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Population growth and its implications for ACP rural development

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Population growth and youth in rural areas: the case of Uganda
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Executive Summary

Uganda's population has grown from 4.8 million people in 1950 to the current estimate of more than 30 million. It is noteworthy that Uganda's population doubled in the last 20 years. At her current population growth rate (3.2% per annum), Uganda's population is expected to double yet again in 22 years and if this trend continues, Uganda's population will reach 130 million people by 2050 [*National Population policy 2008*]. Uganda has a dominant young population, with youth ages 0-29 representing approximately 67 percent or more of total population). This trend however is reflective of other countries within the region and or sub-Saharan Africa.

- Over 70% of the total population in Uganda is not in productive employment hence increasing dependency and poverty
- About 68% of the population is engaged in subsistence farming
- At least 60% of the population is either children or elderly, or unemployed, i.e. not contributing to meaningful national development

There is no doubt therefore, that such a surge in population would put pressure on Government's ability to provide social services like education, health, housing as well as putting increased pressure on land use and the protection of the environment, if the country is to achieve the MDGs to ensure poverty reduction, social transformation and sustainable development needs.

The quality of Uganda's population is also of national concern. Although poverty has reduced considerably from 56% in 1992 to 31% in 2006, infant and maternal mortality remain unacceptably high at 76 per 1000 and 435 per 100,000 live births, respectively. In addition, fertility has remained high at about 7 children per woman over the last 4 decades or so [*National Population policy 2008*].

- *Teenage pregnancy (25% of girls under 18 years)*
 - *Unmet need for FP (15-19 years) 33.8% and 40% over all*
 - *Contraception Prevalence Rate (CPR:15-24 10%) and 24% over all*
- Source (Uganda Health Demographic Survey 2006)*

With limited social services especially health for youth in rural areas, lack of education and few economic opportunities, all have long term adverse effects on the youth population resulting in far reaching consequences on political, economic, social and physical frontiers.

Last year alone Uganda experienced a wave of social unrest in form of violent and destructive street and village demonstrations. Through these events lives were lost, property worth billions destroyed and analysts continue to predict that such behavior mostly if not exclusively propagated by redundant youth, will mostly likely continue in Uganda.

The Majority of youth in Uganda do not have access to participate in economic development opportunities, yet escalated numbers of unemployed redundant youth both, graduates and uneducated continue to rise. This signals Government's challenge and the urgent need to intervene and provide solutions in order to mitigate

social pressure from the ever growing youth population of potentially erratic citizens to become productive citizens.

Critical areas for intervention therefore shall include among others, poverty eradication, through job creation and broader economic development programmes, gender concerns especially women/girl empowerment, equality and equity, and the role of communication and advocacy in promoting social protection, advancing effective legal systems, commitment of resources to support existing policies of agriculture, environmental management, pro-poor donor policies (donor prioritization of youth development programmes across all development sectors) and population management and support especially in sexual and reproductive health and rights such as family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention.

To advocate for the above approach, is to foster the understanding that the current population growth trends in Uganda and else where in sub-Saharan Africa, need to be reversed (promote demographic change and foster economic development).