

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

Family Planning Focus

Malawi has one of the fastest-growing populations in Africa. Women (in Malawi) give birth to an average of nearly six children (MDHS 2010). This contributes to rapid population growth.

One could clearly see that this rapid pace of growth not only affects families—but poses a substantial burden on Malawi's government and economy to provide more services.

If these trends continue, Malawi will need to approximately triple the number of health care facilities, primary schools, nurses, and teachers over the next 30 years to provide adequate health services and opportunities to gain an education.

A slower population growth rate frees up resources that the government can use to provide free education and public health services.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To educate listeners on some of the effects of population growth, that is, poverty and land use.
- To dispel the myth that more people equates to better development
- To promote discussion and dialogue between listeners and other community members about the population crisis

The Problem: Effects of Population in Malawi

Malawi has one of the fastest growing populations in Africa and is one of the most densely populated countries on the continent. Its population has grown from 6 million in 1966 to more than 16 million in four decades.

With an annual growth rate of 2.8 percent, the National Statistical Office projects the population could more than triple to 50 million by 2050 -- a worrying truth because of increased pressure on water, land and other natural resources (National Census, 2008).

Some people think that a country develops by having many people. However, as long as the fertility and resulting population growth rate remain high in Malawi, the size of the school-age population will be larger than the working-age adult population. Families and the government will struggle to adequately invest in the health

and education of children and will have few additional resources to invest in the infrastructure needed to spur job creation and economic growth. At this point in Malawi's development, it needs to slow the pace at which its population is growing and work on improving the productive capacity of its population and future generations.

Malawi needs to have a sustainable infrastructure to educate all its children, and provide adequate health care and employment for its citizens and reduce poverty.

How can we expect the country to develop if we continue adding more and more people, when we cannot take care of the people we already have? In fact, the greatest single constraint to long-term economic development and human welfare is rapid population growth.

This is ravaging the environment, turning cropland into desert and robbing remaining arable land of its productive capacity. The growing demand for firewood is causing large-scale deforestation and water shortages. So, rapid population growth is not good for Malawi's development.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand that planning the number of children to have is good for a family's well-being and the country's development.

Help them understand that slower population growth creates the potential to accelerate the rate of economic growth and that smaller family size can create a path out of poverty for many families. You can give the following examples from the book by Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning titled Population and Development:

Fertility and Household Poverty

Besides creating the potential for a faster rate of economic growth, a lower fertility rate can help many families escape poverty. According to the United Nations Population Fund (2004), smaller families can reduce household poverty in several ways:

- The clearest impact is on the health of mothers and children. Fewer and better-spaced pregnancies reduce maternal deaths and improve child survival. The death or disability of mothers impedes opportunities for families to escape poverty. Also, women with smaller families often have more economic opportunities, and their earnings can help families escape poverty.
- Parents of smaller families are in a better position to care for and feed their children. Large, poor families are more subject to malnutrition, which is widespread in Malawi. For example, the 2010 MDHS found that one out of two children are stunted or too short for their age and one out of five is severely stunted. Malnutrition results in mental and physical underdevelopment, making it harder for children to do well in school and become skilled for future employment.

Land Use

Rapid population growth works against the agricultural sector and has resulted in exploitation of land, deforestation, erosion, loss of soil fertility, and reduced productivity.

According to the Agricultural Development Programme Support Project, land degradation affects about 30 per cent of Malawi's population. The high population density in rural areas forces farmers to clear natural forests and cultivate food crops on steep slopes and other marginal lands. This exploitation of land contributes to a net average loss of topsoil – about 12 tons per hectare per year. Most smallholder farmers struggle to meet their subsistence needs on less than one hectare of land and seek immediate returns on crop yields rather than future gains through sustainable land management practices. Rapid population growth puts even more pressure on the already exploited land.

You can add more examples.

Have a Vox pop with people from your area and ask them how they think over-population has affected their communities and what they think can be done to stop over population.

Also talk to the District Commissioner in your area, ask him/her about the effects over-population has brought on the district and how he/she thinks the communities can take part in reducing population.

Community Engagement

Urge listeners to send SMS, call or stop by the radio station to talk about how they think they can play a role in reducing population.

Useful Contacts

- PRB, Contact Sandra Mapemba: +265-99-921-9789
- http://www.healthpolicyinitiative.com/Publications/Documents/1065_1_Malawi_booklet_2_23_10_singlepg_acc.pdf
- Malawi Demographic Health survey 2010, <http://www.measuredhs.com/publications/publication-fr247-dhs-final-reports.cfm>

