



AFRICA: "The fewer the children the better the care"



Photo: Aubrey Graham/IRIN

Child spacing can improve family nutrition, education levels and living standards, say experts (file photo)

KAMPALA, 17 November 2009 (IRIN) - Africa will fail to achieve most UN Millennium Development Goals unless countries adopt effective family planning programmes and control rapid population growth, experts warn.

"Africa has not done well in areas of family planning," Khama Rogo, World Bank senior adviser, said. "It is not that we cannot do well; we have not committed ourselves... family planning and population growth have a cross-cutting impact."

Rogo was speaking at a three-day international conference on family planning, organized by the Gates Foundation and Johns Hopkins and Makerere universities that began on 16 November in the Ugandan capital, Kampala.

More than 1,000 policy-makers, researchers, academics and health professionals from 59 countries are attending. Various speakers warned that the rate of Africa's population increase was too rapid, with women in some countries having on average seven children each.

"Family planning improves maternal health, thereby increasing women's productivity and reducing dependency at both family and national levels," Chisale Mhango, director of reproductive health at Malawi's Health Ministry, told

IRIN.

"Fewer children means manageable education targets; more children means that parents will mainly educate sons, which promotes gender inequality," he added. "The fewer the children the better the care, the more the food, the lower the child mortality and there will be savings for health provision."

Malawi's population is projected to reach 41 million by 2040 from 13 million currently. Child spacing, Mhango said, would reduce the economic burden on poor Malawian families, allowing them to invest more in each child's care and education. This would improve family nutrition, education levels and living standards.

Education crucial

Worldwide, 200 million women seek to prevent unplanned pregnancies but cannot access contraception. This demand is estimated by the UN to grow by 40 percent by 2050 as young people enter prime reproductive ages.

Michael J. Klag, dean of the school of public health at Johns Hopkins, called for community education to ensure successful family planning policies.

"Populations need to grow and economies grow, but this must be done in such a way that ensures the health of our children," he said.

According to the World Bank, demographic health service surveys in Africa show that family planning needs have not been met by up to 30 percent, and by up to 41 percent in countries like Uganda.

"People want the services, but they cannot access them," Rogo told the meeting. "Statistics indicate that we have more people to feed, but few hands to work. We have a very big dependent population in Africa [because] 60 percent of the population is under the age of 15."

Some specialists at the conference called for more focus in global debates on the impact of population on climate change.

"If we are going to destroy our forests to create more homes and more farming areas, what will be the impact on the climate?" asked Jason Bremner, programme director in charge of population, health, environment at the Population Reference Bureau.



Photo: Nancy Palus/IRIN

Worldwide, 200 million women seek to prevent unplanned pregnancies but cannot access contraception (file photo)

"There is a relationship between population growth and carbon emission which is as a result of human consumption," he added.

Humanitarian risk

The conference also seeks to lobby policy-makers to increase funding for family planning. This, participants said, would reduce global humanitarian risks.

"With higher population growth, there would be less land per holder and existing holdings would be divided among more family members," said Clive Mutunga, research associate with Population Action International.

"Smaller farms are less productive overall than larger holdings, which will lead to perennial food insecurity as land productivity reduces due to over-exploitation," Mutunga added.

vm/eo/mw

Themes: (IRIN) [Children](#), (IRIN) [Health & Nutrition](#)

[ENDS]

Report can be found online at:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87081>

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

Services: [Africa](#) | [Asia](#) | [Middle East](#) | [PlusNews](#) | [Film & TV](#) | [Photo](#) | [Radio](#) | [Weekly](#) | [Live news map](#) | [Interviews](#) | [E-mail subscription](#)

Copyright © IRIN 2010

The material contained on www.IRINnews.org comes to you via IRIN, a UN humanitarian news and information service, but may not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its agencies.

All IRIN material may be reposted or reprinted free-of-charge; refer to the IRIN copyright page for conditions of use. IRIN is a project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.