



Case Study: Gambia's Youthful Population

Gambia is located in West Africa as shown by the map below. It is a small country of only 11,000km².

Why is Gambia's population youthful?

As Gambia is an LEDC, they lack the funds to employ a vast amount of doctors to the area. This means that for every doctor, there are 14,536 patients meaning that the inhabitants don't receive much healthcare. This has contributed to a relatively short life expectancy of just 54 years for a man and 57 years for a woman. The lack of healthcare available has also meant that there is an extremely high infant mortality rate of 73 per 1000 people, even though it is lower than it has been in the past. As many children die at an early age, parents tend to have a large number of children to help with daily tasks, to bring a higher income to the family and to look after the parents when they reach ill health. Gambia has a high birth rate of 40 per 1000 people because of this and in 2003, the average fertility rate was 5.13.

What are the positive and negative impacts?

Due the high birth rate, falling infant mortality rate and improvements in the level of healthcare available, the population has been increasing rapidly. In fact, Gambia's population doubles every 28 years and in 2009, it is estimated to be around 1.7million people.

63.55% of the population is estimated to be aged below 25 years and only 3.36% of the population is aged over 65 years. This had meant that there is a high dependency ratio of 86:100 working people. Each working person has to earn enough to support 1.86 people including themselves, which makes trying to earn a living in an LEDC an even harder task than it already is.

In the future, it will become harder to find employment and accommodation and even more stress will be put on food resources, the infrastructure and the health service, which is already struggling. However, also in the future, there will probably be a large and cheap workforce. Overall, the Gambia's youthful population is not an asset to the country.

What are the policies/solutions being put in place to help the situation?

One of the solutions to the youthful population of Gambia has been "The Gambia Family Planning Radio Project". This was a 2-year education, information and communication campaign which used radio dramas (named "Fakube Jarra") aimed at less-educated women in Gambia in order to better inform them about family planning options and change their attitudes to family life. This project was considered to be a success, based on the findings of a survey carried out on 400 randomly selected men and women in 1991. Those who had heard the radio drama could name more methods of contraception than those who had not and they tended to have more positive attitudes to family life. The most important observation was that those who had heard the radio drama were more likely to use a method of contraception than those who had not. The number of people using contraception increased from 10% to 27%, so it nearly tripled.

The Gambia Family Planning Association were the ones who initiated this radio campaign and they have also made many further attempts to alleviate the problems associated with a youthful population, such as running 8 family planning clinics throughout Gambia. The association focuses mainly on increasing awareness of the contraception available and knowledge of how to use it, whilst also encouraging smaller families and changing the attitudes of the adults living in Gambia. All in all, the results have been very positive.

