

**KEYNOTE PRESENTATION DELIVERED BY THE SPECIAL ASSISTANT
TO THE PRESIDENT ON YOUTH & STUDENTS AFFAIRS – HON. NASIR
SAIDU ADHAMA AT THE EU-NIGERIA BUSINESS FORUM, HELD AT
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Nigerian Growing Population: Risks and Opportunities

Protocols,

I am deeply honoured to have the opportunity to give this brief keynote presentation on a matter I feel very passionate about. Nigeria is indeed the most populous black nation on earth, with arguably one of the highest population growth rates.

With an estimated population of about 186 million people, Nigeria experienced annual population growth of about 2.7% between 2010 and 2015, according to the United Nations.

Another UN report in 2016 revealed that at current growth rates, Nigeria would become the 3rd most populous nation on earth with an estimated population to surpass over 300 million people by 2050. To any policy maker, this statistic presents a very disturbing revelation, which, as the title of this presentation indicates, presents risks and opportunities.

While some population experts believe a growing population poses a major challenge unless properly harnessed, others argue that it presents a massive potential work force that can drive development and growth.

RISKS

What is risk? A basic definition of this means “a situation involving exposure to danger”. Based on this, and given the context previously laid, it becomes evident that with the current infrastructure deficits in Nigeria, a rapidly increasing population means, the resources available per person are reduced even further, potentially leading to increased poverty, malnutrition, and other large population-related problems like migration, crime, unemployment, and social unrest.

Other risk factors associated with a growing population are:

- Climate change associated with increased human activities
- High energy consumption
- Food insecurity
- Strained public service infrastructure
- Militancy/ insurgency, etc

OPPORTUNITIES:

A report published by the USAID Population Reference Bureau, reveals that Africa’s young people will be the driving force behind economic prosperity in future decades. According to the report, this can only be achieved if policies and programs are in place to enhance their opportunities.

The report further reveals that a cycle of positive outcomes can result from having a larger, better-educated workforce with fewer children to support.

Just recently, I was watching an interview on the CNN programme; Market Place Africa, with the CEO of Bata – the swiss based shoe manufacturer.

In the interview, the CEO was discussing the company's growth strategy and was highlighting that a market like Nigeria, with annual birth rates exceeding that of the EU combined, presents consumption opportunities for his company's products.

The perception that “a larger population means larger markets for goods and services”, is also held by numerous manufacturers and service providers, local and foreign.

However, I prefer to look at the opportunity a larger population presents, from a perspective of production, not consumption. An example frequently given from this perspective is that of China.

Over the past few decades, China's large population has helped them greatly in terms of workforce and human development. They have been able to harness their huge population from a consuming population to a producing one.

This however, is only made possible when you have a skilled and educated population. The large population alone is not enough to make it productive.

In setting the tone for the upcoming panel discussion, I would like to reiterate the importance of investing in youth. A growing population means a growing youth population.

With the population demographics of Nigeria indicating a total population of about 186 million people as at 2016, with 60 million people (or 32%) between the ages of 15 – 39, and 80 million (43%) between the ages of 0 -14, it is clear to us that as much as this population provides a market for consumption, it has a greater potential of becoming a very productive one, given the right support.

In concluding, it is my expectation that the discussions in the subsequent panel would explore viable options that would ensure that we harness the vast youth population we have, by educating and providing them with required skills to make the country a production hub for the continent, and a true giant of Africa.

This discussion could not have come at a better time as my office partners with local and foreign development organisations such as the EU Commission, and organizations within the United Nations System to take advantage of the Third Industrial Development Decade for Africa (2016 – 2025).

I thank you for listening and God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.