ZELEK Sebastian 26/03/2015

History-Geography

“Do demographic characteristics of Gambia affect it's development?”

The countries of the sub-Saharan Africa are renowned to be some of the poorest countries of the Earth. Gambia is one of these countries, having a very poor economy, and a very young population.

Gambian development is heavily impacted by Gambia's young population, negatively impacting the quality of life in Gambia. In fact, Gambia's GDP per capita is only around 1000 pounds a year, which puts it amongst the last on the list. This already creates a set of problems: many are forced to live in poverty, with practically no hope to improve their status and even if they end up with some form of income, they need to use it to support their large families. Due to these poor life conditions, Gambia experiences a very high birth rate: 40 per 1000, as well as a high maternal mortality rate: for each 1000 children, 11 mothers will die at childbirth. That situation is not helped by Gambia's high infant mortality rate: 73 out of 1000 children won't live a year, 1/10th won't live more than 5 years, and the life expectancy levels: 53 years for men and 57 for women. All of this draws the Gambian population as very young, with many children, and not enough people of working age, which furthers collapses Gambia's development by creating a very high dependency ratio: 92.3%, which already shows how much the young population of Gambia is a strain on the Gambian population; practically each working individual needs to support himself and someone else. This shows that the population just doesn't have the means to support itself and it's growth, and mothers try to overcompensate for that by having many children, further accelerating the growth of the population, that is predicted to double every 28 years.

This constantly increasing youthful population creates a big range of difficulties for Gambia's development, successfully bringing it to a halt. As seen before, there's an enormous strain on financial resources: 48.4% of the population in 2010 lived under the poverty line, and the other half isn't that better off. People need to support their very large families and others with very limited money. That causes severe lacks in basic needs, like a largely lacking sanitary network, if not non-existing, common malnutrition, homes are often overcrowded and don't have electricity. But these problems don't stop in housing: education also suffers greatly from the lack of money and infrastructure. Schools in Gambia often find themselves with very old books, overcrowded class rooms and a lack of teachers, who can work up to 12 hours a day. But education isn't poor only because of that: 1 in 3 14 year olds need to work to support their family, restraining their possibilities to educate themselves. Natural resources are also abused by the constantly increasing population: desertification of the forests is a daily occurrence, with people hunting for firewood and things to sell, causing the desert to advance, further restraining the Gambian living space and worsening their perspectives for the future: if the current rate of deforestation continues, in 50 years there will be no more forests left in Gambia. The ever increasing young population just continues to increase the heavy strain on these already limited resources: people need to live with poor financial conditions, very limited healthcare, struggling education and quickly disappearing natural resources.

There is an attempt from the government and NGO's to limit the impact and the growth of the population, notably with the information campaigns about contraceptives and family planning, as well as improving the management of resources and relieving the strain from the educational system. However, Gambia's development is still restrained by the severe demographic problems that will probably take a couple of decades to phase out. Suffices to say that if Gambia wants to improve and develop, it needs to take care of it's strongly youthful population, because so far there's just too much young and poorly educated people living in poor conditions.