POPULATION PATTERNS AND GROWTH IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is the eighth largest country on Earth by population. It has one of the fastest growth rates (2.5 percent) in the world. By 2050, Nigeria may be the third largest country by population, with over 440 million people. This is equivalent to 13 times Canada’s current population living in a space a little smaller than Ontario.

NATURAL FACTORS

The Nigerian landscape ranges from rich forests in the south to grasslands in the drier savannah and semi-desert regions in the north (Figure 1.25). A low-lying coastal plain rises from the humid southern coast to the centre of the country. The plain then descends into drier northern regions.

Nigeria is home to the Niger River delta, one of the largest deltas in the world. A delta is a plain of fertile sediment deposits that forms when a river empties into another body of water. Mountainous regions sit to the north and east of the delta, with the highest elevations just over 2000 m. Nigeria has a tropical climate with average annual temperatures between 25 °C to 30 °C.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Most Nigerians live in the flat coastal plains and the river delta regions in the south. These regions have abundant water, tropical rainforest, and access to the sea for fishing and trade.

Fewer people live in northern Nigeria, which has a drier environment. Long-term drought has made life difficult for northern Nigerians in the Sahel region. Millions have migrated to the already dense cities in the south. Figure 1.26 shows the population density patterns in Nigeria.

ECONOMIC GROWTH FACTORS

Many African nations were under the control of European countries as colonies for centuries. Nigeria was no exception. During the colonial period (1500 to 1950), resources such as cacao, coffee, palm oil, cotton, wood, and ground nuts were sent to Europe and made into more valuable products. This meant that wealth left the country, while most Nigerians remained poor.

Recently, oil reserves were found in the coastal regions, particularly in the Niger River delta area. Nigeria is now the largest oil producer in Africa and the twelfth largest oil producer worldwide. Nigeria’s oil economy has attracted migrants from all over West and Central Africa. The wealth from oil, however, does not benefit most Nigerians or migrant workers. Low wages are paid to many workers, while the majority of the oil wealth goes to large corporations and the government.

MANAGING A GROWING POPULATION

Currently, six out of ten Nigerians are under 25 years of age. With such a large number of people entering their reproductive years, the rate of population growth could increase.

The Nigerian government faces a difficult, but not impossible, task. Nigeria will have to plan and put in place the structures and services to help support population growth. The government is emphasizing employment skills and education for its citizens. For example, the government is offering programs that will train young men in skilled trades. Another program focuses on improving the education rate for females, which is a factor in lowering birth rate and family size. However, many Nigerians believe that large families show importance and prosperity.

EXPLORE THE ISSUE

1. With a partner, look at Figure 1.25 and Figure 1.26. Choose one area in northern Nigeria and one area in southern Nigeria. Create a t-chart and compare the environment and population density of the two areas.

2. Create an inquiry question that will help the government address population growth in Nigeria.