

The Population Growth Bomb Exploding in Ethiopia

Tsegaye Tegenu, PhD

2015-12-13

The current event in the Oromia region might surprise the media. Though qualitatively different, I see it as a culmination of long term upheaval process that began since the early 2000s. The underlying process that trigger the past and the current political commotion of young adults in Ethiopia is the existing glaring gap between the growing needs of the age group and the availability/supply of resources to meet those needs.

Reflecting back I can say that effects of population growth bomb was ticking since the early 2000. In April 2001, Addis Ababa, the capital city, was engulfed for two days by student and non-student urban youth revolts. Following this revolt, for almost two years, the highly densely populated area of southern Ethiopia saw a number of repeated and continuous revolts spearheaded by students. At that time I discussed with government officials how they planned to diffuse the bomb related to life transition events of young adults: access to education, getting job, earning income, marriage and housing. I was told not to worry about: the government economic policy would expedite the life transition of the youth from one event to another. Massive outmigration to Sub-Saharan African countries, to Middle East and Europe shows that the government social and economic policies could not influence the life chances of young adults, which on the contrary have only got worse.

Since 1994/95 the age structure of the Ethiopian population has changed. The country has started to experience an increase in working age population and an associated decline in the dependent age population. Between 1995 and 2000 the annual growth rate of the working age population and the young dependent population appears to run on an equilibrium position (a stationary state, balanced at a knife-edge). Since 2001, the child dependent population is displaced from its position as a result of the increase of the working age population. In 2008 the country had a total population of 79 million and 48 percent of the working adult population was in the age group 15-29. Today, the percentage of the young adult age group increased to 51 percent of the working

age population. Already at the start of the age structural change in the early 2000s, the country was facing problems of higher unemployment, access to higher public education and provision of housing. The Ethiopian economy not only had to recover from backlogs but also re-adjust to new additional shortages every year since the start of the age structural change in the country.

To understand the problems of life course transition of young adults I do not use ideological assumptions (ethnicity, neo-liberalism, etc.,) and prejudices. My first question is about the number of the age groups. I then multiply the size by standard needs and subtracting those needs from current outputs. The difference what the age groups are supposed to get and what are they getting in practice shows the level of scarcity. In finding solution, I do not focus in reducing their numbers, since number reduction cannot be a substitute for lack of economic growth mechanism in the society. I try to identify mechanism of economic growth, the questions of how and why the country economy should progress as the number of young adults increase. In other words, I use a quantitative lens perspective to understand the life conditions of growing number of young adults and ask whether the economy has the capacity to increase the scale of production and employment at the rate needed to recover from backlogs and re-adjust to new additional shortages every year.

Based on this perspective I warned about food security problems, massive unemployment, rural-urban migration and massive outmigration (see reference below). I advised not to cover oneself in the shelter of ideologies and prejudices. Age structural change is an autonomous force and adopting this perspective helps to estimate how a condition will be in the future. According to the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), by 2027 Ethiopia's population is projected to reach 116 million and the young adult age group will constitute about 47 percent of the adult population. The continuous growth of the young adult group at least in absolute terms increases the number of young people searching for work and production resources. Let alone using force, even dropping the whole idea of the New Addis Ababa Master Plan does not help to cope up with the problems caused by numbers. The government has to focus in choice and implementation of economic policies that transform the structure of output, employment and ownership of resources.

I can be reached at tsegaye.tegenu@epmc.se

References

- [http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/Get the diagnosis right.htm](http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/Get_the_diagnosis_right.htm)
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/GreenRevo Industrial policy Ethiopia.pdf](http://aigaforum.com/articles/GreenRevo_Industrial_policy_Ethiopia.pdf)
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/Green Revolution PartTwo.pdf](http://aigaforum.com/articles/Green_Revolution_PartTwo.pdf)
- http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/reflection_on_gtp.php
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/Green Revolution response1.htm](http://aigaforum.com/articles/Green_Revolution_response1.htm)
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/Green Revolution smallholder.htm](http://aigaforum.com/articles/Green_Revolution_smallholder.htm)
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/Final response on green revolution.htm](http://aigaforum.com/articles/Final_response_on_green_revolution.htm)
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/Problems of Institutional instability.htm](http://aigaforum.com/articles/Problems_of_Institutional_instability.htm)
- http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/condition_forms_industrial.php
- <http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/Population-and-Economic-Growth-Ethiopia.pdf>
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/Future of SmallFarms.pdf](http://aigaforum.com/articles/Future_of_SmallFarms.pdf)
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/miss conceptualizing smallfarms.pdf](http://aigaforum.com/articles/miss_conceptualizing_smallfarms.pdf)
- [http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/structural transformation.pdf](http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/structural_transformation.pdf)
- [http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/Large scale technology ethiopia.pdf](http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/Large_scale_technology_ethiopia.pdf)
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/Idea of Industrialization Ethiopia.pdf](http://aigaforum.com/articles/Idea_of_Industrialization_Ethiopia.pdf)
- [http://aigaforum.com/articles/Speeding Industrialization Ethiopia.pdf](http://aigaforum.com/articles/Speeding_Industrialization_Ethiopia.pdf)
- http://aigaforum.com/articles/export_or_domestic_led.php
- http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/understanding_egypt_rev.php
- [http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/Revisiting Youth Bulge.pdf](http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/Revisiting_Youth_Bulge.pdf)
- http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/reflection_on_gtp.php
- http://aigaforum.com/articles/population_pressure_south_eth.pdf
- [http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/regional dev policy.php](http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/regional_dev_policy.php)
- <http://www.aigaforum.com/article1/Reflection-on-Government-Body-Discussion-on-Good-Governance.pdf>
- <http://aigaforum.com/article1/Debate-over-Industrialization-Policy-Choice-in-Ethiopia.pdf>