

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: Population Growth

According to the 2010 Malawi Demographic Health Survey (MDHS), Malawi's population has grown rapidly from almost four million in 1966 to nearly 15 million in 2012.

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that worldwide, human population is growing rapidly. One billion people are being added to the planet every twelve years. This means that about 220,000 people are born every day.

The rapidly increasing burden of population in our countries and the world has significant adverse consequences on our lives – including our health.

If health services are poor, the more people one comes in contact with each day, the more chances there are to pass on a contagious disease.

For example, recent media reports indicated that some wards at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital have no oxygen machines, and this is putting the life of patients at risk. The unavailability of oxygen machines could be related to over-crowding at the hospital.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To increase knowledge of listeners on how population growth encourages the spread of diseases
- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on population growth and the spread of diseases
- To help journalists engage their communities in the search for solutions to population growth and the spread of diseases

The Problem: Population Growth and the spread of diseases

In this week's Bulletin, we look at how population growth contributes to the spread of diseases.

Apart from population issues, factors such as unhealthy living conditions, poor sanitation and poverty encourage the rapid spread of diseases.

People living in close vicinity to each other are far more predisposed to infectious diseases -- such as tuberculosis.

A disease such as cholera can also be spread because of population growth.

The more people we have in this country and the world, the more

contacts there will be with other people, and the more diseases will spread.

In an interview with one of the head teachers of a primary school in Blantyre (who opted for anonymity), said population growth can cause the spread of diseases in schools. He said that where there are a lot of students, outbreaks of diarrheal diseases are more frequent and that a breakdown in hygiene can cause diarrheal diseases to sweep through an entire class of students.

The situation is the same in hospitals, where diseases spread more easily when more people are packed into a closed space.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand how population growth contributes to the spread of diseases.

Make the following points:

As we have discussed in the previous Bulletins, our country is currently facing shortage of drugs and other crucial medical resources because of population growth.

Population growth leads to increased numbers of people seeking medical attention, which leads to overcrowding in hospitals. More people means more pressure on fewer resources. Access to fewer resources can mean a higher risk of spreading diseases.

As we discussed in our last week's bulletin, population growth will lead to patients not receiving adequate care, since most wards are overcrowded. This can lead to all sorts of health issues among the population and a potential increase in the spread of diseases.

As a result of rapid population growth, there is often shortages of food, shelter and clean water for everyone, which can lead to diarrheal diseases and malnutrition in

both children and adults.

A long term solution for this problem is for people to consider using modern family planning methods to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies.

Another solution is to avoid being in crowded places and making sure if you are in a room with many people, then it is well ventilated.

It is also important to follow proper health procedures to avoid water-borne diseases; these include treating water with chlorine. Since a lot of people often use the same borehole or a well – it is easier for the water to become contaminated. Chlorine can reduce the risk.

Do a vox pop with several people and ask them how population growth leads to the spread of various diseases.

Have a round table discussion with a nurse and a head teacher from your community. Ask them how they think population growth is leading to the spread of diseases. Find out what they think can be done to curb this problem.

Useful Contacts

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- http://www.who.int.../ccsbrief_mwi_en.pdf



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