

Uganda

Population Factors & National Development



Population Secretariat, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
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Uganda's ambitious national development vision is to transform the society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years. This analysis asks the question: What is the importance of population factors to the ability of the country to achieve its national vision in coming decades?

Population Characteristics and Projections

The Ugandan population has been growing rapidly for a long period of time. The population grew from only about 5 million persons in 1948 to 24.2 million at the time of the 2002 census. In 2010, the population is estimated to be around 32 million persons (Figure 1). The population has grown, in part, because Uganda has a high fertility rate. Ugandan women have 6.7 children each, on average—one of the highest levels of fertility in the world. Because fertility has been high for a long time, Uganda has a very young population. Half the population is under the age of 15, which results in a high level of child dependency and creates a built-in momentum for future growth.

To illustrate the impacts of rapid population growth on development in Uganda, this analysis uses two population projections based on different assumptions about the future course of fertility. The projection period is for 30 years, 2007–2037.¹ The first projection assumes that high fertility continues, with just a small decline in fertility over the projection period. In that case, the population increases from 29 million persons in 2007 to nearly 89 million in 2037. In contrast, the second projection assumes a transition from high fertility (6.7 children per woman) to low fertility (2.2 children per woman) over the 30-year projection period. Under that assumption, the population would grow to about 62 million in 2037 (Figure 2). These projections can be used to explore the impact of different rates of population growth on Ugandan development.

Figure 1. Historical and Estimated Population Growth

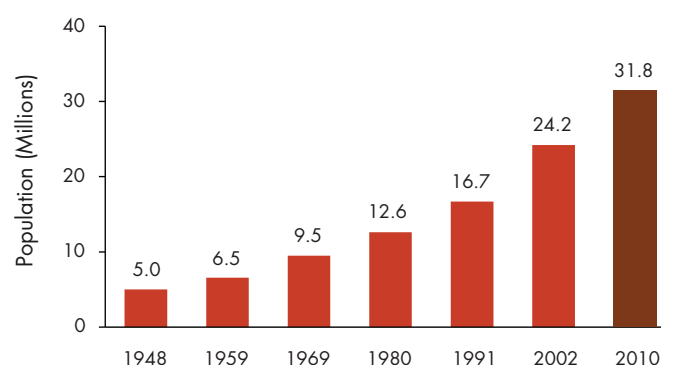
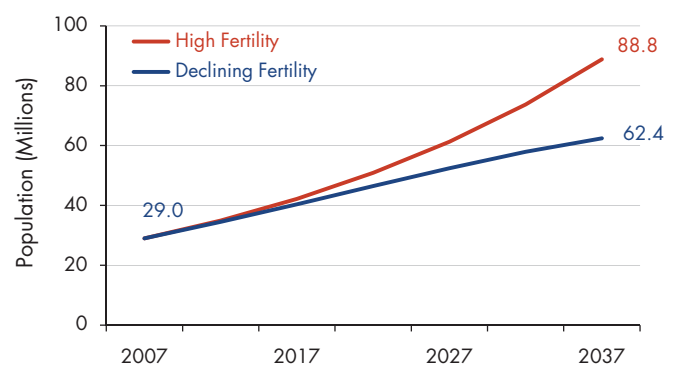


Figure 2. Population Projections



¹ This analysis uses the Spectrum System of Policy Models. Based on available data, 2007 was set as the base year.

Education

The rate of population growth will affect Uganda's efforts to achieve and sustain universal primary education. With high fertility continued, the number of primary school pupils will increase from 7.5 million in 2007 to 18.4 million in 2037. With declining fertility, the pupil population would increase gradually to 10.2 million by 2037. The minimal required number of primary school teachers would increase from 152,000 in 2007 to 459,800 in 2037 with high fertility continued; in contrast, 253,900 teachers would be needed in 2037 with declining fertility (Figure 3). In addition to the need to train, recruit, and retain more teachers, Uganda will need more schools, and primary expenditures will be much larger with high fertility continued.

Health

The health sector already faces severe human resource and infrastructure shortages. Uganda aims to reduce the population per health provider ratio as well as to keep pace with rapid population growth. In that case, the nursing force would need to increase from 7,700 in 2007 to 88,800 in 2037 if high fertility continues. Declining fertility would reduce the severity of the nursing shortage; in 2037, 62,400 nurses would be required with declining fertility (Figure 4). The country would also potentially save a cumulative US\$6.4 billion in health expenditures over the 2007–2037 projection period with declining fertility.

Urbanisation

Continued high fertility across the country, combined with increased pressures on the land in rural areas, will lead to further urban growth in Uganda (Figure 5). The rapid growth of urban centres will place a greater burden on the urban infrastructure (e.g., housing, transport and roads, water and sanitation, and energy) and the need for urban employment opportunities. In particular, this pressure will exacerbate the already poor living conditions for low-income populations and people in urban slums, who face overcrowding, inadequate shelter, lack of clean drinking water and adequate sanitation, and increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

Figure 3. Projected Number of Teachers Required

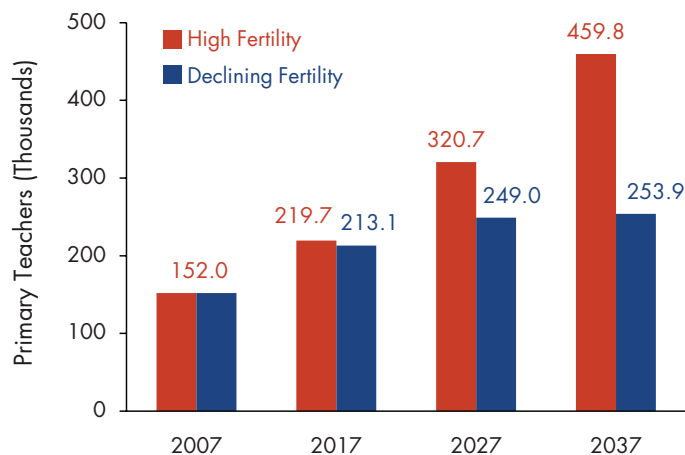


Figure 4. Projected Number of Nurses Required

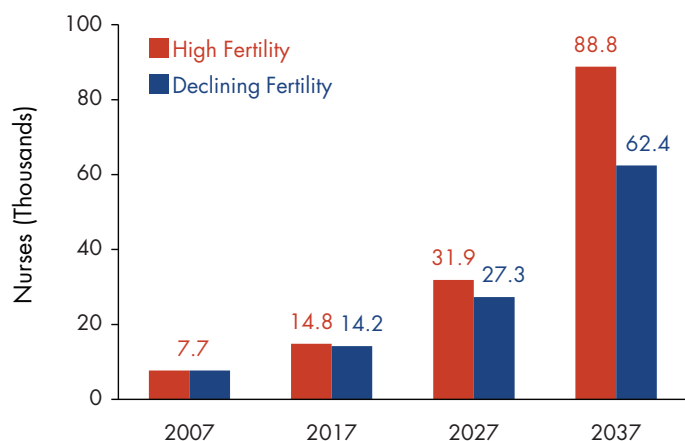
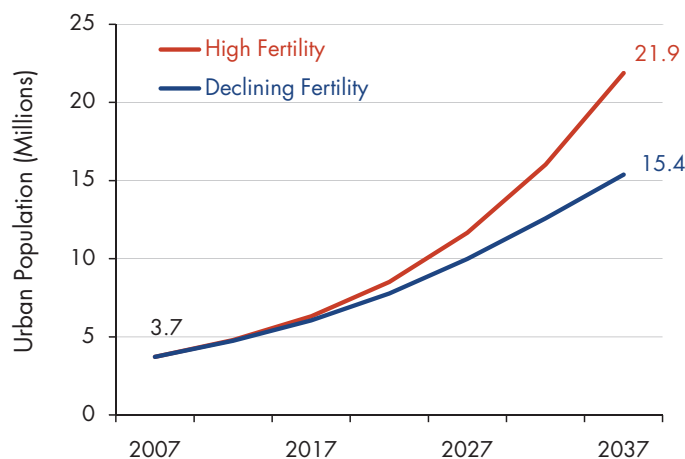


Figure 5. Projected Urban Population Growth



Economy

As evidenced in other countries, declining fertility and a slower rate of population growth can contribute to economic transformation by creating conditions for greater savings and investment, more educational opportunities, and modernisation of agriculture. The Ugandan vision to become a middle-income country can best be achieved by a combination of fast economic growth and a slower rate of population growth. For example, with a 7 percent annual economic growth rate sustained over the entire projection period, Uganda would not achieve middle-income status by 2037 with high fertility continued (Figure 6). With a slower rate of population growth, however, the country could achieve middle-income status before 2037.

Employment

The inability of the economy to generate sufficient jobs results in unrest among the youth as the numbers of unemployed and underemployed continue to swell. The situation is likely to worsen with the growth of the population. With persistent high fertility, annual new job requirements would increase from 476,000 in 2007 to 1,521,000 in 2037 (Figure 7). With declining fertility, annual new job requirements would be 854,000 in 2037. By some reports, only about 100,000 new job seekers found work last year.

Figure 6. Projected GDP per Capita, 7% Growth

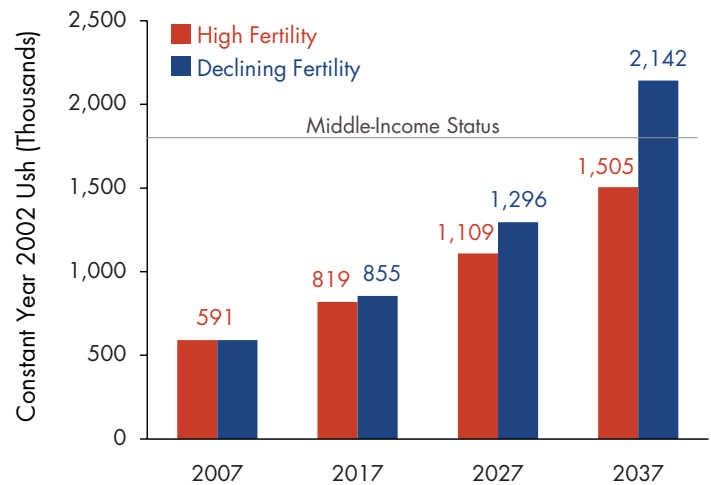
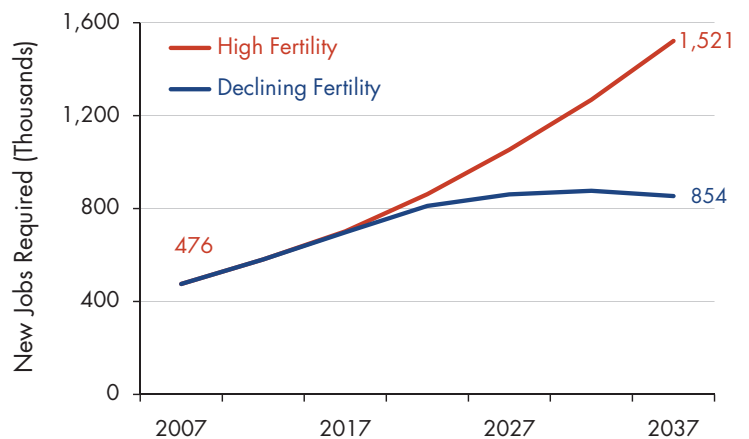


Figure 7. Projected New Job Requirements



Photograph by www.traveladventures.org, 2009

Agriculture and Environment

Modernisation of agriculture is key to achieving the national vision. Rapid population growth works against modernisation by contributing to deforestation, soil erosion, land degradation, and fragmentation of small holdings in many parts of the country. Slower population growth would improve the country's ability to provide food security, would reduce pressures on the land, and would mean that more resources could be invested in agricultural modernisation.

Food security remains a fundamental development objective. The rate of population growth will affect the demand for food. At 2007 per capita production levels, food production would need to increase to 65.1 million tonnes in 2037 with high fertility continued. In contrast, food production would have to rise to 45.7 million tonnes in 2037 under the declining fertility projection.



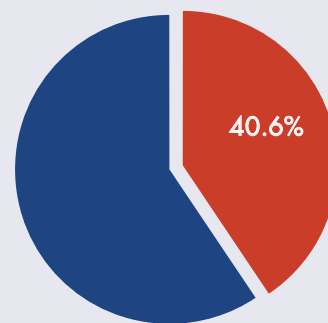
Photograph by Trees for the Future, 2009

Policy Response

Fertility reduction and a lower rate of population growth can be critical to Uganda's ability to achieve its national vision. In turn, family planning to help couples voluntarily plan and space births is an important intervention to reduce fertility. However, contraceptive use is low in Uganda. Only about 17.9 percent of married women of reproductive age use a modern contraceptive. At the same time, the 2006 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey reports an exceptionally high level of unmet need for family planning. About 40.6 percent of married women of reproductive age want to space or limit births but are not using contraceptives (Figure 8).

To satisfy unmet need, Ugandan couples who want to space or limit their births need access to a choice of contraceptives consistently available at affordable prices. Public policies and programmes can be adopted to help satisfy unmet need. Political and other leaders, planners, and programme

Figure 8. Unmet Need for Family Planning



40.6% of married women of reproductive age in Uganda want to space or limit births but are not using contraceptives

implementers can all contribute. By moving to satisfy current unmet need, Uganda will be on track to achieve lower fertility. In the end, good demographic outcomes depend on good policies that empower individuals and couples to make free choices.

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