

IUSSP MEETING REPORT

“Population Growth and Poverty-Reduction Planning: Creating Linkages at the Country Level”

Paris 8 - 9 November 2007

Summary Report

There is now accumulating evidence that reduction in population growth rates contributes to economic development and poverty reduction. This has led to renewed recognition in the international arena of the importance of population dynamics as reflected, for example, in the addition of a reproductive health target to the MDG framework. Despite this progress, it remains the case that at the country level, where the critical planning must occur (e.g., formulation of PRSPs), there is an uneven awareness of the contribution of population dynamics to economic development and a glaring absence of programmes designed to address population growth and improve reproductive health in poverty-reduction strategies.

The purpose of this meeting was to consider how to bridge this gap between scientific evidence and discourse in the international arena, on the one hand, and development planning at the country level, on the other. The goal was to set in motion activities whose impact will eventually be felt in Ministries of Planning and among development partners.

The meeting was attended by 23 participants and structured around fourteen presentations. Participants included population experts and economists as well as policy-makers. They were based in North America (8), Europe (6), Sub-Saharan Africa (6) Asia (2) and Latin America (1). Some countries represented at the meeting --Philippines, Pakistan, and Latin American countries--are far more advanced in their fertility transition. The presentations on these countries highlighted the need for decentralization (Philippines), the role of globalization (Pakistan), and the importance of causality and analysis (Latin America). Other presentations highlighted equity issues. Finally, the presentation on Guinea has shown the importance of understanding mechanisms at the micro-level (disaggregated data explain more).

Rationale for Interventions

Today, 35 countries have total fertility rates (TFR) higher than 5 children per woman and 32 of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The classic rapid population growth “gloom and doom” approach, with short doubling times and looming catastrophes has failed to convince leaders in SSA. A health rationale may be more important for interventions, especially as some sub-Saharan African countries appear to suffer from high levels of induced abortion. The focus should be on unmet needs for family planning, youth programs, and linkages with HIV/AIDS programs.

A new way to approach population issues is to focus on age structures and the rationale for human capital investments. The demographic bonus could be opposed to a demographic onus (or “malus”). Or is the demographic bonus to be transformed

into a “super bonus”, provided the right policies are put into place? Overall, entering the debate through the economists’ door is essential with a view to increase economic growth through population growth reduction and the potential savings to governments on expenditures for schooling, vaccinations, and health care.

How to intervene?

In sub-Saharan Africa there has been a general failure to bring population issues into Population Reduction Strategy Papers. The meeting addressed how this might be changed. Two attitudes were voiced during the meeting. Some proposed to stick to business as usual, i.e. to do more training, more capacity building, and more modelling using existing tools. However, the need for a new business model was voiced by most participants.

A few ideas to move forward were discussed during the meeting:

- *Country focus*: better use the existing information at the country level; better document national dynamics; prepare national population projections on a regular basis; and prepare advocacy tools (booklets, posters, short briefs, etc).
- *Need to find policy champions and proactive advocates*: only convinced people can convince others; improve the communication tools; and improve national ownership.
- *Donors’ alignment*: need to strengthen it; and move toward population-SWAs (sector-wide approaches), similar to health sector reform efforts.
- *Need to work at the macro- and micro-levels*: economists and demographers need to join efforts to talk to decision makers with appropriate policy tools. At the macro-level, decision makers should aim in the short-term at improving the health status of their people (as this will bring political reward, e.g., reelection). In the long-term, decision makers would improve their standing in history (this will bring moral reward). At the micro level, economists and demographers need to join efforts with NGOs to talk to individuals through appropriate communication strategies. In the short-term, this will also improve health and reproductive health outcomes.
- Need to work also at national and decentralized levels: this will also include work at the village and community levels.