

## POVERTY, GENDER, AND YOUTH PROGRAM: FROM DEMOGRAPHY TO POLICY

Founded in 1952, the Population Council is an international, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization that seeks to improve the well-being and reproductive health of current and future generations. The Council works in three areas—HIV and AIDS; Poverty, Gender, and Youth; and Reproductive Health—to:

- produce reliable scientific evidence to improve policies and programs;
- provide training and technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of individuals and institutions to address population and health issues;
- develop, test, and introduce new and improved health technologies, including contraceptives and microbicides; and
- synthesize and communicate evidence to guide practitioners, policymakers, and donors toward better decisions and allocation of resources.

In addition to its headquarters in New York and an interregional office in Washington DC, the Population Council has offices in 18 developing countries and works in an additional 46 countries. Its global presence allows the Council to establish effective and enduring collaborations in both the public and private sectors to carry out innovative research and programs.

### **Poverty, Gender, and Youth Program**

Through the Council's Poverty, Gender, and Youth program, researchers address the social dimensions of poverty, the determinants and consequences of gender inequality, the disparities that arise during adolescence, and the critical elements of a successful transition to adulthood in developing countries.

Other areas of research include evaluating fertility transitions in developing countries; examining demand for demographic data in development; assessing and improving the measurement of sexual behavior; and identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge of urban poverty and health in developing countries.

Demographic research is complemented by interventions and partnerships at local, national, and international levels to enhance the potential for policy influence.

Plotting a Safe, Healthy, and Prosperous Transition to Adulthood through Education Adolescence marks the developmental transition from childhood to adulthood, a time when many important social, economic, biological, and demographic events set the stage for adult life. For instance, when schooling of good quality is accessible and educational experiences are positive, disadvantaged children can acquire the capabilities to take advantage of a greater range of opportunities as adults. Indeed, it is in the poorest settings that schooling is likely to make the greatest contribution to children's futures. Council researchers are conducting a study of several schools in Malawi to identify critical aspects of school quality that put adolescents who face the dual challenges of poverty and HIV/AIDS on a safer, healthier, and more productive path to adulthood.

### **Demographic Data for Development**

Demographic data provide an essential evidence base for the development and evaluation of local and national policies. The bottom line is that "a country cannot develop without data." It is in part through the collection and evaluation of data that countries and communities have defined themselves, identified inequities, challenged misconceptions, and justified their claims to resources. Accessible data are a public good, benefiting citizens and the political system as a whole.

Council researchers examined the demand for data in four sub-Saharan African countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal, and Uganda. This project focused on the views of policymakers, the data they use, the data they want but do not receive, and what they might use but do not request. The project further explored the underuse of existing data and asked about the factors that limit the collection, use, and sharing of data.

The second phase of this work is now underway in Ghana, Senegal, and Namibia. The focus is on helping members of the media, journalists, in particular, to gain access to data resources and to better use data in their work. As shown in the first phase, the media is a key intermediary that can drive the demand for data and accountability, but barriers in access to and effective use of data limit this potential.

### **Assessing and Improving the Measurement of Sexual Behavior**

The AIDS pandemic has increased the need to gather comprehensive data on sexual behavior in developing countries. Accurate self-reporting is critical both for household surveys that document risky sexual behavior and for clinical trials of the effectiveness of technologies to prevent transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Through methodological experiments and innovative research, activities aim to:

- assess and improve the validity and reliability of reporting of sexual behavior in survey research in developing countries;
- improve the quality of behavioral data collected in clinical trials of products and technologies aimed at reducing STI transmission; and
- evaluate the use of new technologies for collecting data on sexual behavior in developing countries, specifically computerized self-interviewing.

### **Fertility Transitions in Developing Countries**

A revolution in reproductive behavior has occurred throughout the developing world over the past three decades. The average number of births per woman has fallen by half, from six or more characteristic of traditional societies to around three in the contemporary developing world. This decline in fertility has been driven by a desire for smaller families, as social and economic changes have increased the cost of children and reduced their benefits to parents.

However, rapid population growth remains a concern of governments in many parts of the developing world. Using a decomposition exercise, Council researchers are determining the significance of five demographic factors in population growth: unwanted childbearing, high desired fertility, declining mortality, population momentum, and net migration. The results offer clear policy options for addressing these factors.

### **Urban Poverty and Health**

Nearly all future population growth in the developing world will occur in cities, yet little is known about differences in health between the urban and rural populations of developing countries, nor about how urban health varies with poverty. Among relatively poor urban children, the disadvantages of urban living (crowding and possibly greater exposure to communicable disease) can offset the advantages of better urban service provision and generally higher incomes.

The Population Council's urban research is underway on a number of fronts:

- analysis of urban poverty measures based on demographic survey data;
- development of new, spatially sensitive methods for estimating and projecting urban populations, with attention to where the urban poor are located within and across cities;
- assessment of the cost of health care for slum-dwellers;
- analysis of health needs in secondary and small cities, and
- identification of determinants of intimate-partner violence in peri-urban areas.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE POVERTY, GENDER, AND YOUTH PROGRAM, VISIT [WWW.POPCOUNCIL.ORG/PGY](http://WWW.POPCOUNCIL.ORG/PGY)**