomenally and projected to reach 9.7 billion human beings by 2050 (United Nations [UN], 2024). However, population growth rates vary significantly throughout different regions and countries, with the developing nations experiencing higher population growth than the developed nations (United Nations [UN], 2024). High fertility rate, low mortality rate, migration and economic development are considered as the major determinants influencing rapid population growth (UN, 2024). Population explosion poses significant challenges such as poverty and inequality, unemployment and underemployment, resource depletion, environmental degradation as well as health issues affecting socioeconomic development of a people (UN, 2024; World Bank, 2023). At the same time, countries like Japan and South Korea are experiencing population decline due to low birth rates and aging populations (Our World in Data, 2024; UN, 2024). Regardless of the challenges posed by rapid population growth, targeted investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure can facilitate socioeconomic development and improve living standards in developing countries.

The rate at which population growth is happening, Sub-Saharan Africa, is among the fastest rates globally. The growth is so fast that the continent's population will double by 2050, bringing along an increase in various economic and social challenges. Whereas there is an economic growth trajectory in some parts of the world, rapid population increase pressure on resources, infrastructure, and job opportunities (World Bank, 2023).

Nigeria's the most populous country in Africa is experiencing rapid population growth which creates a lot of challenges (Whyte & Adejoh, 2022). It is felt in its six geopolitical zones; much as in North Central towns like Makurdi, Benue State, rural migration inflates urban housing and creeps in slums and poor sanitation. In towns like Maiduguri, Borno State of North East Nigeria, population displacement due to insecurity-wrought humanitarian crises is exacerbated by an insurgency by a terrorist group called Boko Haram (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2024).

High fertility rates contribute to youth unemployment and overstretched public services in the North West-for example, Kano (Kano State Government, 2021). Rapid urbanization in the South East-for example, Onitsha, Anambra State-is leading to traffic congestion and decaying infrastructure (Makata, 2024). Meanwhile, oil pollution and population growth that stress the environment and public health afflict the South South towns, such as Port Harcourt, Rivers State (Whyte & Adejoh, 2022). Whereas in the South West, such as Lagos State, Lagos, there is congestion and inadequacy in housing leading to slums and high living standards (World Bank, 2023).

Africa's rapid population growth continues to outpace socioeconomic development, worsening unemployment, poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and food insecurity (World Bank, 2023). In Sub-Saharan Africa, high fertility rates and rural-urban migration strain public resources, limiting access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (United Nations, 2024).

Makurdi, the capital of Benue State, is equally beset by challenges of high birth rates and the influx of displaced persons. The resultant effects are overcrowding, poor living conditions, environmental degradation, and increased poverty levels (OECD, 2023). While policy interventions have been made in this regard, research has not risen to the expectations of how urban planning and social welfare programs can ameliorate these effects. Therefore, there is a need for sustainable strategies that might improve infrastructure, economic opportunities, and living conditions in Makurdi. Based on this backdrop, this study seeks to:

- i. Evaluate the impact of rapid population growth on residents' poverty levels in Makurdi town, Benue State.
- ii. To determine the effect of rapid population growth on unemployment and residents in Makurdi town, Benue State and

- iii. To assess the pressure of rapid population on public services in Makurdi town, Benue State.

### **Rapid population growth**

Rapid population growth is when the population of a region increases dramatically over a relatively short period. According to the United Nations, 2024, it is an increase in population by more than 2% annually, usually due to high birth rates and a decline in mortality rates. As expressed by Weeks (2021), rapid population growth occurs when fertility rates remain high while improvements in healthcare and living conditions reduce death rates, leading to an imbalance in demographic trends.

While the term “rapid population growth” is widely used, its implications are not the same. Some scholars argue that growth is only “rapid” when it surpasses economic and infrastructural capacity (Bloom & Canning, 2019). Others note that growth may be beneficial in labour-driven economies but detrimental in resource-constrained settings (Todaro & Smith, 2020). The term also lacks a universally agreed-upon threshold, as different countries experience “rapid” growth at different rates depending on their economic and demographic contexts.

For this study, rapid population growth refers to an accelerated increase in Makurdi’s population due to high birth rates, rural-urban migration, and declining mortality rates, surpassing the city’s socioeconomic capacity to provide adequate housing, employment, and public services.

Excluding the increase in the general population, this approach focuses entirely on built-up areas where infrastructural and economic limitations further heighten the impacts of demographic growth. It also distinguishes between natural increase—that is, birth rate exceeding death rate—and migration-driven growth, with emphasis on the latter as the drive for urban development in Makurdi.

### **Socioeconomic development**

Socioeconomic development entails the process of economic, social, and general well-being improvements of individuals and communities. The United Nations Development Programme (2023) defines it as the process of improving human capabilities, income levels, and social inclusion leading to an improved quality of life. According to Todaro and Smith (2020), socioeconomic development involves changes in the structure of income distribution, reduction of poverty, health, and education that add to long-term economic growth and improvement in the living standards.

While many people use the terms interchangeably, socioeconomic development is not the same as economic growth. Where economic growth is an increase in the gross domestic product of a nation, socio-economic development involves wider measures like literacy rates, life expectancy, the quality of employment, and social equity. As put by Sen (1999), measurement of development is still complex because different societies have different priorities as some focus on industrialization, while others emphasize social welfare (World Bank 2023).

Socio-economic development, in this regard, implies an all-round improvement in the economic condition and social structure of Makurdi in areas such as reduction of poverty, employment opportunities, infrastructure, and access to key public services. This definition excludes purely economic growth indicators and focuses on multidimensional well-being. It emphasizes measurable factors such as income distribution, education, healthcare, and infrastructure in the context of Makurdi’s population challenges. The study will analyze socioeconomic development in relation to rapid population growth, assessing its impact on poverty, employment, and public services.

### **Literature**

Generally, high population growth is associated with a high level of poverty in many countries, especially developing economies with scarce resources. According to the United Nations (2024) high rates of population growth are usually followed by unemployment, low wages, and lack of social services which are causes of poverty. According to Bloom and Canning (2019) if not

matched with equal economic growth, population growth is posed to lower per capita income and result in a generalized reduction of living standards.

On the regional level, Sub-Saharan Africa has to tackle persistent poverty issues, as its population grows expeditiously. According to the World Bank (2023), high fertility rates and rural-urban migration lead to strained infrastructure, poor living conditions, and scarcity of jobs. Nigeria, being the most populous country in Africa, is no exception: cities are experiencing housing deficits, informal labor markets, and growing inequality (Todaro & Smith, 2020).

Currently, poverty levels are rising in Makurdi town due to uncontrolled population growth. Studies note the plight of migration, unemployment, and meager governmental intervention as contributors to deteriorating living conditions (Benue State Planning Commission, 2018). Urban poverty acknowledges gradual growth, requiring sustainable measures addressing her socioeconomic challenges, in the spirit of what policy undercurrent the rest.

Inevitably, with population growth and rural-urban migration; high fertility rates have also increased unemployed and under-employed in Sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank (2023) reveals that job shortages in urban areas in Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya are attributable to population pressures, lack of industrial development, and mismatched skills in the labor markets. Youth unemployment remains high, compelling many to resort to informal low-paid occupations (Todaro & Smith 2020).

Makurdi, like many of the rapidly urbanizing settings in Nigeria, suffers a rapid urban unemployment because of their low industrialization and over-dependence on agriculture. The Benue State Planning Commission (2018) shows that the influx of people into Makurdi could not be matched by the number of job opportunities created; and of the growing number of unemployed youths; informal jobs have become rampant, thus contributing to increased crime rates. Without policy strategies that focus on job creation, it is likely that socioeconomic strains associated with unemployment in Makurdi will worsen.

Rapid population growth exerts a high pressure on public services, especially in developing economies with slender infrastructures. According to the United Nations (2024), in those cities where population growth has become unregulated, serious strains occur in healthcare, education, house accommodation, and sanitation. The same overstretching public service delivery when urbanization outpaces government planning, according to Bloom and Canning (2019).

#### Regional Perspective

This is evidenced by rapid urban population growth, which in Sub-Saharan Africa has often outrun the growth of public services in major cities. According to the World Bank (2023), many cities in Africa face overcrowded schools, inadequate health facilities, and inefficient waste management due to the pressure of a growing population. In Nigeria, for example, there are high levels of shortages in housing, congested healthcare centers, and failing water supply systems as populations grow without a corresponding infrastructural development (Todaro & Smith, 2020).

The population has grown relatively fast in Makurdi because of high birth rates coupled with rural-to-urban migration, putting a strain on fragile public services. The Benue State Planning Commission, 2018, asserts that the public health facilities are overcrowded, the schools are understaffed, and the water and sanitation services are insufficient for the residents. The unplanned urban expansion has resulted in increased informal settlement that has worsened access to necessary services. Without strategic planning and investment, Makurdi's public infrastructure will struggle to support its growing population.

#### Theory

This study is anchored on three interrelated theories, namely; **Malthusian Theory of Population Growth, Demographic Transition Theory and Structural Strain Theory.**

#### Malthusian Theory of Population Growth

The Malthusian theory, postulated by Thomas Malthus (1798) suggests that population growth tends to outgrow available resources, which in turn may lead to poverty, unemployment, and inadequate public services. Rapid population growth has put excessive stress on infrastructure,

health, education, and job opportunities in Makurdi, exacerbating socio-economic challenges. However, some critics say technological changes and policy interventions can ease the negative impacts of population growth; Todaro & Smith (2020).

### **Demographic Transition Theory**

The DTM by Notestein (1945) describes how development forces society to gradually move from high levels of birth and death rates to low ones. Characteristically, the early stages of transition are marked by high birth rates and attendant rural-urban migration without complementary improvement in economic and infrastructural developments. In Makurdi, such an imbalance accelerates poverty, unemployment, and overstretch in public services. World Bank (2023).

### **Structural Strain Theory**

Robert Merton (1938) formulated the Strain theory, which theorized that when social structures are not able to meet the needs of fast-growing populations including economy, education, and employment, deviant behaviour, informal labour markets, and higher rates of crime surface. The fast-growing population of Makurdi is confronted with an inadequate number of jobs and public services; thus, there is an increased level of economic insecurity and social instability.

By implication both theories explain how rapid population growth in Makurdi contributes to socioeconomic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and overburdened public services. While Malthusian theory portends the resource scarcity issue, Demographic Transition Theory shows insight into population dynamics, and Strain Theory describes the societal consequences of unmet economic and social needs.

### **Methods**

A survey research design was used for this study in ascertaining how rapid population growth has influenced socioeconomic development in the lives of the residents in Makurdi town, Benue State.

The study location is Makurdi town, the capital of Benue State, which has grown rapidly due to high birth rates, rural-urban migration, and an influx of displaced persons. The attendant problems of unemployment, poverty, and strained public services make it an ideal location for this research. The population of this study comprised of all adults that are residing in Makurdi who are employed or unemployed, business owners as well as students. Based on projections by the National Population Commission and the National Bureau of Statistics, the population of Makurdi Local Government Area was estimated at approximately 433,700 as of 2022 (City Population, 2023). The sample size was determined using the Fisher's formula (1998), which gave a sample size of 400 respondents. A multistage sampling technique was used: first, stratified sampling divides Makurdi into major residential areas: Wadata, North Bank, High-Level, and Ankpa Quarters, to ensure geographic representation. Then, 50 households in each stratum were selected using systematic random sampling. This was ensured by listing all households in a cluster and selecting households at intervals and the process was repeated in all the four clusters bringing the total selected houses to 400. Thereafter, a simple random sampling was used to select 2 individuals in each of the households. Persons eligible to participate in the study were persons who resided in Makurdi, were willing to participate in the study and who understands the survey questions. Data collection was done using a self-designed structured questionnaire, while data analysis was done using quantitative methods including frequencies and percentages.

### **Results**

This section covers the presentation of the data obtained from respondents relating to impact of rapid population growth on residents' poverty level in Makurdi, effect of rapid population growth on unemployment and pressure population growth posed on public services in Makurdi.

**Table 1: Impact of Rapid Population Growth on Residents' Poverty Levels in Makurdi**

Response Item	Response Options	Frequency (n = 385)	Percentage (%)
1. Have you personally experienced increased poverty levels due to population growth?	Yes	290	75.3%
	No	95	24.7%
2. To what extent has population growth affected your access to basic needs?	Moderately	150	39.0%
	Slightly	120	31.2%
	Not at all	115	29.8%
3. Do you agree or strongly agree that the cost of living has increased due to population growth?	Agree	245	63.7%
	Strongly Agree	65	16.9%
	Disagree	45	11.7%
	Strongly Disagree	30	7.8%
4. Have you observed overcrowding and poor housing conditions in your area due to population growth?	Yes	295	76.6%
	No	90	23.4%
5. Do you believe the government is effectively addressing the poverty effects caused by population growth?	No	325	84.4%
	Yes	60	15.6%

**Source: Field survey, 2025**

The figures in table 1 show that the majority of respondents (75.3%) confessed that they themselves have personally seen increasing poverty from the population increase. This shows that the growing population is deepening economic hardships for the majority of people in Makurdi. Together, 70.2% of respondents (150 moderately and 120 slightly affected) said that the increase in population has had a tangible effect on their access to basic needs. This is a pointer to pressure on basic needs and facilities, which are in increasingly short supply as the population grows. 80.5% (245 agreed and 65 in strong agreed) of respondents affirmed that population growth has raised the cost of living. This finding is a pointer to pressure imposed by increasing density on market prices, housing, transport, and other cost-of-living factors. Additionally, an overwhelming majority (76.6%) of the inhabitants reported increasing overcrowding and deteriorating housing conditions in their neighbourhoods. This is proportional with the rapid urbanization of Makurdi, leading to substandard housing and slum development. Furthermore, a highly significant 84.4% of the respondents stated that the government is not addressing the poverty effects triggered by population increase.

This suggests a policy gap, that the local government's efforts towards mitigating the socioeconomic impacts of population growth are inadequate. By extension, this information shows a broad perception of the negative impacts of population growth on the welfare of residents: for instance, the high percentage of residents reporting increased poverty levels and rising cost of living illustrates that population growth is worsening economic challenges in Makurdi. The study can highlight the causes of poverty through population pressures and can talk of possible economic interventions. The study also shows that there is pressure on basic needs, accommodation, urban planning matters, as well as government inefficiency in addressing this negative trend.

**Table 2: Effect of rapid population growth on unemployment in Makurdi**

Response Item	Frequency (n = 385)	Percentage (%)
Increased job competition due to population growth <b>(Yes)</b>	320	83.1%
Main source of income is informal/unstable jobs	280	72.7%
Insufficient job opportunities to match population growth <b>(No)</b>	345	89.6%
Population growth contributes to informal/low-paying jobs <b>(Agree/Strongly Agree)</b>	310	80.5%
Unemployment rise due to rural-urban migration <b>(Yes)</b>	300	77.9%
Need for skill development/job creation programs <b>(Yes)</b>	365	94.8%

**Source: field survey, 2025**

These findings have huge implications for this study on the socioeconomic well-being of Makurdi inhabitants impacted by population growth. That there is a major consensus that competition for jobs has risen as a result of population growth, it has fuelled dependence on temporary or volatile means of livelihood, and it has led to the extensive adoption of low-income employment indicates a heightened economic vulnerability in the area. This is typical of a labour market in desperate need, where the quantity of labour available exceeds the quality of work to be gained. The levels of high unemployment that come with rural-urban migration further point to how population growth is overwhelming the economic capacity of the town. The strong support for job creation and vocational training initiatives reflects widespread demand for concerted interventions that will close the gap between economic opportunity and population growth.

**Table 3: Pressure of rapid population growth on public services in Makurdi**

Response Item	Frequency (n = 385)	Percentage (%)
Increased pressure on healthcare facilities <b>(Yes)</b>	330	85.7%
Availability of public healthcare services <b>(Poor/Very Poor)</b>	290	75.3%
Overcrowded schools due to population growth <b>(Yes)</b>	315	81.8%
Strain on water supply and sanitation <b>(Agree/Strongly Agree)</b>	300	77.9%
Public transportation system is overcrowded and inefficient	320	83.1%
Areas requiring urgent improvement: All of the Above	350	90.9%

**Source: field survey, 2025**

Evidence in table 3 shows that public services are under extreme pressure, with 85.7% of the sample noting pressure on health facilities, and 75.3% noting poor health services.

Overcrowding in schools (81.8%) and deteriorating water supply and sanitation (77.9%) point to infrastructural problems. Moreover, 83.1% note public transport is overcrowded, with 90.9% highlighting the urgency for improvement in all categories. These findings reinforce the critical need for policy interventions in urban planning, employment creation, and infrastructure development to mitigate the negative consequences of rapid population growth in Makurdi.

### **Discussion of findings**

The results of this research show that high population growth has a critical effect on the poverty rate, unemployment, and public amenities in Makurdi town, Benue State. The results are corroborated by available literature and the theory employed in this research. For instance, the study coincides with that of the World Bank (2023) which stated that high population growth has been linked to higher poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural shortages across the globe. The results in Makurdi mirror the same trends, where 75.3% of the interviewees cited deteriorating poverty, and 83.1% recognized growing competition for employment because of population growth. The results validate regional research in Sub-Saharan Africa, where high fertility and rural-urban migration saturate labour markets and social services (United Nations, 2024). Locally, the dominant socioeconomic issues were overpopulation, poor state of housing,

and little access to public services, in line with the observations in other Nigerian cities (OECD, 2023).

Relatedly, this research is based on Malthusian Theory of Population Growth, which holds that uncontrolled population growth outpaces the advancement of resources, triggering poverty and economic insecurity (Malthus, 1798). The findings of this research confirm this in the context that growing demand for employment, housing, and health outpaces government capacity, creating deteriorating living conditions. The Structural Strain Theory also accounts for mounting social inequalities and public service pressure due to population pressure, making planning and intervention a necessity in Makurdi.

## Conclusion

This research concludes that the population boom of Makurdi town is a major driver of increasing poverty, unemployment, and pressure on public amenities. The results confirm international and regional patterns, justifying the necessity for policy-driven responses to cushion the adverse socioeconomic impacts. If not properly planned for, the issues presented by population growth can worsen economic and social instability in the town.

## Recommendations

- i. Poverty Alleviation Programs: The government should implement targeted economic empowerment programs, including skills acquisition and microfinance support, to improve residents' standards of living and reduce poverty rates.
- ii. Employment Generation Programs: Entrepreneurship, industrialization, and vocational training investments should be given utmost priority in an attempt to absorb the growing workforce and reduce unemployment.
- iii. Expansion of Public Services: Budgetary provisions to infrastructure, health, and education by the government must be raised to keep pace with the needs of the increasing population and enhance service delivery in Makurdi.

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