

POPULATION GROWTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE SUDAN

by

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Introduction :

The Democratic Republic of the Sudan is the largest political unit (total area : 2.5 Km²) in Africa and one of the most sparsely populated (average density : 6 persons to the Km²). Considering the vast agricultural potentialities (the Sudan has total cultivable land of 120 million feddans of which only 16 million feddans or about 13% are presently cultivated), the country with a population of about 16 million (1972), appears to be highly underpopulated. Similar to other underdeveloped countries, Sudan's economy is centred around agriculture and pastoralism, and according to the United Nations the country is considered as one of the 25 least developed nations of the world. Per capita income for the country is estimated at £S 40 (110 US Dollars) per annum, one of the lowest by world standards. As the economy is growing at the rate of only 5% per year, the Sudan is facing real capital shortage to finance various socio-economic projects. Provided with a poor transport system, extensive areas of good agricultural land are rendered inaccessible to commercial exploitation. Nevertheless, economic and social developments which have been taking place since the turn of this century have contributed effectively to the rapid upsurge of population. With an annual rate of natural increase of 2.8%, the population of the Sudan is one of the fastest growing in the world.

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Population Growth :

For the past seventy years the population of this country has been continuously rising (Fig. 1), save for very minor fluctuations. The condominium rule (1898 - 1955) laid the foundations for a well-established administrative system, and made considerable strides to improve the infrastructure and develop the economy. Measures of increased security reduced inter-tribal wars and animosities, and the provision of medical services and the control of tropical diseases have provided favourable conditions for rapid population growth. Progressively the ravages of epidemic diseases such as typhus, yellow fever, malaria, sleeping sickness, smallpox, and cerebrospinal meningitis (CSM) were checked, thereby resulting in a decline in the death rate, particularly among infants. Moreover, the development of agriculture and the economic exploitation of the resources during the early years of the Angle-Egyptian administration restricted the occurrence of famines which used to devastate extensive territories in earlier periods.

The introduction of major economic projects such as the Gezira, Managil, Mechanised Crop Production Schemes of the Gedaref District and Khashm el-Girba between the 1920's and the 1960's encouraged large numbers of people to settle down. As the population became more settled and more prosperous its reproductive capacity became greater. According to the 1955/56 Census, the Sudan had birth and death rates per 1,000 of 52 and 24 respectively, giving rise to a rate of natural increase of just under 3% per year which is considered high by world standards. Continuous improvements in the nutritional standards and medical services are likely to lead to a further acceleration of the growth rate of population. It is important to indicate here that while the death rate has been constantly brought down, the birth rate has continued to be high. The decline in mortality without a corresponding decrease in fertility has been one of the important factors contributing to the rapid growth of population.

A dramatic increase in population has been realized since the late 1940's (Table 1), the period marking the end of the World War and the resumption of international trade. Scientific and

technological developments in the field of agriculture, the introduction of light industry, together with improvements in the media of communications since the 1950's have resulted in a considerable increase in population.

Table (1)

SUDAN : Growth Of Population In Relation To Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P.)

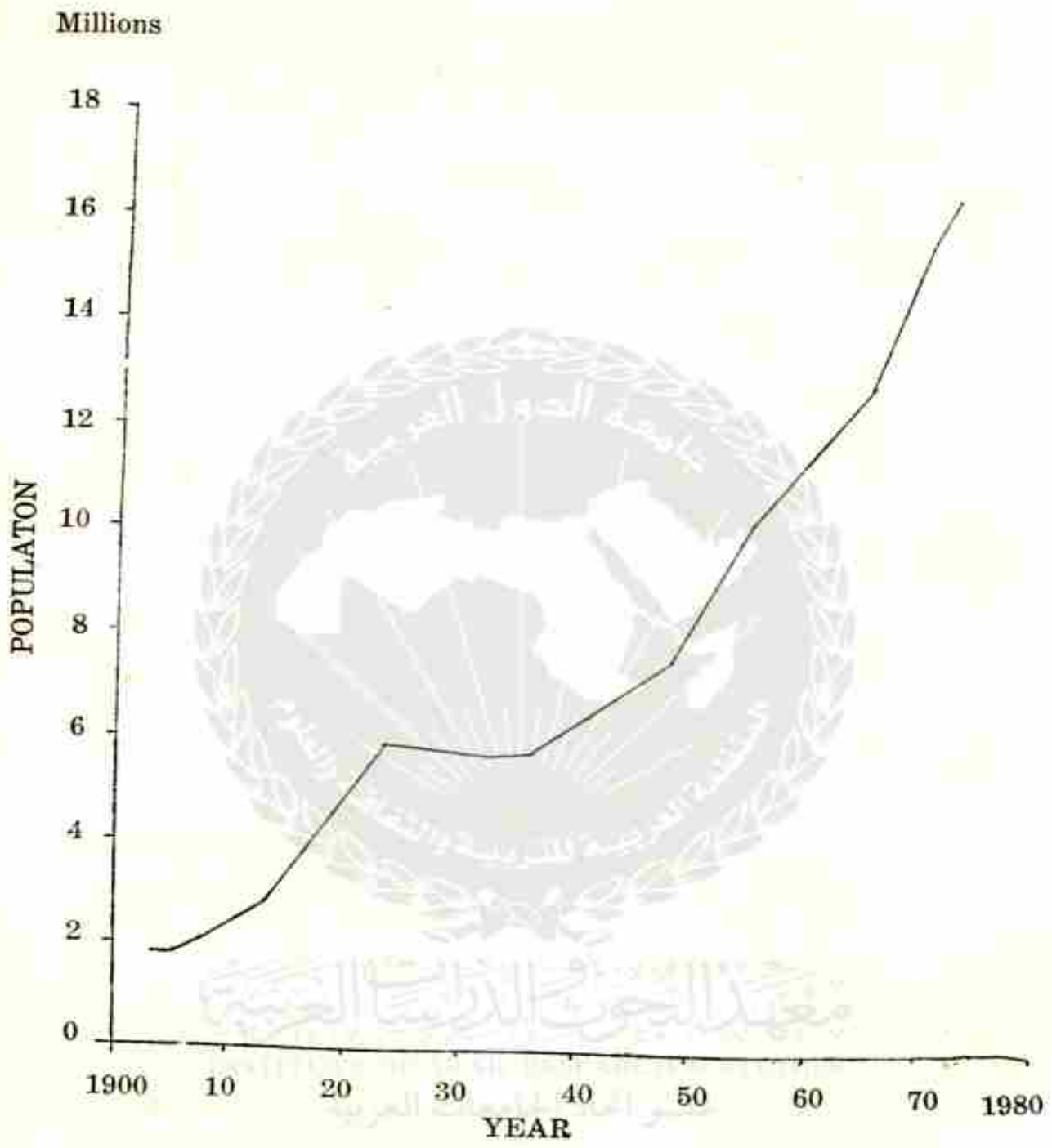
Year	Total Population	G.D.P. in Million £S xx
1903	1,870,000	—
1931	2,706,000	—
1923	5,852,729	—
1932	5,665,806	—
1948	7,547,200	—
1955	10,262,536 ^x	284.2
1965	12,838,840 ^x	486.9
1970	15,300,000	602.6
1971	15,700,000	637.6
1972	16,490,000	—

Source : Sudan Almanac (1903 - 1955) ; Population Census of Sudan (1955/56) ; Department of Statistics, Estimates ; National Income of Sudan, Khartoum (1962) ; National Income Accounts, Khartoum (1973).

x Census Results

xx £S 0.82 = £ 1

If the present rate of growth is to be maintained, the population of this country is expected to double itself by the end of the century. However, population expansion in the Sudan is not only attributed to the natural increase, but immigration of West Africans has contributed substantially. While the First National Population Census (1955/56) puts the number of West Africans residing in the country at 300,000, some authorities put their present



**THE GROWTH OF POPULATION IN THE SUDAN
1900 — 1972**

Fig. I.

number at about one million (6%). The plains of the central Sudan (latitudes 10° to 16° N.) have always had their magnetism, imagined or real, to various groups of West African people. To the Muslims of West Africa to move east is to move towards the promised land of Mecca and Medinah. Although migration across the Sudan plains has been going on since time immemorial, the pilgrimage to the holy places in Arabia encouraged migration into the Sudan and gave it a new dimension. On their way to holy places of Islam large numbers of migrants may settle permanently in the Sudan, especially that the country offers better opportunities to gain a livelihood than their homelands where in certain localities population pressure on agricultural land has already become apparent. Moreover, three successive years of bad rainfall in the Sahelian Zone of Africa have resulted in mass migration from famine-stricken territories in Chad, Niger and Northern Nigeria into the Sudan. These West African immigrants, however, provide a great proportion of the labour force in various agricultural schemes and as such contribute effectively to the national economy.

Although rapid population growth in an underpopulated country like the Sudan may be looked upon as an asset rather than a liability, the fact that the supply of capital is unlikely to keep pace with population expansion points towards a more depressing economic situation. With 46% of the population in the age-group under 15 years the Sudan has an exceptionally 'young' population. A high concentration of population in the younger age-group has considerable repercussions on questions of employment, education and the provision of other social facilities. A large percentage of children means fewer people may be available for employment, in which case the working population has to support a large number of dependents. In this way most if not all of the income earned will be spent on consumables and the individual, the family and the nation at large will find it difficult to accumulate savings to help with investment in major socio-economic projects. Unless some foreign sources of finance are tapped to reactivate and accelerate economic growth, rapid population expansion is bound to lead to a lowering in the living standards.

Population Distribution And Density :

As indicated earlier, with an average density of 6 persons per Km² the Sudan is one of the least settled countries even in the thinly populated continent of Africa. Highest densities of over 40 persons per Km² and 20 persons Km² are recorded in Khartoum and Blue Nile Provinces respectively, the two most developed regions in the country. The distribution of population is uneven being influenced by both physiographic and economic factors. As the Sudan is dominated by a tropical continental type of climate the distribution of population is closely associated with the water sources. Consequently, the bulk of the population is concentrated along the Central Sudan (latitudes 10° to 16° N.) and the Nile Corridor, where the water sources are developed and most of the economic projects are located (Fig. 2). Over 65% of the Sudanese are concentrated within these two major axes of population scatter. Aridity in the north and swamps in the south provide unfavourable conditions for dense settlements. However, the resources offered by the middle zone of moderate rainfall and by the Nile and its tributaries are considerable. In relation to the existing resource potentialities the density of population is very slight. In a sparsely populated country the per capita cost of transportation becomes rather high and as such discourages investment in an efficient network, even though adequate means of transport are essential for the country's socio-economic progress.

As most of the modernized farming and industrial schemes are located along the Nile and farther east, there has been a redistribution of population during the last fifty years in favour of provinces such as Khartoum, Blue Nile, Kassala and Red Sea. Economically depressed areas such as the Southern Sudan (provinces of Upper Nile, Bahr el Ghazal and Equatoria), the Western Sudan (provinces of Kordofan and Darfur), and the Northern Province have provided the labour force needed in areas where major development projects are located. In addition to the migration of people from the traditional to the modern agricultural sector, there has been an active rural-urban migration. The bulk of this townward movement or rural people focuses on a few principal cities of which the Khartoum Conurbation (towns of

Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman) is the most significant. The Khartoum urban complex has 40% of the nation's city-dwellers, and the ten largest towns account for about 70% of the country's urban population. It is in these major cities, and particularly so in the triple capital (Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman) that there is a disproportionate concentration of social and economic functions. The disparity in the level of income between large urban centres and the countryside has resulted in the large-scale exodus of rural people. Moreover, as small towns (towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants) have generally weak economic systems they have come to attract a small proportion of migrants. In fact, a large number of small towns seem to be losing in terms of population to these major cities. With 15% of the population classified as urban, the Sudan is one of the least urbanized countries even by African standards. However, the shift from rural to urban areas is taking place at a remarkable speed. Excessive migration into the large cities has resulted in unemployment, while a number of agricultural projects suffer from shortage of labour. This is simply a manifestation of inadequate and uneconomic utilization of the labour force, particularly in a country where there is need to maximize the productivity of manpower. Improvements of the socio-economic situation throughout the rural areas may act as an impetus to attract more people to the land, thereby increasing economic production. On the whole, the Sudan seems to be one of those developing countries, where an increase in population coupled with an adequate supply of capital will lead to more than proportionate increase in economic growth.

Conclusion :

Unlike several countries in the Third World the Sudan with these enormous agricultural potentialities is capable of supporting a larger population. In fact, underpopulation has been one of the factors contributing to the country's underdevelopment. However, it must be understood that a more adequate utilization of the resources is unattainable through an increase in population alone. In order to accelerate the country's economic development, an increase in population has to be supported by a corresponding

increase in the supply of capital. As the possibilities of accumulating the necessary capital locally are rather remote because of a generally weak economic base, the required investment must be drawn from foreign sources.

In the first place, as the United Nations is fully aware of the incompatibility in the world food supply and that of population expansion, the Sudan with her considerable agricultural wealth, must rank high in the investment priorities of the Organization. Modernization of Sudanese agriculture will certainly help towards solving the world food problem. In the second place, the Sudan, as an Afro-Arab nation can benefit from investment coming from the oil-rich countries of the Middle East and other African countries. If an improvement in the infrastructure and the economy is to be realized, the Sudan, being rich in grains, oil seeds, cotton, horticultural products and livestock, can easily meet the shortages in food supplies both in the Middle East and Africa. Finally, both economic and demographic indicators suggest that future economic growth and population expansion will persist along the Central Sudan and the Nile corridor, where most of the country's resources are located.

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