International Journal of Academic Accounting, Finance & Management Research(IJAAFMR)
ISSN: 2643-976X
Vol. 10 Issue 1 January - 2026, Pages: 52-59

Population Growth, Demographic Change And Global Food Security: Challenges And Policy Responses

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Abstract: *Population growth and demographic change are central determinants of global food security, particularly in developing regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. This paper examines the complex interplay between population dynamics and food systems, highlighting how rapid population expansion, youthful age structures, urbanization, and migration exacerbate challenges of food availability, access, utilization, and stability. Adopting a non-empirical, conceptual, and theoretical approach, the study draws on secondary data from scholarly literature, policy documents, and international reports, with a focus on Nigeria as a case study. Theoretical perspectives, including Malthusian theory, Boserupian hypothesis, demographic transition, and integrated population-food security frameworks, provide a lens to understand how demographic pressures influence agricultural demand, consumption patterns, and supply chain vulnerabilities. Key challenges identified include land scarcity, climate and environmental stresses, malnutrition, socio-economic inequalities, and weak policy implementation. The paper evaluates policy responses and interventions, such as family planning, climate-smart agriculture, urban food programs, social safety nets, and international cooperation, demonstrating how integrated strategies can mitigate population-driven food insecurity. Implications for sustainable development are explored, emphasizing the need to align population policies, agricultural productivity, and nutrition-sensitive programs with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). The study concludes that achieving resilient and equitable food systems requires multi-level, evidence-based approaches that integrate demographic management, technological innovation, governance, and community participation. By synthesizing demographic and policy insights, this paper offers actionable guidance for policymakers, development practitioners, and international stakeholders to strengthen global food security in the face of rapid population growth.*

Keywords-Population growth, Demographic change, Food security, Nigeria, Sustainable development, Policy interventions

INTRODUCTION

Population growth and demographic change are central to contemporary discussions of food security. Food security is defined as a situation in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], as cited in Owoo, 2021). Global demographic trends particularly rapid population increases in developing regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa are projected to intensify the demand for food in the coming decades, making it increasingly difficult to achieve food security without substantial improvements in production, distribution, and stability of food systems (UNDP, 2012; Owoo, 2021). Sub-Saharan Africa's exceptionally high population growth rates are expected to challenge food availability and access, especially among economically vulnerable groups, by increasing consumption demands and food needs (UNDP, 2012). In Nigeria, for example, demographic factors such as household size and fertility rates are significantly associated with food insecurity, with larger households more likely to experience inadequate access to food (Owoo, 2021). These patterns illustrate the complex link between population dynamics and the structural conditions of food systems at both national and regional levels. The rapid population growth in Africa and Nigeria in particular, continues to pose profound challenges for sustainable development. Nigeria remains the most populous country in Africa and among the fastest-growing in the world, with estimates suggesting it could become the third most populous nation globally by 2050 (UN World Population Prospects, 2017). While demographic expansion can potentially drive economic growth, it simultaneously places increasing pressure on basic social services and essential resources including food, healthcare, water, and education exacerbating inequalities and exposing structural weaknesses in development planning. In recent years, Nigeria has faced a deepening food security crisis. According to the latest Cadre Harmonisé analysis, over 30 million Nigerians are experiencing acute food and nutrition insecurity, with projections suggesting this could rise to nearly 35 million during the 2025–2026 lean season if urgent action is not taken (FAO & partners, 2025). Despite modest improvements in some food security indicators, Nigeria continues to host the highest number of food-insecure people globally, driven by economic hardship, high food prices, conflict, and climate-related disruptions (FAO & partners, 2025). These realities underscore that, even as the population grows access to adequate and nutritious food remains out of reach for millions,

aggravating poverty and limiting human development outcomes. Nigeria's classification among the most severe food crisis countries, coupled with rising inflation and insecurity, further exacerbates the challenges faced by vulnerable households. The Nigerian Red Cross warns that over 33 million Nigerians could experience severe hunger and malnutrition in 2026 without coordinated interventions, highlighting the urgent need for policies and programs that address both demographic pressures and food system resilience (Red Cross Society, 2025). These trends reveal a troubling gap between population growth and the country's capacity to ensure consistent food availability and access, emphasizing the need to understand the population–food security nexus in policy formulation and planning. Meeting the nutritional needs of both the current and projected population will require long-term strategic investments in agriculture, infrastructure, and social safety nets. Agricultural research initiatives, such as those led by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), continue to offer innovations in crop development; however, their impact on national food security remains limited without broader adoption and scaling (Muhammad Salahudeen et al., 2024). With millions of youths entering the labor market annually, the absence of effective population and food security policies further threatens progress toward sustainable development goals.

The interplay between population growth, food availability, and food affordability raises several critical questions: What are the primary drivers of population growth in Nigeria, and how does this relate to food insecurity? Have existing policies sufficiently addressed the demographic pressures on food supply systems? This paper addresses these questions through a structured analysis, comprising the introduction, theoretical and conceptual discussions, literature review, challenges of food security in Nigeria, data, and concluding observations.

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Understanding the relationship between population growth and food security is crucial for informing policy frameworks that aim to achieve sustainable development outcomes. As populations continue to grow especially in developing countries with high fertility rates and urbanization food systems face increasing pressure to produce, distribute, and make affordable nutritious food accessible to expanding populations. A singular focus on increasing food production is insufficient; issues such as unequal access, economic inequality, and demographic structure play significant roles in determining who can obtain adequate nutrition (Investigation and Quantification of Food Insecurity in Nigeria, 2025). Furthermore, demographic pressures intersect with other systemic factors such as poverty, climate change, conflict, and socio-economic inequalities, making food security a complex policy challenge that requires integrated responses. The significance of this study lies in its potential to deepen understanding of how population dynamics impact food security outcomes and to identify policy avenues that enhance food systems resilience. This is particularly relevant for regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which are projected to experience the highest rates of population growth and where food insecurity remains pervasive (UNDP, 2012). Addressing these challenges is essential for achieving global development goals such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2, which aims to end hunger and ensure access to nutritious food for all by 2030.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to assess the impacts of population growth and demographic change on global food security and to identify effective policy responses that enhance food systems resilience. To achieve this aim, the study has the following specific objectives:

1. To conceptualize the relationship between population dynamics and food security, including key terms and underlying mechanisms.
2. To analyze how major demographic drivers such as population growth, age structure, and urbanization affect food production, access, and distribution.
3. To evaluate contemporary policy responses and strategies addressing food security challenges in the context of demographic change.
4. To propose evidence-based policy recommendations that can guide governments, international organizations, and stakeholders in strengthening food security outcomes globally.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a non-empirical, conceptual, and theoretical approach, drawing on existing scholarly literature, policy documents, and institutional frameworks related to population dynamics, food security, and sustainable development. The analysis relies on secondary data sourced from peer-reviewed journals, government and intergovernmental reports, United Nations publications, and international development agencies, with particular attention to Nigeria and comparable high population-growth contexts globally. Methodologically, the study is interpretive and integrative, aiming to synthesize demographic, socio-economic, and policy perspectives rather than collect or analyze primary data. Through systematic review and thematic analysis, the paper identifies key drivers of population growth, examines their influence on food production, access, and distribution, and evaluates existing policy interventions. Particular focus is given to demographic factors such as high fertility, urbanization, and household structures, and how they interact with food security challenges. These insights provide a basis for evidence-informed recommendations to strengthen food systems, enhance resilience, and align population policies with sustainable development objectives.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concept of Population Growth and Demographic Change

Population growth refers to the increase in the number of individuals in a population over time, influenced by fertility, mortality, and migration patterns (Bongaarts, 2016). Demographic change encompasses shifts in population size, structure, and distribution, including age composition, household size, urbanization, and migration trends (UNFPA, 2019). Rapid population growth, particularly in developing regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, is often associated with high fertility rates, declining mortality due to improved healthcare, and rural-to-urban migration (United Nations, 2017). These changes not only affect the size of the population but also reshape demand for resources, infrastructure, and services, including food, education, housing, and healthcare. In Nigeria, the population is projected to reach over 400 million by 2050, making it a critical case study for understanding the implications of demographic change on development and resource allocation (UN World Population Prospects, 2017). High population growth combined with a youthful age structure intensifies the demand for food and other basic necessities, highlighting the importance of integrating population dynamics into national development and food security planning (Owoo, 2021).

Food Security

Food security is a multi-dimensional concept that goes beyond mere food production. According to the FAO (1996), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. Food security is commonly assessed through four interrelated pillars: availability, access, utilization, and stability (FAO, 2008). Food availability refers to the physical presence of food through domestic production, imports, and reserves. Food access relates to households' ability to obtain sufficient food, influenced by income, market prices, and social entitlements. Food utilization concerns the proper biological use of food, which depends on nutritional quality, preparation, and health status. Food stability ensures that the other three dimensions are maintained over time, even in the face of shocks such as conflict, economic crises, or climate events. In Nigeria, rapid population growth, urbanization, and economic inequality challenge these pillars, contributing to high levels of food insecurity. Recent reports indicate that over 30 million Nigerians face acute food and nutrition insecurity, demonstrating the urgent need for interventions that address both demographic pressures and structural challenges in food systems (FAO & partners, 2025).

Theoretical Perspectives Linking Population Dynamics and Food Security

Several theoretical frameworks help explain the relationship between population growth and food security. Among the most widely cited are: Malthusian Theory of Population: Proposed by Thomas Malthus (1798), this theory suggests that population growth tends to outpace the growth of food production, leading to shortages, famine, and poverty unless checked by natural or preventive measures. While historically criticized for its simplicity, the theory remains relevant in highlighting the potential pressures of rapid population growth on finite resources. Boserupian Hypothesis: Ester Boserup (1965) argued that population pressure can stimulate agricultural innovation and intensification. According to this perspective, increasing population density can drive technological advancements in farming, leading to higher productivity and potentially mitigating food insecurity. Demographic Transition Theory: This model explains how population growth changes with socioeconomic development. Countries typically transition from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates as they industrialize and improve living standards (Notestein, 1945). Understanding where Nigeria and other developing countries fall within this transition helps policymakers anticipate future food demand and plan agricultural and social interventions accordingly. Integrated Population-Food Security Frameworks: Contemporary approaches recognize that population growth, food production, and socio-economic factors are interlinked. For instance, the FAO's food security frameworks consider population growth as a driver of demand, while also emphasizing governance, infrastructure, and access as mediating factors (FAO, 2008; UNDP, 2012). These frameworks guide policy development that integrates demographic insights with agricultural planning, market regulation, and nutrition programs. In sum, conceptualizing population growth, demographic change, and food security within these theoretical perspectives allows for a comprehensive understanding of how demographic pressures influence food systems, and provides a foundation for evidence-based policy responses.

POPULATION DYNAMICS AND GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Population growth, urbanization, and demographic shifts profoundly influence global food systems. Increasing population directly raises food demand, often outpacing domestic production, which creates supply gaps, higher prices, and reduced access, particularly for low-income households (Abdulmalik & Njiforti, 2018; UN DESA, 2025). Rural-to-urban migration alters food supply chains by reducing agricultural labor in rural areas while increasing dependence on purchased food in cities, stressing logistics, infrastructure, and storage (FAO & partners, 2025; Taylor et al., 2023). Additionally, population structure including age distribution, household size, and income shapes consumption patterns, with urban populations demanding more processed and protein-rich foods, further pressuring food systems (CGIAR, 2024; Owoo, 2021). Together, these dynamics complicate food production, distribution, and access,

highlighting the need for resilient and sustainable food systems that can accommodate demographic transformations.

Population Growth and Agricultural Demand

Population growth directly influences agricultural demand by increasing the number of people that food systems must feed. As populations expand, especially in developing countries, food demand typically rises faster than domestic production, creating pressure on agricultural sectors to scale up output (Abdulmalik & Njiforti, 2018). In Nigeria, for example, population growth has historically outpaced growth in food production, resulting in a production–demand gap that necessitates increased food imports to meet domestic consumption needs. This imbalance often leads to higher food prices and reduced access to affordable food, particularly for low-income households. Moreover, global food systems are vulnerable because food production already occupies large shares of habitable land and freshwater resources, meaning that added demand from a growing population intensifies pressure on natural ecosystems and may undermine long-term sustainability (UN DESA, 2025).

Urbanization, Migration, and Food Supply Chains

Urbanization and migration are major demographic processes that reshape food supply chains. As more people move from rural to urban areas, the structure of food systems changes: rural agricultural labor declines while demand for market-supplied food increases in cities (FAO & partners, 2025; Taylor et al., 2023). In Nigeria, rapid rural-to-urban migration has led to a significant rise in urban populations that largely depend on purchased food rather than self-produced agricultural goods, creating stress on food supply networks and contributing to price volatility (Almujtaba & Almani, 2023). This shift also increases reliance on longer, more complex supply chains, which must transport food from rural producers to urban markets. However, inefficiencies such as poor infrastructure, high transportation costs, and inadequate storage facilities can reduce supply chain effectiveness, leading to increased post-harvest losses and limiting the availability of affordable food in urban centers.

Demographic Structure and Consumption Patterns

The structure of a population including age distribution, household size, and income levels affects consumption patterns and therefore food demand. Urban populations, for example, tend to have different dietary preferences compared to rural populations, often leading to higher demand for processed and convenience foods (CGIAR, 2024). Urban residents may also have higher incomes that support increased consumption of protein-rich foods, including livestock products, which place additional pressure on food systems. Household size is also significant: larger households generally consume more food but may experience lower overall food security due to limited per-capita resources (Owoo, 2021). As Nigeria's population continues to grow and urbanize, consumption patterns are shifting from predominantly staple crops toward diversified diets, including imported and processed foods, which influences both national food demand and international trade dynamics. Taken together, these demographic changes, rapid population growth, urbanization, and shifts in population structure play a central role in shaping global food systems by increasing demand, complicating supply chains, and altering consumption patterns. Addressing these dynamics is essential for designing resilient food systems capable of ensuring sustainable food security in the face of ongoing demographic transformation.

CHALLENGES TO FOOD SECURITY FROM POPULATION DYNAMICS

Population growth and demographic change present multifaceted challenges to food security, particularly in countries like Nigeria where rapid population expansion coincides with economic, environmental, and social vulnerabilities. The challenges can be broadly categorized into land scarcity and agricultural pressure, climate change and environmental stress, malnutrition and dietary inequalities, and socio-economic and policy constraints. These factors interact to create a complex food security landscape, requiring a nuanced understanding for effective policy intervention.

1. Land Scarcity and Agricultural Pressure

Rapid population growth increases demand for arable land, placing pressure on agricultural systems to meet rising food requirements. In Nigeria, the population is projected to exceed 400 million by 2050, which will require a substantial increase in domestic food production (UN World Population Prospects, 2017). However, arable land per capita is shrinking due to urban expansion, industrial development, and competing land uses, which limit the area available for farming (IPC Abstracts, 2025). Land scarcity also contributes to intensification of farming practices, often without sufficient soil management or sustainable techniques, leading to land degradation, reduced fertility, and desertification, particularly in northern Nigeria (Abdulmalik & Njiforti, 2018). Smallholder farmers, who constitute the majority of Nigeria's food producers, often lack access to mechanization, improved seeds, and irrigation systems, further reducing productivity. Consequently, increased population growth leads to an intensification of demand–supply gaps, creating higher reliance on food imports, inflation in food prices, and increased vulnerability among low-income households (FAO, 2025).

2. Climate Change and Environmental Stress

Climate change amplifies the challenges posed by population growth. Changes in rainfall patterns, prolonged droughts, flooding, and rising temperatures affect agricultural

productivity by disrupting planting cycles, reducing crop yields, and increasing pest and disease prevalence (FAO & partners, 2025). For example, northern Nigeria has experienced longer dry seasons and erratic rainfall, leading to reduced crop output and increased food insecurity (AP News, 2025). Environmental degradation, including deforestation, overgrazing, and soil erosion, reduces the resilience of ecosystems to cope with increasing demographic pressures. Combined with high population density in arable regions, these environmental stresses can lead to overexploitation of natural resources, threatening both agricultural sustainability and biodiversity (Springer, 2025). Climate-induced shocks disproportionately affect smallholder farmers, who often lack the resources to adapt to changing conditions, intensifying regional disparities in food access.

3. Malnutrition, Hunger, and Dietary Inequalities

Population growth exacerbates malnutrition and hunger by increasing food demand while limiting per-capita food availability. In Nigeria, over 30 million people face acute food insecurity, and this number is projected to reach nearly 35 million by 2026 if current trends continue (FAO & partners, 2025). Acute hunger is concentrated in conflict-affected northern regions, where agricultural production is disrupted, and humanitarian access is limited (Reuters, 2025). Population dynamics, such as large household sizes, high fertility rates, and a youthful age structure, also influence dietary outcomes. Larger households may consume more food in absolute terms but often have lower per-capita access, contributing to micronutrient deficiencies and stunted growth in children (Owoo, 2021). Urbanization shifts consumption patterns toward processed and protein-rich foods, which increases demand for imports and places additional pressure on local production systems. Consequently, dietary inequalities emerge between urban and rural populations, and among socioeconomic groups, reinforcing patterns of malnutrition and under nutrition. Furthermore, malnutrition is not only a consequence of insufficient food but also of inequitable access, poor healthcare, and limited nutrition education, all of which are exacerbated by rapid population growth. The combination of rising demand and limited capacity to meet nutritional needs intensifies vulnerability among children, pregnant women, and elderly populations, highlighting the multidimensional nature of food insecurity.

4. Socio-economic and Policy Constraints

Socio-economic and governance challenges further exacerbate the impact of population dynamics on food security. In Nigeria, poor policy implementation, corruption, and weak institutional capacity hinder effective agricultural development and food system planning (RSIS International, 2025). Programs designed to enhance food production and reduce hunger often face delays, mismanagement, and limited scaling, leaving many smallholder farmers without adequate support. Conflict and insecurity, particularly from insurgent groups in northern Nigeria, displace millions of people from agricultural lands, reducing both local production and household access to food (AP News, 2025). Economic challenges, including high inflation and limited access to credit, further constrain households' ability to purchase food. In urban areas, growing populations increase demand for food in markets, yet inadequate infrastructure and logistics lead to post-harvest losses, price volatility, and reduced availability, especially for perishable items. Population growth also interacts with policy gaps in social protection and agricultural innovation, which limits resilience against shocks. Without policies that integrate population projections with agricultural planning, food systems struggle to adjust to increasing demand, creating persistent food insecurity and heightened vulnerability among economically marginalized groups (UNDP, 2012). The challenges described above highlight that population dynamics and food security are deeply interlinked, with demographic pressures exacerbating vulnerabilities created by environmental, social, and economic factors. Addressing these challenges requires multidimensional strategies, including sustainable land management, climate-smart agriculture, nutrition-sensitive social programs, and robust governance mechanisms. Only by integrating demographic insights into agricultural, economic, and social policies can countries like Nigeria ensure resilient and equitable food systems in the face of continuing population growth.

POLICY RESPONSES AND INTERVENTIONS

Addressing the complex challenges posed by population growth and demographic change on food security requires multi-level policy interventions. Strategies must simultaneously manage population pressures, enhance agricultural productivity, improve food system resilience, and ensure equitable access to nutritious food. These include:

1. Family Planning and Population Management Policies

Population management policies, including family planning programs, are critical for moderating demographic pressures on food systems. High fertility rates, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria, contribute to rapid population growth, which intensifies food demand and strains agricultural resources (Bongaarts, 2016). Implementing comprehensive reproductive health programs, increasing access to contraception and promoting awareness of family planning options can reduce unintended pregnancies and moderate population growth (UNFPA, 2019). For instance, Nigeria's National Population Policy (2004, updated 2020) aims to stabilize population growth by improving access to reproductive health services, educating women and youth on fertility choices, and promoting smaller family norms. Evidence suggests that integrating population policies with food security initiatives can mitigate demographic pressures and enhance the capacity of food systems to meet national needs (Owoo, 2021).

2. Sustainable Agricultural Practices and Innovation

Sustainable agricultural development is central to enhancing food security in the context of population growth. Climate-smart agriculture, mechanization, improved seed varieties, and irrigation infrastructure can increase productivity while minimizing environmental degradation (FAO, 2020). The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Nigeria has developed high-yield, pest-resistant crop varieties, including cassava, maize, and plantain, which have the potential to improve food availability (Muhammad Salahudeen et al., 2024). Policy interventions that encourage adoption of sustainable farming practices, provide subsidies or incentives for mechanization, and strengthen agricultural research-extension systems are vital. Additionally, integrating population projections into agricultural planning ensures that production meets anticipated future demand, reducing reliance on imports and buffering households against food insecurity (UNDP, 2012).

3. Urban Food Systems and Nutrition Programs

Urbanization presents both challenges and opportunities for food security. Rapid urban population growth in Nigeria increases demand for purchased food, often stressing urban supply chains and increasing food prices (Taylor et al., 2023). Effective policy responses include urban agriculture initiatives., public nutrition programs, and improved distribution networks. For example, municipal programs that support community gardens, rooftop farming, and peri-urban agriculture can increase local food availability, improve dietary diversity, and reduce reliance on imports. Additionally, school feeding programs and targeted nutrition interventions can address malnutrition among vulnerable populations, particularly children in low-income urban areas (FAO & partners, 2025). By strengthening urban food systems, governments can improve resilience and reduce inequalities in food access amid rapid demographic changes.

4. International Cooperation and Food Security Initiatives

Global partnerships and international initiatives play a critical role in addressing food insecurity in high population-growth contexts. Nigeria participates in programs such as the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (FSNS) with FAO, World Food Programme (WFP), and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which aims to enhance food availability, support smallholder farmers, and improve nutrition outcomes (FAO & partners, 2025). International cooperation also facilitates technology transfer, investment in agricultural infrastructure, and capacity building for food system governance. Policies that leverage global best practices, while adapting interventions to local socio-cultural and demographic realities, can strengthen national resilience against the dual pressures of population growth and climate change (UNDP, 2012; CGIAR, 2024). Combining population management, sustainable agriculture, urban food system improvements, and international collaboration offers the most comprehensive approach to mitigating the effects of population growth on food security. Policy coherence across these domains ensures that interventions are mutually reinforcing, creating sustainable and equitable outcomes for populations experiencing rapid demographic change.

MPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPEMT

Population growth and demographic change are closely linked to food security outcomes, and their interactions have profound implications for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs). Understanding these dynamics is essential for planning resilient food systems that can accommodate growing populations while ensuring environmental sustainability, equitable access, and socio-economic stability.
1. Population–Food Security Nexus and SDGs: The interplay between population dynamics and food security is central to multiple SDGs, particularly: SDG 2: Zero Hunger, which targets the elimination of hunger and all forms of malnutrition, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, where adequate nutrition directly affects public health and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, promoting sustainable use of resources in food production. Rapid population growth, particularly in countries like Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa, intensifies food demand and challenges the achievement of SDG 2. Millions remain food insecure due to high fertility rates, urbanization pressures, and insufficient agricultural output (FAO & partners, 2025; Owoo, 2021). Meeting these SDGs requires integrated approaches that link population policies, agricultural productivity, and nutrition-sensitive interventions (UNDP, 2012).

2. Planning for Future Demographic and Food Trends
Effective planning for future food security must consider projected population growth, urbanization, and shifts in household demographics. In Nigeria, for instance, estimates suggest the population could exceed 400 million by 2050, significantly increasing food demand (UN World Population Prospects, 2017). Without commensurate expansion in food production, distribution infrastructure, and technological innovation, food insecurity and malnutrition risks will escalate. Policymakers need to integrate demographic projections into national agricultural strategies, including: Expansion of arable land under sustainable management, Promotion of climate-smart agriculture, Investment in post-harvest technology and supply chain resilience, and Strengthening of social safety nets to protect vulnerable populations (Taylor et al., 2023; Muhammad Salahudeen et al., 2024). Scenario-based modeling, such as the IMPACT model used by UNDP (2012), can inform policymakers about the future interplay between population growth, food production, and nutrition outcomes, allowing for evidence-based interventions.

STRATEGIES FOR RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Ensuring food security in the context of demographic expansion requires resilient and sustainable strategies that combine technological innovation, policy coherence, and community participation. Key strategies include:

1. Population Management: Promoting family planning and reproductive health to moderate population growth and reduce pressure on food systems (Bongaarts, 2016; UNFPA, 2019).
2. Sustainable Agriculture: Adoption of climate-smart practices, improved crop varieties, and mechanization to enhance productivity while conserving natural resources (FAO, 2020).
3. Urban Food Systems: Supporting urban agriculture, efficient supply chains, and targeted nutrition programs to meet the dietary needs of growing urban populations (Taylor et al., 2023).
4. Social Safety Nets: Implementing cash transfers, school feeding programs, and subsidies to protect vulnerable populations from food insecurity (World Bank, 2021).
5. International Cooperation: Leveraging global partnerships to support knowledge transfer, financing, and capacity building for sustainable food production (FAO & partners, 2025). Collectively, these strategies enhance the resilience of food systems, reduce vulnerability to climate and demographic shocks, and help align national development trajectories with the SDGs. By recognizing the population–food security nexus, governments and stakeholders can implement holistic policies that address both current and projected challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the intricate linkages between population growth, demographic change, and global food security, using Nigeria as a representative context for high population-growth settings. Rapid population expansion, youthful age structures, urbanization, and migration intensify demand for food, exacerbate land scarcity, strain supply chains, and contribute to malnutrition and dietary inequalities. Environmental and climate-related stresses further compound these challenges, while socio-economic and policy constraints limit the effectiveness of interventions. Effective policy responses require integrated, multi-level strategies that combine population management, sustainable agriculture, urban food system development, social safety nets, and international cooperation. Aligning these interventions with projected demographic trends is essential to ensure resilience, equitable food access, and the long-term sustainability of food systems. Addressing the population–food security nexus is critical for achieving Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Only through evidence-based planning, technological innovation, and policy coherence can countries like Nigeria strengthen food security, reduce vulnerability, and support sustainable development in the face of continuing demographic pressures.

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