Why is Nigeria exceptional? A comparative perspective on Nigeria’s fertility trends

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Rapid population growth driven by high fertility

Nigeria: Total population

Nigeria: Total Fertility Rate
Persistently high fertility compared to other countries

Determinants of fertility

**Contextual factors**
- Wealth/economic development
- Increased female education
- Child mortality declines
- Gender equality and gender & family norms

Decisions about how many children and when to have

**Proximate determinants** of fertility:

- Marriage/union patterns & sexual activity:
  - Early union formation and sexual activity leading to *Early childbearing patterns*
  - Sexual activity among unmarried
  - Abstinence from sexual activity

- Contraceptive use

- Abortion

- Infecundity – PPA and infertility
Data

- World Population Prospects (United Nations 2019)
  - total fertility
  - age-specific fertility rates
  - population estimates and projections
- Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators (United Nations 2021)
  - contraceptive use
  - need for family planning satisfied by modern methods (SDG 3.7.1)
- Demographic and Health Surveys
  - Subnational differences
- Female secondary school enrollment, UNESCO (2021)
Is overall level of women’s education lower in Nigeria?

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2021)
Large differences in fertility by woman’s education

Source: Demographic and Health Surveys – most recent survey
Is early childbearing higher in Nigeria and contributing to higher total fertility?

Nigeria has the lowest levels of contraceptive use among countries in the comparison group

Contraceptive use among women of reproductive age (%)

... also when expressed as “among women in need for family planning” (who want to postpone or avoid further childbearing) and thus controlling for differences in fertility intentions across countries

Proportion of women of reproductive age who have their need for family planning met with modern methods (%) – SDG 3.7.1

Nigeria has the lowest level of contraceptive use at all age groups

Contraceptive use among women of reproductive age (%)
Contraceptive prevalence by method, among married/in-union women

Source: Calculations by United Nations Population Division based on World Contraceptive Use (2021)
**Large sub-regional differences in total fertility**

- Fertility in northern Nigeria is higher than in south
- Contraceptive use in northern Nigeria is substantially lower than south
Summary and conclusions

• In Nigeria, early childbearing is not higher and is not contributing to higher fertility
• Additionally, female education is not different to the comparison set of countries
• The main difference is in the proportion of women using modern contraception
• This is true also when expressed as proportion of women who want to postpone or avoid childbearing (SDG 3.7.1)
• Large regional differences in Nigeria: Northern Nigeria has lower levels of education, lower use of contraception, higher poverty, high fertility preferences, and growing instability
• For Nigeria’s demographic transition to accelerate, expanded family planning programs and increased government commitment at the highest levels, will be necessary