2014 PopPov Blogs

The Demographic Dividend, Revisited

February 28th, 2014 | Posted in Education, Population Basics

by John F. May, Visiting Scholar

The 8th Annual Conference on Population, Reproductive Health, and Economic Development was held in Nairobi, Kenya in January 2014. The PopPov Conference should obviously return to the topic of the demographic dividend. This dividend becomes possible when fertility declines sufficiently to increase the number of the working age population relative to the rest of the population and to reduce the investments needed to care for children (an improvement in the dependency ratios). It follows the acceleration of economic growth, which depends equally on human capital formation (education and health) and on the adoption of adequate macroeconomic policies.[1]

At the moment, the possibility of such a dividend is a great subject of debate in discussions of population and development issues in sub-Saharan Africa. The demographic evolution on the continent is marked by striking contrasts between, on the one hand, the rapid decline of mortality levels (especially infant and child mortality), and on the other, the slow erosion of high fertility levels. This contrast contributes to accelerating population growth in the region and does not bode rapid demographic change in the future.

This does not prevent some experts from having an optimistic vision of the demographic future of the continent. They anticipate enormous economic growth such as that recently experienced in the countries of East Asia. In contrast, others such as the global strategist Gérard Chaliand are more pessimistic. He writes: "Even if one observes, for several years, economic growth in SSA, the number of unemployed and little, or badly, educated increase apace, giving rise to bloody conflicts."[2] An intermediary position was voiced in the new report *Africa 2050*, which was just published under the aegis of the Emerging Market Forum.[3] This more nuanced approach could be qualified as the "Yes, but": yes, one will be able to capture the benefits of a demographic dividend in Africa, but one will need definitely a much faster fertility decline than the one that has been observed so far.

It is essentially this last position that was expressed during the PopPov Conference panel "Demographic Dividend: Policy Perspectives." The five panelists underscored the diverse political aspects of the debate, as well as the varied programmatic interventions that are possible.

The vision set forth by Eliya Zulu, director of the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), is very broad and covers the main array of political actions: fertility, development of human capital, economic reform and job creation, and finally good governance. Zulu insisted that we are still far from achieving the demographic dividend in Africa. His vision is both dynamic and proactive, while insisting on the urgency of accelerating efforts already underway.

Alex Ezeh, Director of the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in Nairobi, insisted that actions are needed at the national level. Each country has its own particular demographic dynamics, he underscored. Hence, the population policies ought to be conceived and implemented at the national level.

In my presentation, I also repeated this message about the necessity of interventions at the national level. Moreover, the rationale for working at the level of the States is developed in detail in my last book.[4]

The contribution of Jane Kiringai, economist at the World Bank office in Nairobi, highlighted the implications of the demographic dividend for women's employment. In effect, the increased labor force participation of women (especially the better educated ones) would begin the virtuous cycle of demographic change (working women have fewer children) and economic growth.

Finally, Miriam Were, founder of the UZIMA Foundation in Kenya, recalled efforts led by nongovernmental organizations. According to her, population policies should not be solely directed from the top down; they ought to also move from the bottom up, through individual and collective initiatives. This is well-illustrated by activities at the UZIMA Foundation ("uzima" means "abundance of life" in Swahili), which works to build the capacity and power of youths.

Overall, it appears more and more clear that the demographic dividend is not automatic. Rather, it must be earned by putting in place, at all levels, the policy tools that would allow rapid modification of population age structure and would push through macroeconomic reforms, all in order to facilitate achieving the demographic dividend. The supply-side interventions offering family planning services should be complemented by creating strong demand for lower fertility. It would also be appropriate to raise African's political leaders' awareness of population issues. As to African demographers and economists, they ought to apply their technical know-how to also become agents and even advocates of change.

References

1. J.F. May, *Agir sur les évolutions démographiques*, Brussels : Académie royale de Belgique, 2013, pp. 25-28.
2. G. Chaliand and Michel Jan, *Vers un nouvel ordre du monde*, Paris : Le Seuil, 2013, p. 64.
3. T. Ahlers, H. Kato, H.S. Kohli, C. Madavo, and A. Sood (Edits), *Africa 2050.Realizing the Continent's Full Potential*, New Delhi : Oxford University Press for Centennial Group International, 2014.
4. J.F. May, op. cit., pp. 18-20 & 122-125.

“Research TO Policy?”: Reflections on a Persistently Intriguing Debate

February 27th, 2014 | Posted in Income/Poverty

by Peter da Costa, development consultant

This post was originally published by On Think Tanks.

Photo: Peter da Costa.

A few weeks ago I facilitated a session on ‘Tools for Bringing Research to Policy Makers’, on the final day of the 8th Annual PopPov Conference on Population, Reproductive Health and Economic Development, held in Nairobi, Kenya. It’s not always a given that much can be unpacked or chewed over in any substantive way on such a complex and contentious subject in an hour and half.

However, I was lucky to have a fantastic panel of high-level researchers and funders’ representatives who were able to cut to the chase and share fascinating and deeply insightful examples of how they harnessed research, in practical ways, to engage in policy spaces.

The Panel members were Jan Monteverde Haakonsen of the Research Council of Norway; Chima Izugbara of the African Population Health and Research Center (APHRC); Susan Rich of the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), which organized the event; and Veronique Filippi of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

For more on what they said and for a great summary of the Panel, please read theblog prepared by Kate Belohlav.

The PopPov annual conference is a gathering of seasoned and student economic demographers, population policy people and advocates, designed to incubate the next generation of scientists, build up an evidence base, and stimulate dissemination of research to policymakers. It’s part of a wider initiative, seeded by the Hewlett Foundation, aimed at strengthening the evidence base of the links between reproductive health and population dynamics. PopPov, administered by the PRB, provides research grants, doctoral dissertation fellowships, and organizes the annual conference.

I kicked off the session with a series of assumptions that spring to mind when we talk about ‘bringing research to policy makers’:

- First, when we speak of ‘from research to policy’ or use the demand and supply analogy we assume the process to be a linear one, starting with generating the evidence and ending with policy makers consuming that evidence.
- Second, we assume that policy makers make decisions based on evidence; or put otherwise, that evidence makes for sound policy.
- Third, it’s assumed that there’s a need to bridge some sort of gap between the evidence and those who need evidence to inform their decisions.
- Fourth, we assume that policy makers need help in accessing evidence, which needs to be ‘brought’ to them.

Interrogating the ‘research-to-policy’ nexus raises a million questions about how and why evidence is generated, what kind of evidence, what forms it takes, what expectations exist around its potential impact on policy or society, how policy makers think of or interact with evidence, whether evidence is intended to immediately inform or impact on policy, whether knowledge generated can be useful down the line or whether it sits on shelves, who ‘pushes’ evidence to policy makers, and so on. [For a discussion of these questions in the African context see these papers on the political economy of research uptake in Africa.]

Read the rest of this post at On Think Tanks.

Tools for Bringing Research to Policymakers at the PopPov Conference on Population, Reproductive Health, and Economic Development

February 3rd, 2014 | Posted in Population Basics, Reproductive Health

by Kate Belohlav, research associate, International Programs

On Jan. 25, 2014, four senior-level researchers and donors opened the final day of the Eighth Annual PopPov Conference by sharing the strategies they have used for bringing research to policy and provoking thoughtful discussion. Peter da Costa, development consultant, facilitated the panel which included Jan Monteverde Haakonsen, Research Council of Norway; Chimaraoke Izugbara, African Population Health and Research Center (APHRC); Susan Rich, PRB; and Veronique Filippi, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The group addressed one of the core goals of the PopPov initiative: using evidence generated by PopPov researchers to inform policy. Panelists and conference attendees brought up the many challenges that both researchers and funders continue to confront in the pursuit of bringing research to policymakers. In this first blog post, I will focus on some of the core issues that came up during the discussion from the perspective of researchers, while a future post will cover discussion from the perspective of funders.

Build communications into the budget and mentor junior researchers. Once research is complete, the results must be communicated, although there is debate regarding who is best positioned to convey the research to policymakers. Some members of the audience argued that researchers are trained to develop technical analytical skills in their fields of expertise, and might not be the best people to actually communicate findings. Other participants pointed out that some researchers really do understand how to engage with policymakers. One audience member proposed that these seasoned researchers/policy communicators should mentor junior researchers and help them develop those skills.

Being a mentor requires time and commitment, which may be difficult for senior researchers to provide. Veronique Filippi pointed out a more-structured way of building communications into a research program—by having a budget line for communications. Some of her PopPov-funded research has included a budget for communications, and she advised that 5 percent to 10 percent of the grant budget be allocated to communications. In her case, a specialized group communicated the findings to researchers, and this budget allocation helped bring Filippi's research to policymakers.

Involve in-country researchers in the project. Several panelists and audience members shared their experiences in presenting evidence to policymakers, and emphasized the importance of involving researchers who are from the country being studied. These participants provided their perspectives on how involving in-country researchers contributed to the success of the project, while Filippi presented an anecdote of a less-successful situation: A doctoral student published her findings from her analysis of an African country's Demographic and Health Survey in a well-known journal. A senior representative from the Ministry of Health (MoH) of that country met a co-author from that study at an international conference. The MoH representative indicated that she was upset that the findings had not been presented in-country, and that no one from her country appeared to have been involved in the analysis. While she may have found the paper and its findings useful, the lack of engagement with researchers on the ground and dissemination in country made them less acceptable. This anecdote illustrates the value in involving researchers from the country being studied, because policymakers may take the research more seriously or be more receptive if they have their own people involved, or if there is a serious effort to engage them through meetings.

Work with stakeholders from the outset of a research initiative. Chimaraoke Izugbara shared insights from his experience in engaging with Kenyan policymakers on the sensitive issue of abortion. Izugbara and his team began by creating a stakeholder map and identifying key parties, which allowed them to gain buy-in early in the engagement process. By working together with the Ministry of Health, Izugbara and his fellow APHRC researchers identified sensitive topics and proposed a solution and specific language for amending policies to improve postabortion care in Kenya. This engagement and relationship development has been vital in their ongoing work with policymakers to improve postabortion care.

When to publish in the mass media, and avoid "dumbing down the research."Is it possible for researchers to publish short opinion pieces, or simplified versions of their research, without losing respect from their peers in the larger research community? Making the research less technical and available to the public can raise awareness of an issue, and catch the attention of a policymaker. One senior researcher encouraged the researchers themselves to publish op-eds, as long as they support a growing body of research on the topic. Another senior researcher echoed the same sentiment, emphasizing the importance of framing the research within the content of the larger body of literature being proposed, and developing key messages to make the research more accessible to the general public.

Several other important points came up during the conversation:

- During these types of discussions about bringing research to policy, researchers and donors should keep in mind that some country contexts are changing rapidly, and these contexts require flexibility among the researchers.
- When researchers collect data, they should work with the community to inform them of their findings.
- What happens when the research does not yield "good" results, or when the results are different from what the policymakers or donors had expected? What about when they conflict with the policymaker's agenda?

One goal of many academic researchers is to improve the lives of individuals: by uncovering new evidence about effective policies and programs, identifying relationships between key socioeconomic variables and policies, and using innovative methodologies to realize these findings. The next step—translating, communicating, and delivering this evidence to policymakers—is often fraught with challenges. PopPov conference attendees shared some strategies they have successfully employed for bridging the gap between research and policy.

Researchers can incorporate these strategies from the first steps of developing their research questions, while funders can consider a few of these options when structuring research grants. Another post on this panel will cover some other strategies that funders may consider incorporating into their strategies of bringing research to policymakers.

Breakfast With Champions of Economic Development

January 29th, 2014 | Posted in Income/Poverty

by Marlene Lee, program director, Academic Research and Relations

I spent the past week at the Eighth Annual PopPov Conference on Population, Reproductive Health, and Economic Development in Nairobi, Kenya. Most mornings, I only managed a quick business breakfast with a few of the people who have dedicated their professional lives to helping low- and middle-income countries confront the development challenges and opportunities associated with population growth. On the morning before leaving the city, I happened upon Paul Schultz from Yale University at a late breakfast, and we were later joined by Andrew Foster of Brown University. I had a few questions on my mind, so I asked these two champions about the data currently being used to analyze questions about reproductive health and economic outcomes at the individual and household level.

For much of the past week, I had been watching social scientists from the fields of demography, public health, and economics struggle to identify basic relationships that might help inform a wide range of programs and policies. They made efforts to determine the extent to which unanticipated economic hardships pushed young women into sexual relationships; whether women observing high child mortality in their own specific localities respond by having more children; to know if unplanned children strain household resources more than planned children; and much more. Some applied the "gold standard" of program evaluation—randomized controlled trials (RCTs)—and others turned to standard tools of their research trade, including Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), though there were some novel uses of these tools. While some researchers are on the way to making substantive policy-relevant discoveries such as quantifying the impact of mortality interventions on fertility or finding thresholds at which higher proportions of young adults in the population raise unemployment, many others are frustrated by the inability of the available data to address the research questions they have.

I asked Paul Schultz if I was correct—that the DHS could not be used effectively to address the questions about the relationship between women's reproductive histories and individual or household income and assets? He said that good measurements for income and assets just are not there in the DHS. Economists have turned to the Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS), but other fields still use the DHS, even when the same reproductive health measures are in the LSMS.

Andrew Foster joined us, and I asked the other question that was on my mind: Is the future of analysis in the economic development field in "harmonized" RCTs, so that there could be generalization beyond the local context? Not really, according to Foster. Schultz chimed in about the costs of even trying to use RCTs when it is important to consider differences for various population groups such as urban and rural—such an RCT would need to involve so many more people. Foster thinks the solution really lies with administrative data that could be linked to large surveys. This is the future, and to get there countries need assistance in building their national data systems. Vital statistics and census data as well as administrative data from tax records could improve data available for assessing the links between population, reproductive activity, and economic well-being. And such data improvements would also aid in making governments more accountable for achieving economic development goals.

Welcome to the Eighth Annual PopPov Conference on Population, Reproductive Health, and Economic Development

January 29th, 2014 | Posted in Income/Poverty

by Veronique Filippi, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Filippi welcomed participants on the first day of the PopPov conference. Below is a transcript of her Jan. 23, 2014 speech.

Welcome to the Eighth PopPov Conference. It is now time to start. My name is Veronique Filippi and I have had the great privilege of being chair of the scientific program committee for the organization of this conference, allowing me to peek behind the scenes and understand why PopPov conferences never fail to deliver, in my experience. I can see many familiar faces today—researchers met mostly at earlier PopPov conferences—and they would not be here in Nairobi if they did not agree with me.

As mentioned yesterday evening, the objective of the conference is to bring together researchers from a range of disciplines, mostly demography and economics; but also anthropology, public health, and epidemiology; who work on the intersections between population dynamics, reproductive health, and economic development.

The eight members of the scientific committee screened around 180 [correction: 130] papers, and selected 18 papers and five posters that were innovative, either because they bring new knowledge to uncharted territories or because they scrutinize a particular issue with new methodological lenses. In putting the program together, some very difficult choices were made, particularly in the “other” category, for which we received many papers.

The papers all focused on an aspect of RMCH [reproductive, maternal, and child health]—in its broadest sense, from descriptive micro-level study of determinants of RH [reproductive health] to understand what makes people tick, to national-level statistical modeling of demographic and economic changes, as well as the evaluation of policy and behavioral interventions aimed at improving RH or reducing inequities. All these different layers of study design and research focus are important for our understanding of the interaction between population, RH, and economic development, and how these might be influenced for greater benefits to all, but most importantly the poorest or most vulnerable in our societies.

The selected papers are organized into six themes: starting later this morning with the economic consequences of poor or good reproductive health; followed by a session on behavioral changes; empowerment and reproductive health; health and nonhealth benefits of family planning; the effects of policies on reproductive health; and demographic transition, population growth, and economic growth. We also have a panel on the demographic dividend and one on tools for bringing research to policymakers. Finally, we have opening and keynote addresses from Alex Ezeh [African Population Health and Research Center] and Jotham Musinguzi [Partners in Population and Development].

This conference is very timely and comes at an exciting or interesting time in terms of global progress and decisionmaking.

First, there has been tremendous progress with MDGs 4, 5, and 6. The number of maternal deaths have halved from 546,000 in 1990 to 287,000 in 2010, with the caveat that we are still falling short of the MDG-5 target and that some countries have had a bumpy ride, particularly where there is conflict and HIV is prevalent. Fertility control has played a key role in this progress, by reducing the number of unplanned pregnancies. Child mortality has also been reduced from 87 deaths per 1,000 to 51 per 1,000.

Second, economic growth in some middle-income countries has been phenomenal and several countries have graduated from low-income countries to middle-income countries. Work conducted by PopPov grantees, including David Canning, has shown that "health improvements can stimulate economic development" (Jamison et al., 2013). But inequities remain, and there are more poor people living in middle-income countries than in the poor countries, as underlined in an article written by Dean Jamison and colleagues for the Lancet Commission for Global Health.

Third, following the perceived success of the MDGs in bringing about positive changes, sustainable development goals are being defined: this is a slow process led by countries, and focuses on many other issues aside from health, including climate change, good governance, peaceful societies, energy, and the environment—because the aim is to reduce extreme poverty. However, women, their health, their education, and the reduction of inequity through universal health coverage and economic growth are at the center of these discussions. These are all themes we are interested in.

In this conference, we will mostly concentrate on numbers at the aggregate level. Before starting the next session, I invite you to remember the human faces beyond the numbers. We all have stories or anecdotes to explain the work we do and the passion we put into it. Mine is the case of a young, uneducated woman we recruited in a PopPov cohort study because of her severe obstetric complication. Thirteen months later, she died in pregnancy, because she could not adequately treat her underlying hypertension, her husband had "nothing else to sell" (to use his own words), and because she did not use a modern method of contraception despite her unmet need and the apparent support of her husband. This story exemplifies several of the themes in this conference, from women's empowerment and early marriage to the need for appropriate RH intervention and policy responses. And, I am sure you have many more in your mind and maybe to share.

While you are doing this, I now invite Alex Ezeh from APHRC [African Population Health and Research Center], our host institution, to share with us his thoughts in his opening address.

Tools for Bringing Research to Policymakers at the PopPov Conference on Population, Reproductive Health, and Economic Development

February 3rd, 2014 | Posted in Population Basics, Reproductive Health

by Kate Belohlav, research associate, International Programs

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Build communications into the budget and mentor junior researchers. Once research is complete, the results must be communicated, although there is debate regarding who is best positioned to convey the research to policymakers. Some members of the audience argued that researchers are trained to develop technical analytical skills in their fields of expertise, and might not be the best people to actually communicate findings. Other participants pointed out that some researchers really do understand how to engage with policymakers. One audience member proposed that these seasoned researchers/policy communicators should mentor junior researchers and help them develop those skills.

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Involve in-country researchers in the project. Several panelists and audience members shared their experiences in presenting evidence to policymakers, and emphasized the importance of involving researchers who are from the country being studied. These participants provided their perspectives on how involving in-country researchers contributed to the success of the project, while Filippi presented an anecdote of a less-successful situation: A doctoral student published her findings from her analysis of an African country's Demographic and Health Survey in a well-known journal. A senior representative from the Ministry of Health (MoH) of that country met a co-author from that study at an international conference. The MoH representative indicated that she was upset that the findings had not been presented in-country, and that no one from her country appeared to have been involved in the analysis. While she may have found the paper and its findings useful, the lack of engagement with researchers on the ground and dissemination in country made them less acceptable. This anecdote illustrates the value in involving researchers from the country being studied, because policymakers may take the research more seriously or be more receptive if they have their own people involved, or if there is a serious effort to engage them through meetings.

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Population Policy, Poverty Reduction, and Economic Growth: PRB at the PopPov Research Conference

January 22nd, 2014 | Posted in Income/Poverty, Reproductive Health

by Kate Belohlav, research associate, International Programs

PRB is gearing up for dynamic presentations and engaging events at this year's Eighth Annual PopPov Conference on Population, Reproductive Health, and Economic Development, from Jan. 22-25, 2014 in Nairobi, Kenya. Bringing together academic researchers and funders from around the globe who are interested in how population dynamics impact economic outcomes is central to the work of the Population and Poverty (PopPov) Network, founded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The network is focused on how population policies can be used for poverty reduction at the household level and economic growth at the country and state levels.

We are honored to be co-sponsoring this year's conference with APHRC and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The conference has a diverse agenda, providing a rich forum for learning and engagement on links among population, reproductive health, and economic development for the 90 researchers, policymakers, and decisionmakers attending. Attendees represent 21 different countries and 49 institutions, including representatives from nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The agenda includes six paper sessions covering topics such as "*Economic Consequences of Poor Reproductive Health" and "Demographic Transition, Population Growth, and Economic Growth"*; panel presentations addressing "*Policy Perspectives on the Demographic Dividend" and "Tools for Bringing Research to Policymakers";* roundtable discussions on emerging research topics; and many other fascinating speakers and events.

Throughout the week, the PRB team will be blogging and tweeting (#poppov14) from Nairobi and interviewing researchers on population and economic issues and their implications for public policy. Stay tuned for more blog posts and audio clips highlighting PopPov research on the PRB and PopPov websites over the coming weeks.