CASE STUDY: World Population: Trends and Challenges

The world population growth rate has decreased from its peak of 2 percent per year in the late 1960s to 1.2 percent today. The United Nations projects the world’s population will reach 7 billion persons by 2012, 8 billion by 2027, and 9 billion by 2050.

While the overall population of the world will increase throughout the next four decades, considerable diversity is expected in the population growth of various countries. The population of many countries, especially those of Africa and Asia, will significantly increase; yet, fertility levels in some developed countries are so low that it will lead to a significant population decline. Population geographers will continue to closely watch this trend along with the trends of urbanization and population ageing.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Population Increase</th>
<th>B. Population Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem. Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Urbanization

In 1950, 30 per cent of the world’s population lived in urban areas. Today, urbanized areas account for approximately 50 per cent of the world’s population, and this figure is expected to reach 61% by 2030. In developed countries this process of urbanization is already very advanced, and it is expected to reach 82% by 2030. In less developed countries, however, the number of urban dwellers is only expected to reach 50% by 2017.
Today's cities are sites of social advancement, wealth creation and instruments of globalization; but with urbanization comes many problems. Pollution, for example, is aggravated by traffic and by the increasing use of heating and air conditioning. Likewise, poverty creates problems by contributing to urban sprawl and decay. In many cases, city infrastructure has not been extended or improved since it was originally built. Railways, bridges, sewers, water mains and major roads have not been able to keep up with expansion and create enormous economic and social costs. Such problems create many challenges.
**Population Ageing**

Another challenging population trend in the world is that of population ageing. Throughout the twentieth century, the proportion of older persons (60 years or over) has risen substantially and will continue to rise well into the twenty-first century (Figure 1).

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**Proportion of world population aged 60 years or over: 1950 - 2050**

It is estimated that by the year 2020, of the more than 1 billion people aged 60 years and older, more than 700 million will be from developing nations. Of significant interest to population geographers is the rate at which population ageing is taking place in developing countries. For example, in some developing countries an increase of between 200% and 300% may occur in the elderly population in a period of only 35 years.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

Percentage of people over age 60 in 1999 and 2050 in developing African countries
Africa is presently the continent with the youngest population and is on the course of transition to the ageing process. With regards to the social and economic problems associated with this worldwide phenomenon, for Africa it is problem that has to take a backseat to more pressing demographic issues such as: rapid population growth, high infant and child mortality, and excessive urban expansion.

1. According to Table 1 in the case study, the top six countries with increasing populations are developing. In comparison, the top six countries with declining populations are developed. Use two reasons to explain this trend.
2. Developed countries have problems with aging populations. Use three reasons to explain why developing countries do not currently experience this problem.
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KEY

2 marks for each of the two reasons.
• high birth rates in developing countries as opposed to developed countries
• increased health care in developing countries, whereas developed countries have already achieved a higher level of death control
• any other reason associated with high birth rates in developing countries, the opposite exists in developed countries

Max 4

2 marks to explain each of three reasons.
• high birth rates in developing countries
• low life expectancy
• low levels of health care and disease control
• low levels of sanitation, water quality, nutrition
• high poverty levels
• lack of long term care for elderly
• civil war reducing adult population

Max 6

/ 10