

Sub-Saharan Africa: Selected Social and Healthcare-Related Aspects

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Article History	Abstract
Short Communication	<p><i>Environmental damage depends on human activities, being proportional to the population density especially in overpopulated regions. The overpopulation contributes to pollution of air and water thus lowering the life quality of billions. Food production cannot increase infinitely without soil depletion, desertification, deforestation and other forms of environmental damage. Overpopulation is the foremost problem in Sub-Saharan Africa, while the growth perspectives are comparatively high. Some environmental, demographic and social aspects of recent developments in African countries are discussed here. In more developed states, exemplified by South Africa, the number of people increases additionally due to legal and illegal immigration, which is not counterbalanced by the ongoing emigration of citizens of European origin. The country is short of erstwhile hopes and expectations 30 years into democracy. Many citizens, across all social groups, wish for a return to a state of orderliness and national respectability. South African history is globally relevant; the country can be seen as a microcosm of problems, manifest in different ways, and with differing degrees of severity, over the entire planet. The population problem isn't simply that there are too many mouths to feed – neither is it a matter only of solving the energy problem. Efficient solutions would require application of a new ethical principle, namely that no population group, on a national or international scale, may achieve advantages through faster growth, even if such caveat disagrees with numerical democracy.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa, demography, population, environment, climate change.</p>
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Human industrial activities have an effect on climate change and environmental harm (Godlee 2014), and the latter is clearly related to how many people live in an area. In the last quarter of the 20th century, the population rose quicker in nations that were not as industrialised as others (Our World in Data 2025). Too many people can cause poverty, overpopulation, and pollution of air and water (Greep 1998). These things, along with rising unemployment, food and clean water shortages, could make life worse for billions of people. Food production cannot rise indefinitely without resulting in soil depletion, desertification, deforestation, and other forms of environmental degradation. Some people think that people may either lower the birth rate or raise the death rate (Russell and Russell 2000). The latter can happen through starvation, disease, or murder, which has been common

throughout history and prehistory. Even now, damage to weak infrastructure in some places might cause serious shortages of food and clean water. Humanity is in a demographic dead end (Vishnevsky 2005), and so yet, no credible options have been suggested. To make these kinds of changes, some moral rules would need to be changed and new ones would need to be spread. For example, no group of people, whether on a national or international level, should be able to get any benefits because of how many people they have or how fast they are growing. Following this principle could help build trust amongst people. Without procreative rivalry, various groups would be more inclined to coexist peacefully (Jargin 2009, 2015). The equality principle would mostly effect groups of people with greater birth rates.

Overpopulation is the foremost problem in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), while the growth perspectives are the highest. For example, Uganda's populace is expected to increase to over 100 million by 2050, causing deforestation and erosion of croplands (Coombes 2009). According to forecasts, Nigeria's present population of ~238 million will further increase. SSA has the highest incidence of undernourishment, poverty and conflict-related deaths. While poverty remains the foremost challenge, most African countries also grapple with poor infrastructure and productive capacity, conflicts, corruption and mismanagement. At the same time, SSA has to put up with rising food and energy prices. Productivity of agriculture is relatively low; water resources suffer from suboptimal distribution and mismanagement (Barrett and Upton 2013; Sessay et al. 2013). Deforestation and soil erosion have accompanied Ethiopia's tenfold population growth since the past century (Nyssen et al. 2009). Up to 264.2 million individuals in SSA, or 24.1% of the total populace, suffered from undernourishment in 2020. These figures will probably rise (Owolade et al. 2022).

Studies report high rates of child abuse in SSA, with the prevalence as high as ~64% (Meinck et al. 2015). On average, sexual abuse of children is more frequent in SSA than in any other part of the world (Piolanti et al. 2025). One of five girls ≤ 18 years old experiences rape or sexual assault (Cluver et al. 2025). Many cases remain unrecorded (Pitche 2005). In SSA and South Asia, fertility pressures are widespread. Many African men prohibit their wives from using contraception (Baritwa and Joho 2024). The prevalence of past-year reproductive coercion (RC) was the highest in the Democratic Republic of Congo (20.3%) (Wood et al. 2023). Niger has the greatest adolescent birth rate worldwide (Tomar et al. 2025). In the latter country, 11-17% of female adolescents reported RC, the highest percentage being in the 13-14-year age group (DeLong et al. 2020). RC is pervasive in Kenya, with 10% of all births being unwanted and 25% mistimed (Boyce et al. 2020). Approximately 27.3% of pregnant women reported RC during the past year in Ethiopia, with 14.3% facing its most severe forms (Dozier et al. 2025). In Côte D'Ivoire, 49.8% of women have ever experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence, and 18.6% have ever experienced RC (Mahon et al. 2025). Zimbabwe has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence, whereas 33% of girls had unwanted sexual experiences before the age of 18 years (Bengesai and Chikhungu 2025). Furthermore, the prevalence of elder abuse in SSA is relatively high, physical maltreatment being its most frequent variety (Gedfew et al. 2024). In particular, the high prevalence has been recorded in Uganda, where this figure was estimated at 89.0%, being higher than in India (50.2%), Iran (38.5%), China (36.2%) and other developed nations (Atim et al. 2023). South

Africa is experiencing a scourge of violence against women and children. Despite voices of protest, the political will to change this seems to be lacking (Steyn et al. 2024). Females under the age of 18 comprise ~40% of all rapes and other forms of sexual assault (Smith et al. 2010). More than 88% of child rapes are estimated to be never reported (Shaka 2020). The disproportionately high child homicide rate motivated by sexual assault is linked to the belief of hegemonic masculinity (Hoosen et al. 2022). A study found that the homicide rate in children younger than 18 years in South Africa was 5.5 per 100,000, compared to 2.4 reported internationally (Dempers et al. 2018). Of note, sexual violence had been minimized before 1990 but increased thereafter, most dramatically in 2001-2002 (Posel 2005).

Apropos, the conditions in SSA are partly comparable with those in the former Soviet Union (Jargin 2023). The prevalence of family violence in Russia during the last decades has been 45-70 times higher than, for example, in England and France (Besschetnova 2015). According to a recent report, about 40% of all serious violent crimes in Russia are committed within families; 14% of children are subjected to physical abuse, 2 million are regularly beaten by parents while 10% of them lose their lives as a result (Borisov et al. 2020). According to other sources, 40% of children are beaten in families (Agafonova SV et al. 2011); 31% experience sexual abuse and 41% suffer cruel punishments (Tinkova and Katilevskaia 2016). Reportedly, the General Prosecutor's Office records about 2 million children beaten by their caregivers yearly (Aleksieva 2016). In 2017 Vladimir Putin has signed into law an amendment that decriminalizes some forms of domestic violence (Walker 2017). Apropos, physical abuse was described in Putin's biographies (Baker and Glasser 2005; Ressler 2017). It has been hypothesized that he is re-enacting his own and his family's traumas in conditions of intergenerational chain of violence (Ihanus 2022; Elovitz 2022).

Pre-colonial labor systems of bondage and slavery have been gradually annihilated by Europeans (Bjornlund et al. 2022; Phillips 1989). Sons of local elites attended universities. Modern healthcare has been introduced step-by-step, which went along with prolongation of life expectancy. Nonetheless, Europe's history of colonization remains a sore point. It doesn't put the previously colonized countries on morally high ground – or, since the 'winds of change' in the 1950s and 60s – on any other high ground either. The continent's track record since the independence has not been impressive. Conflicts and political emergencies have been simmering in the post-colonial world (O'Dempsey and Munslow 2006). As assessed in terms of socio-political stability, financial standing (including currency exchange rates), human rights issues,

migration statistics, standards of education, and life expectancies, SSA isn't in an enviable condition. Many apologists continue to ascribe the indices of dysfunctionality to the echoes of colonization. Buying into that ragbag of polemic exegeses is difficult for those who try to base their views on fact and honesty.

Arguably the greatest mistake of the colonizing countries was in having granted independence to peoples who were – and remain – unready for democracy, or indeed for successful non-democratic government. Coercive hegemony is essential, in greater or lesser degree, for many countries. This of course is not to say that coercive hegemony necessarily produces satisfactory conditions. It obviously doesn't in many cases. The world's ten poorest countries are in Africa. For example, Nyasaland became independent of Britain, as the new country Malawi, in 1964. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, with more than 50% of its 20-million people living below the poverty datum line, and 25 % in extreme poverty. The pressing challenge of overpopulation has never been confronted. Since the 1960s, the population of Nyasaland has increased five-fold, with no significant progress in the economy.

In highly developed countries like South Africa, the population grows even more because of legitimate and illegal immigration. The first census, which took place in 1911, reported that 22% of the people were White. It was 16% in 1980 and 8.9% in 2011. At the same time, Black people moved to mostly White regions (Rhodie 1969). These trends, together with the slower natural growth rate, led to the lower proportion. Up until the 1970s and early 1980s, this "White flight" (also known as a "brain drain") was largely blamed on the fact that many of the people who left were against apartheid. People are still leaving the country, but the reasons for doing so have changed. Corruption, violence, incompetence, and the decline of public infrastructure, as well as a lack of possibilities for their children, are currently the main reasons why people in this field are leaving South Africa. In 2022, the country's population was predicted to be 60.6 million. The overall number was around 35 million in the early 1990s. A United Nations study from 2020 said that there were 2.8 million "international migrants" living in the country. Stats SA said that in the same year, there were about 3.9 million South Africans who were born in another country. About 80% of the people of South Africa are black, and that number is growing.

South Africa is far short of its hopes and expectations 30 years into democracy. It was to be expected that the huge changes ushered in by the first democratic election, in April 1994, would bring mistakes and difficulties in its immediate wake. All big changes require learning curves, and mistakes are part of the process. Although many citizens were

uncertain and apprehensive about the country's future under majority government, we doubt that these reservations were shared by many of the newly-enfranchised ones. Theoretically, or 'ideally', the last impediments to advancement of the majority had been removed. The way ahead for the 'rainbow nation' was clear. However, for democracy to succeed, several factors need to be in place. These include low levels of interpersonal competition for comfortable existence, freedom of speech, a 'reasonable' level of education of voters – so that they can evaluate the electioneering speeches, claims and promises made by those seeking election, the personal security, the moral fiber and the willingness to take on responsibilities of public office. It also helps if the population is monocultural and monolingual, and if the people who put themselves forward for election are financially secure and comfortable. None of these factors has been present in the countries of the southern African subcontinent.

SSA loses no opportunities to flay the Global North for colonialism. The sins have been exaggerated – for the purpose, obviously, of milking as much restitution as possible from the guilt-laden 'perpetrators'. For similar reasons the benefits of colonialism have been untruthfully denied. In turn, the Global North has been inclined to an inappropriately acute sense of guilt for its earlier treatment of 'the dark continent'. If Africa wants to continue its psycho-financial levy on the hypertrophied boreal conscience, to progress towards respectability and genuine independence, it should commit itself fully, openly and effectively to policies consistent with those of the civilized world, rather than hiving off and adhering, en masse, to deficient ethics. Apropos, the well-known ethical concept of Ubuntu is nothing else but collectivism, once propagated in the Soviet Union, but largely abandoned in today's Russia.

Many South Africans, across all groups, are decent, reasonable people who earnestly wish for a return to a state of orderliness and national respectability. These people deserve better than what the country has become under majority rule. There are – and were – plenty of good things to be said about colonialism. Apartheid too – by no means a South African invention – was an effective means of allowing civilization to get a foothold in an area that was refractory and hostile to it. Fewer, perhaps, about the subcontinent in its post-colonial phase. There are still some good things in South Africa, but most of them are fast-vanishing relics. Democracy creates vulnerabilities. Premature democracy creates a wider spectrum of greater vulnerabilities. The proponents of transformation have shouldered the challenge of weaving, on the loom of a severely defective democracy, something useful into a populace that is in large majority not ready for democracy.

The second part of the ruinous difficulty is that the 'transformation' movement is based not only on the total rejection of South Africa's history, but on equally mindless and complete rejection of colonialism. In fact there was – and is – an enormous amount of merit in much that is reviled under the name of 'colonialism'. Europeans' desire to promote development of the whole population is undeniable (Rhodie 1969). Russia is certainly not exclusion. It is significant that there are Black people of stature and integrity who recognize these important truths. Throughout the 1960s South Africa experienced one of the highest rates of economic growth and prosperity (Meredith 1988). We're throwing away a lot of babies with the bathwater (perhaps not the best figure of speech in a country blighted with severe overpopulation and ongoing pronatalism). This complete rejection of a complex, advanced, powerful, immensely useful and in many ways admirable system – effectively the whole canon of Western values and accomplishments – leaves nothing useful to work with and build on. It's rather like the bolshy teenager who 'rebels' non-selectively against a situation that is essentially sound and beneficial. It threatens to take local society back several hundred years.

Another of the ironies of the situation is that in proposing to hive off from the intellectual main sequence of the Global North, the indigenous African intelligentsia appear committed to ignoring the real global problem – strongly manifest in this region. The problem can be expressed more briefly and succinctly than that of defining or explaining 'transformation'. The seminal problem' (again not a good figure of speech, but apt) is overpopulation. Indeed, 'humans are a threat to humanity' (van Niekerk 2008). What are the real flaws in the Global North? An inability to control population growth, or – worse – failure to control it when they could have done so. The problem could at least be formulated, and sterilization services offered, like in India in the 1950s-1960s. As mentioned above, European colonization generally went along with prolongation of life, which is an indicator of wellbeing. By all means list colonization as a weakness, but have the good sense and honesty to recognize that it brought benefits with it. The authors are amongst the minority who believe that another thing the Global North can legitimately be accused of is abandoning political control and leaving its erstwhile colonies unready to manage democracy. Herbert Morrison, the Labour Party Deputy Prime Minister (1945-1951), said that giving the colonies independence would be "like giving a child of ten a latch-key, a bank account and a shotgun" (Forbes Africa 2015).

South African history is globally relevant; it has been named 'the guiding light for civilization' in the book by Jargin and Robertson (2025). The country can be seen as a

microcosm of global problems, manifest in different ways, and with differing degrees of severity, over the entire planet. Common denominators aren't hard to find. Over the last few decades, prompted largely by the demographic situation, we have become increasingly interested in global socio-ecological problems, most of which centered on overpopulation and rapid growth. It appears inevitable that the global population will become reduced during the present century. Armageddon is almost inevitable, and it appears to gather momentum. The owl of Minerva has not yet spread its wings. The global juggernaut grinds on, continuing inexorable increase in bickering, warring and suffering – much of it below the poverty datum line, and with very little in the way of wholesome prospects. Nature's re-entry will be a breath of fresh air. Africa is amongst the places of confrontation that humanity cannot possibly 'win' on terms that we would interpret as victory. But it will be a salutary defeat, and those who come through the eye of the needle will benefit.

Bertrand Russell (1935) said: 'Good nature is, of all moral qualities, the one that the world needs most, and good nature is the result of ease and security, not of a life of arduous struggle.' The world isn't moving towards a state of increasing ease and security; it is moving away from it. Of course there is hope, but to minimize the risk of disappointment we need to be cautious about what we hope for. If we hope that we will be able to continue with business and 'growth' as usual, with the United Nations eventually achieving all goals, the lion sitting down with the lamb to eat succulent, abundant and unpolluted grass, and the claptrap of those who still believe in the universal hail-fellow-well-met brotherhood of mankind becoming reality, the probability of being disappointed is high. Liberal, left-leaning academics and idealists in pre-democratic South Africa have been heavily disappointed and disillusioned by the new realities. Those of a more realistic bent were by all means disappointed – they too had hoped – but they were shielded from any great surprise by a well-grounded level of doubt in the inherent good sense of humanity en masse.

The population problem isn't simply that there are too many mouths to feed – neither is it a matter only of solving the energy problem. We need some radical changes in attitudes and policies if we are going to win any moral and practical ground before nature steps in and takes over on a scale that will make our current difficulties look like a well-catered picnic. Efficient solutions would require a revision of some stereotypes and an application of new principles, namely that no population group on a national or international scale, may achieve advantages through faster growth, even if such caveat flew in the face of numerical democracy. In conclusion, united Europe should reappear on the African

scene in the interests of both Africans and Europeans; among others, to avoid increasing dependence on certain BRICS-States.

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