

# Zambia

## Population Factors & National Development

Ministry of Finance and National Planning  
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As stated in Vision 2030, Zambia's ambitious national development goal is to become a prosperous middle-income nation over the next generation. This analysis asks the question: What is the importance of population factors to the ability of the country to achieve its national vision in coming decades?

### Population Characteristics and Projections

The Zambian population has been growing rapidly for a long period of time. The population grew from only about 2.3 million persons in 1950 to 9.9 million at the time of the 2000 census. By 2009, the population may have grown further to nearly 13 million persons (Figure 1). This rapid population growth is, in part, due to Zambia's high fertility rate. Zambian women have 6.2 children each, on average—one of the higher levels of fertility in Africa. Because fertility has been high for a long time, Zambia has a very young population. About 46 percent of the population is under the age of 15.

To illustrate the impacts of rapid population growth on development in Zambia, this analysis uses two population projections based on different assumptions about the future course of fertility.<sup>1</sup> The projection period is for 30 years, 2007–2037. The first projection assumes that high fertility continues, with just a small decline in fertility over the projection period. In that case, the population rises from 12.1 million persons in 2007 to 33 million in 2037, an increase of 21 million persons. In contrast, the second projection assumes a transition from high fertility (6.2 children per woman) to low fertility (2.2 children per woman) over the 30-year projection period. Under this assumption, the population would grow to about 23.6 million in 2037 (Figure 2). Even with declining fertility, the population nearly doubles in size

Figure 1. Historical Population Growth

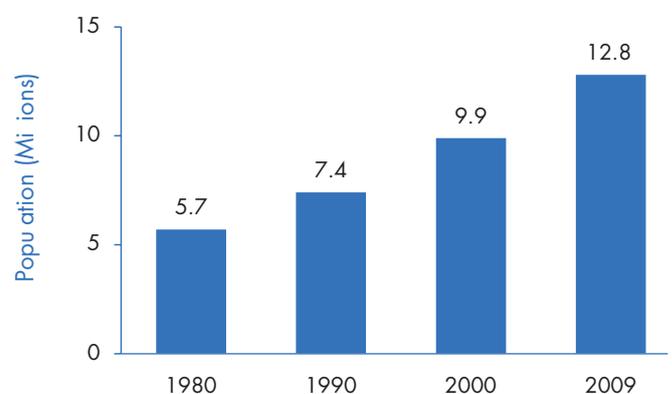
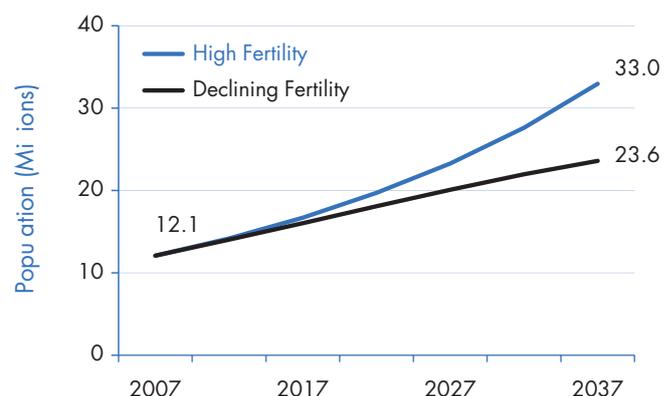


Figure 2. Population Projections



<sup>1</sup>This analysis uses the Spectrum System of Policy Models.

over the projection period and it would still be growing in 2037. This analysis uses these projections to explore the impact of different rates of population growth on Zambian social and economic development.

### Education

A rapidly growing school-age population will necessitate building additional schools and training, recruiting, and retaining more teachers to achieve and sustain universal primary education. With high fertility continued, the number of primary school pupils would increase from 3.2 million in 2007 to 8.3 million in 2037. With declining fertility, the pupil population would increase gradually to 4.8 million by 2037. With population growth and an eventual reduction of the pupil per teacher ratio to 40 students per primary teacher, the required number of primary school teachers would increase from 63,000 in 2007 to 206,600 in 2037 with high fertility continued. In contrast, 120,200 teachers would be needed in 2037 with declining fertility (Figure 3).

### Health

The health sector already faces severe human resource and infrastructure shortages. Zambia aims to reduce the population per health provider ratio as well as to keep pace with rapid population growth. For example, the long-term goal is one nurse for every 700 persons in the population. In that case, the nursing cadre would need to increase from 9,200 in 2007 to 47,100 in 2037—a fivefold increase—if high fertility continues. Declining fertility would reduce the severity of the nursing shortage; in 2037, 33,700 nurses would be required with declining fertility (Figure 4). The country would also need fewer health centres and other facilities and could save in health expenditures. If savings are reinvested, Zambia could move closer to achieving a level of health expenditure per capita comparable with middle-income economies.

### Urbanisation

Zambia is one of the most urbanised sub-Saharan African countries, with 35 percent of the population living in urban areas. In these projections, the urban population would rise from 4.3 million residents in 2007 to 16.3 million in 2037 with continued high fertility, compared with 11.7 million in 2037 with declining fertility (Figure 5). The rapid growth of cities and towns will place a greater burden on the urban infrastructure (e.g., housing, transport and roads, water and sanitation, and energy) and the need for urban employment opportunities. In particular, this pressure will exacerbate the already poor living conditions for low-income populations and people in urban slums, who face overcrowding, inadequate shelter, lack of clean drinking water and adequate sanitation, and increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

Figure 3. Projected Number of Teachers Required

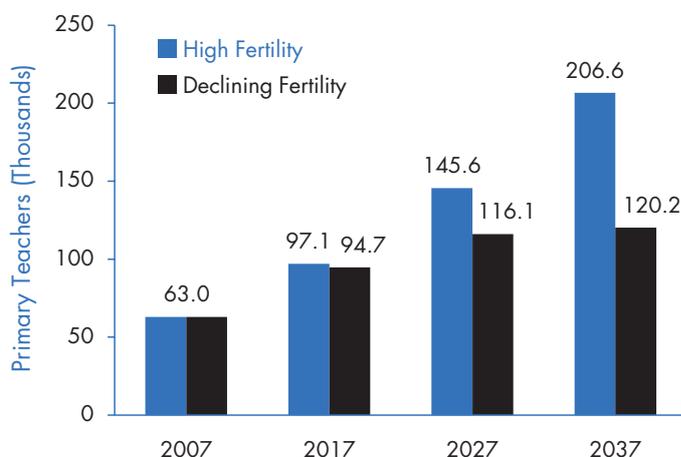


Figure 4. Projected Number of Nurses Required

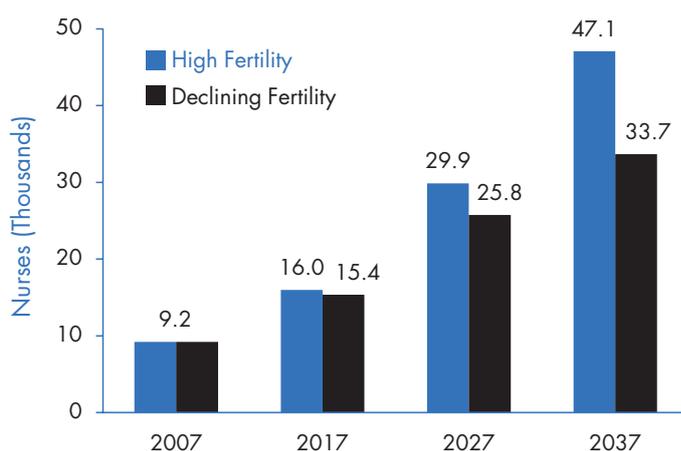
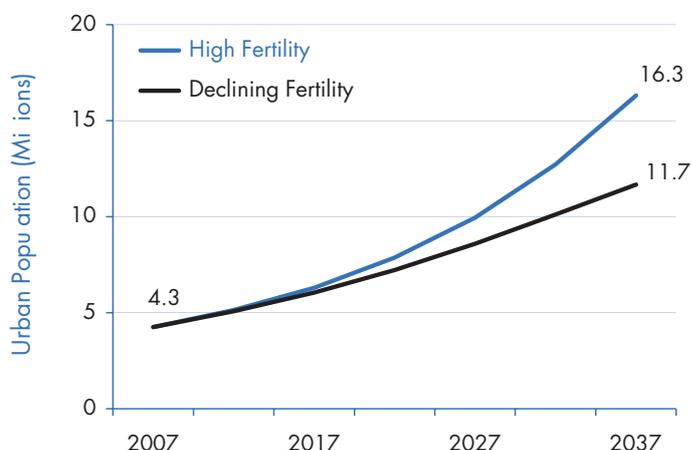


Figure 5. Projected Urban Population Growth



## Economy

As evidenced in other countries, declining fertility and a slower rate of population growth can contribute to economic transformation by creating conditions for greater savings and investment, more educational opportunities, and modernisation of agriculture. The Zambian vision to become a middle-income country can best be achieved by a combination of fast economic growth and a slower rate of population growth.

Vision 2030 points out that “few countries have achieved and maintained real economic growth rates in excess of 6 percent or more over a quarter century.” It uses a baseline scenario that assumes a constant real growth rate of 6 percent per annum (expressed in constant 2000 US\$ to permit comparisons over time). This assumption is also in line with recent economic performance. At that rate of growth, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita would rise to only US\$802 in 2037 with high fertility continued and Zambia would still not have achieved middle-income status. In comparison, with declining fertility, GDP would increase more rapidly to US\$1,121 in 2037, with the country at least reaching the bottom rungs of middle-income status (Figure 6).

## Labour Force and Employment

The Fifth National Development Plan notes that the continued rapid growth of the workforce creates “a mismatch between the increasing labour force and the rate at which the economy can absorb this increasing labour force.” The situation may well worsen with the continued high rate of population growth. With high fertility, annual new job requirements would rise continuously from 163,200 in 2007 to 515,400 in 2037. In contrast, annual new job requirements would be 296,300 in 2037 with declining fertility (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Projected GDP per Capita, 6% Growth

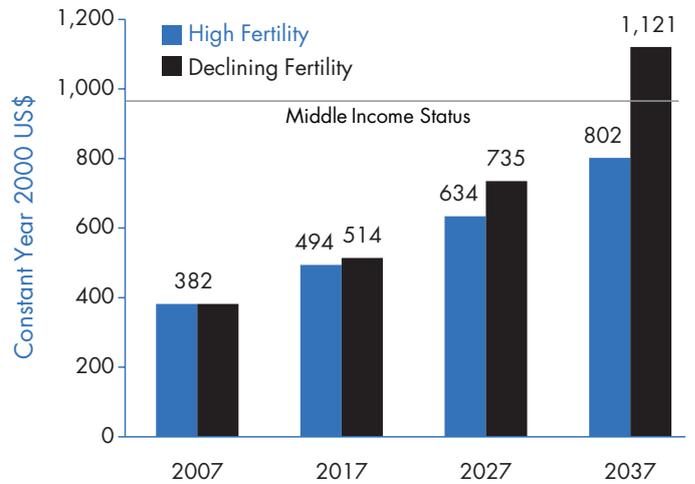
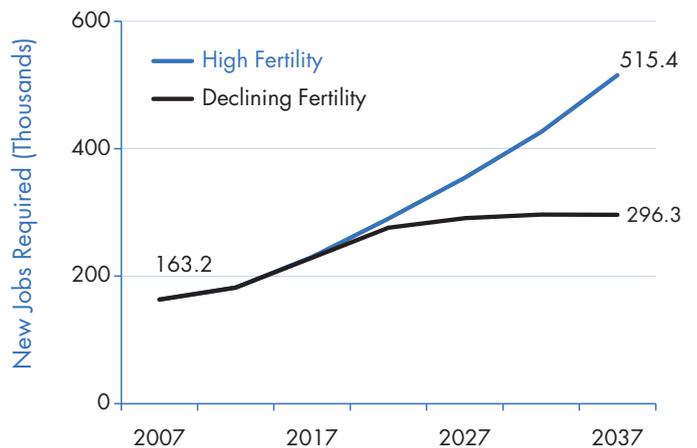


Figure 7. Projected New Job Requirements



Photograph by h ddenfromv ew, 2006

## Agriculture and Environment

Modernisation of agriculture is key to achieving the national vision. Rapid population growth works against modernisation by contributing to deforestation, soil erosion, land degradation, and fragmentation of small holdings in many parts of the country. The high rate of population growth will also affect the ability of the country to achieve and sustain food security. Slower population growth would improve the country's ability to provide food security, would reduce pressures on the land, and would mean that more resources could be invested in agricultural modernisation.

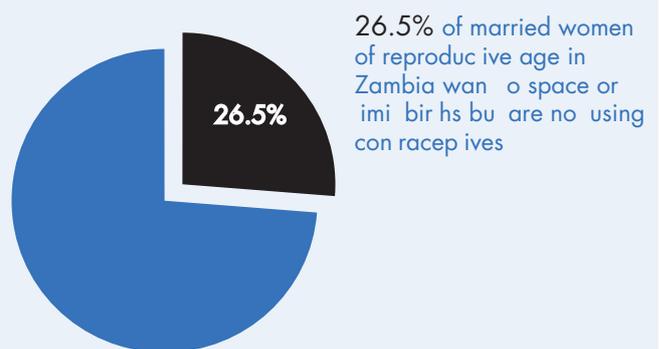


### Policy Response

Family planning to help couples voluntarily plan and space births is an important intervention to reduce fertility. However, contraceptive use is low in Zambia. About 26.5 percent of married women of reproductive age use a modern contraceptive (excluding lactational amenorrhea method). At the same time, the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey reports a high level of unmet need for family planning. About 26.5 percent of married women of reproductive age want to space or limit births, but are not using contraceptives (Figure 8). (By coincidence, modern contraceptive use and unmet need are both 26.5 percent.)

To satisfy unmet need, Zambian couples who want to space or limit their births need access to a choice of contraceptives consistently available at affordable prices. Public policies and programmes can be adopted to help satisfy unmet need. Political and other leaders, planners, and programme

Figure 8. Unmet Need for Family Planning



implementers can all contribute to these efforts. By moving to satisfy current unmet need, Zambia will be on track to achieve lower fertility. In the end, good demographic outcomes depend on good policies that empower individuals and couples to make free choices.

For further information, please contact

Ministry of Finance and National Planning  
P.O. Box 50062  
Lusaka  
260 211 252107  
260 211 250886

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