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MANAGING OUR POPULATION FOR A HEALTHIER AND MORE PROSPEROUS ZAMBIA

In Zambia, continued rapid population growth makes it difficult for the country to meet the basic agricultural, educational, economic, and housing needs of all its people. Recognizing the critical relationship between population and development, Zambia put forward its 2019 National Population Policy to address population factors that undermine efforts towards sustainable economic and social development, including high levels of fertility, slow decline in mortality rates, and increased poverty.¹ An effective response to Zambia's population growth that includes greater access to family planning, improved child survival, and increased completion rates in girls' secondary education can contribute to the success of its Seventh National Development Plan and help Zambia achieve its Vision 2030 goal of becoming a prosperous, middle-income country.

This policy brief examines how current population trends and future population growth will affect Zambia's agriculture, education, economic, and housing sectors between 2018 and 2030, and identifies policies that can slow population growth and adapt Zambia's infrastructure and services to meet the needs of future generations.

Population Growth Has a Profound Impact Across Multiple Sectors

Countries with high fertility rates (lifetime births per woman) must spend increasing resources to meet growing demands for water, sanitation, energy, agriculture, housing, employment, health, and education.

The population of Zambia was projected to rise from 4.1 million in 1968 to 16.8 million in 2017 and to 25.2 million by 2030.² The country's population is expected to grow at an average rate of 2.8 percent annually through 2035—a rate that would result in a doubling of the population over 25 years.³ Statistics from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) show that countries with high population growth rates (averaging 2.4 percent) tend to have low levels of human development, while countries with low population growth rates (averaging 0.8 percent) have high human development levels.⁴ Zambia has a high population growth rate compared to the rest of the world, and is ranked 144 out of 189 countries in UNDP's Human Development Index.⁵

Zambia's rising population can be turned into a valuable asset for achieving the goals outlined in Vision 2030, the comprehensive strategy for achieving upper middle-income country status. If fertility rates decline and Zambia equips its current generation of young people with skills to contribute to economic growth and social development, the country will be better placed to have the healthier, more sustainable, and more prosperous population that its leaders and citizens have envisioned.

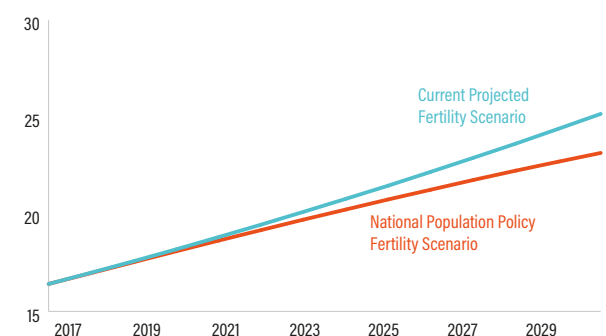
To study the impact of population growth on the future of Zambia's development, the Population and Development Department of the Ministry of National Development Planning, in collaboration with the Policy, Advocacy, and Communication Enhanced for Population and Reproductive Health (PACE) project and Track20, analyzed two scenarios of population growth and their impact on various development sectors. The first scenario, shown in Figure 1, assumes that the total fertility rate (TFR) will follow the current projection issued by the Zambia Central Statistical Office: a decrease in fertility from the current rate of 5.5 children per woman in 2017 to 4.8 children per woman in 2030.

In the second scenario shown in Figure 1, the TFR drops more substantially, from 5.5 children per woman in 2017 to 3.0 children per woman by 2030, the goal fertility level identified in the 2019 National Population Policy. Fertility will decline under both scenarios, but the pace of decline differs, resulting in diverging rates of population growth. If the fertility rate continues to decline slowly (the current scenario), the population will continue to grow rapidly because the large numbers of children will eventually have children themselves. If fertility declines more rapidly, as in the National Population Policy fertility scenario, then population growth will slow sooner.

FIGURE 1

Fertility Declines Now Will Slow Zambia's Future Population Growth

Total population in millions, by year



Note: The current fertility scenario assumes the TFR (lifetime births per woman) will be 4.8 in 2030; the lower fertility scenario assumes the TFR will be 3.0 in 2030.

Sources: Current Fertility Scenario: Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2010 Census of Population and Housing: Population and Demographic Projections 2011-2035 (Lusaka, Zambia: CSO, 2013); Lower Fertility Scenario: projections by the Population and Development Department, Zambia Ministry of National Development Planning, 2018.



Planning Now for the Next Generation of Urban Residents

According to the 2010 census, Zambia's urban population has been growing at approximately 4.2 percent per year, with 43 percent of the population living in urban areas.⁶ This has resulted in high levels of rural-urban migration—fueled by income inequalities and exacerbated by housing shortages—driving more people into unplanned settlements. Currently, 70 percent of Zambia's urban population lives in such settlements, where housing is more affordable and easily available, but often lacks electricity or safe water sources.⁷

In addition, land management policies that benefit the wealthy and the high price of houses (432,000 ZMW in a country where average annual household income is 60,000 ZMW) make home ownership difficult for most Zambians.⁸ Currently, an estimated 2.5 million homes are available nationally, but only 900,000 are in urban areas, of which only 360,000 are considered to be high-quality.⁹ In fact, Zambia is estimated to have a national housing deficit of 2 million houses.¹⁰

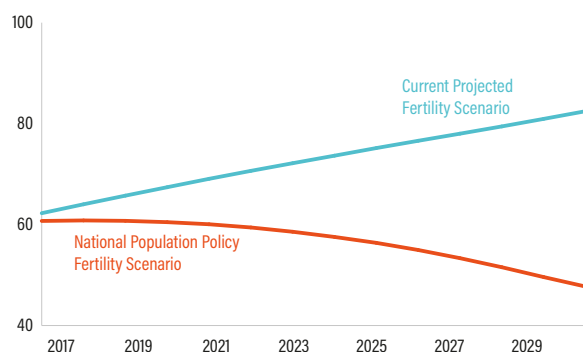
Based on current fertility trends, Zambia's urban population will grow from 6.9 million people in 2017 to 11.4 million by 2030. However, if fertility drops to the level established in the National Population Policy, the urban population will only grow to 10.5 million. The number of new urban households is also expected to rise much more under the current fertility scenario at 82,000 new urban households annually compared to the National Population Policy fertility scenario at 48,000 new urban households annually (see Figure 2).

The housing supply is insufficient to meet the needs of Zambia's current urban population, let alone the 48,000 to 82,000 households that will be added each year. This shortage of housing for rural-to-urban migrants will pressure them into moving into low-quality housing areas, expanding the proportion of the population living in slums, which increases the risk of unsanitary conditions that spread disease. Higher numbers of urban households will also require more public services, such as modern water and sanitation facilities, electricity, and roads.

FIGURE 2

High Fertility Increases Demand for New Urban Housing

New Urban Households (thousands), by year



Note: The current fertility scenario assumes the TFR (lifetime births per woman) will be 4.8 in 2030; the lower fertility scenario assumes the TFR will be 3.0 in 2030.

Sources: Current Fertility Scenario: CSO, 2010 Census of Population and Housing: Population and Demographic Projections 2011-2035; Lower Fertility Scenario: projections by the Population and Development Department, Zambia Ministry of National Development Planning, 2018.

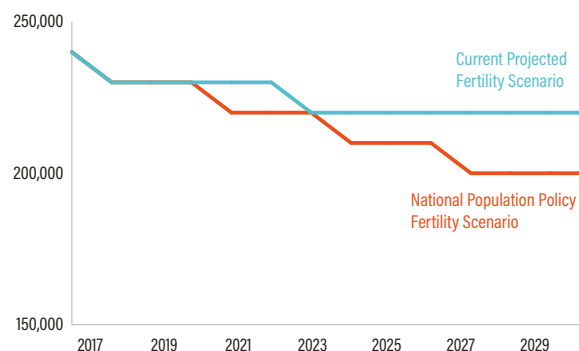
Balancing Competing Priorities for Land Use

Few countries have been able to quickly transition out of low-income status without increasing agricultural productivity.¹¹ Agriculture generates 8.2 percent of Zambia's gross domestic product and provides a livelihood for almost half of the population.¹² Natural resource wealth accounted for \$95 billion of Zambia's national assets, or 43 percent of the country's total in 2010. However, Zambia's increasing population, along with climate shocks, is straining the country's natural resources, resulting in a 17 percent decline in the value of Zambia's natural wealth between 1990 and 2010.¹³ A high rate of population growth increases pressure on the land and exacerbates shortfalls in crop production due to unsustainable farming practices and economic and climate shocks.

FIGURE 3

Rapid Population Growth Reduces Land Available for Housing and Food Production

Total Arable Land (hectares), by year



Note: The current fertility scenario assumes the TFR (lifetime births per woman) will be 4.8 in 2030; the lower fertility scenario assumes the TFR will be 3.0 in 2030.

Sources: Current Fertility Scenario: Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2010 Census of Population and Housing: Population and Demographic Projections 2011-2035; Lower Fertility Scenario: projections by the Population and Development Department, Zambia Ministry of National Development Planning, 2018.

Figure 3 shows that as the population grows, the amount of arable land available for farming will decrease from 240,000 hectares in 2017 to 220,000 in 2030. Population growth requires more land for individuals to live on as well as land on which to grow food to meet increasing demands. Given the value of agriculture to Zambia's economy both now and in the future, arable land should be protected by slowing future population growth, and by funding resiliency efforts identified in Zambia's Seventh National Development Plan, such as diversifying the types of crops grown in Zambia and investing in yield-enhancing technologies.¹⁴

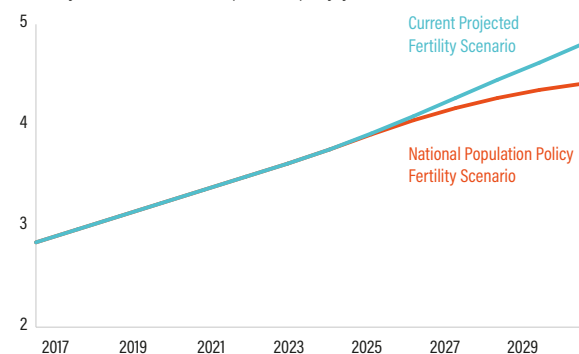
Strengthening School Capacity and the Quality of Education

As of 2015, the total number of school-age students in Zambia was just over 4 million, with 3.2 million of those enrolled in primary schools.¹⁵ Yet, enrolments are lower than they should be: According to estimates from 2014, 15 percent of children ages 7 to 14 and 28 percent of those ages 14 to 18 were out of school.¹⁶

FIGURE 4

Reducing Fertility Eases the Strain on the Education System

Primary School Students (millions), by year



Note: The current fertility scenario assumes the TFR (lifetime births per woman) will be 4.8 in 2030; the lower fertility scenario assumes the TFR will be 3.0 in 2030.

Sources: Current Fertility Scenario: CSO, 2010 Census of Population and Housing: Population and Demographic Projections 2011-2035; Lower Fertility Scenario: projections by the Population and Development Department, Zambia Ministry of National Development Planning, 2018.

The number of children enrolled in primary school will continue to grow regardless of fertility trends. But, under the current fertility scenario, there will be 4.8 million primary school children in 2030 as opposed to 4.4 million children under the National Population Policy fertility scenario (see Figure 4). This difference has major financial implications given that the Zambian government provides for free universal primary education. In addition, increases in the number of children enrolled also affects the quality of education provided. High numbers of school children can increase the pupil-teacher ratio and the availability of adequate textbooks and supplies, and it can create the need to build more schools to ease overcrowding. As of 2013, Zambia has only 30 percent of the secondary schools needed to accommodate its current cohort of students in grades 1 through 5, and more than five primary school students share a textbook for each subject.¹⁷ Achieving lower fertility and consequently lowering the number of school-going children will make it easier for the Zambian government to provide a strong learning environment for its students.

Higher numbers of primary students would also require more trained teachers. By 2030, under the current fertility scenario, Zambia will need an additional 55,000 teachers, almost 10,000 more than under the National Population Policy fertility scenario, just to maintain the current pupil-teacher ratio of 43:1.¹⁸ However, if Zambia wants to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio to 40:1, as called for in the Seventh National Development Plan, even more teachers will be needed.

Strategies for Slowing Zambia's Fertility

Policymakers and other stakeholders can contribute to the success of the Seventh National Development Plan and help Zambia attain its Vision 2030 goal of achieving middle-income status by taking actions to manage the country's population growth. The following strategies to slow population growth can create a healthier, more prosperous, and more productive nation:

Increase access to voluntary family planning. Women and couples in Zambia should have access to services that allow them to have the number of children they choose. Currently, 20 percent of married women in Zambia wish to delay or prevent pregnancy but are not using contraception, representing an unmet need for family planning. The Zambian government should continue to honour its Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) funding commitments by dedicating \$1.5 million per year for contraceptive commodities (up from the current amount of \$1.1 million). Along with ensuring the availability of commodities, change can occur by focusing on removing policy barriers that prevent young people from accessing sexual and reproductive health services; offering a wide range of contraceptive methods from which people can choose; and sharing tasks, where appropriate, between health providers, less specialized workers, and community-based volunteers by 2020.¹⁹ In addition, the government should develop and implement a comprehensive family planning strategy and ensure that its leaders support family planning so that they can empower women to make their own reproductive choices.

Improve child health and survival by scaling up proven interventions. Having fewer children, spaced at healthy intervals, increases children's chances of survival and living a full life.²⁰ Ongoing interventions, such as immunization campaigns, prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, introduction of safe motherhood protocols during childbirth, and the use of insecticide-treated bed nets are proven strategies to reduce child mortality and should be scaled up.

Encourage female education and ensure that girls stay in school. Girls who complete their education are more likely to delay childbearing than those who do not.²¹ Girls' education can be increased by addressing the financial challenges that are unique to them—by offering more scholarships at all educational levels and supporting back-to-school campaigns and incentives to encourage young mothers to return to school.²² The government must also enforce the ban on early child marriage, which often causes young women to drop out of school once they start having children.²³

Integrate demographic and population data into all areas of development planning. Referencing demographic and population data to inform development planning across sectors can help ensure that key sectors of development, such as health, education, environmental protection, and infrastructure incorporate strategies to sufficiently meet the needs of the current population, while working toward a growth rate that is amenable to sustained economic and social development.

By acting now to lower the rate of population growth in ways that support the current population and future generations, Zambian leaders can successfully pave the way for its citizens to have healthier, more equitable lives that include ample food supplies, access to safe housing, quality education, and a plentiful supply of jobs. Planning for demographic change is central to all of Zambia's efforts to achieve its long-term developmental goals.

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