

MAY 2013

# THE POPULATION & POVERTY RESEARCH INITIATIVE

## Background

As part of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's initiative to enhance research and policy communication in population, reproductive health, and economic development, the foundation has partnered with institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands, France, and Africa to strengthen evidence on how population and reproductive health affect economic outcomes in low- and middle-income countries. Under this population and poverty (PopPov) initiative, Hewlett partners have awarded research funding to more than 50 principal investigators and 50 Ph.D. candidates.

The Hewlett Foundation and its partners have supported research to improve the evidence base on how population growth affects economic development and to inform medium-term policy issues (see figure on next page), based on a research agenda outlined by the Center for Global Development expert working group in 2005.

The research agenda prioritizes policy-relevant research questions that address the effect of reproductive health on the economic growth of countries and on the well-being of individuals and households.

## Overview

Macro-level studies supported through PopPov partnerships have addressed the questions of how shifts in mortality and fertility trends associated with the demographic transition influence economic growth as measured by national income. They also have investigated how policy change affects economic growth and contraceptive use. For example:

- Ashraf, Weil and Wilde (2013) find, based on a simulation, that a reduction in the fertility rate in a high-fertility country produces a significant increase in income per capita over 20 years.
- Babigumira et al. (2012) find that the cost of expanded contraceptive services in Uganda would be offset by lower medical costs.

Much of the currently completed micro-level research in the PopPov initiative examines pathways between family planning, reproductive health, and health outcomes for women and children. Other research has identified promising activities for improving health and educational outcomes for women and

children. Findings from micro-level studies include the following field experiments:

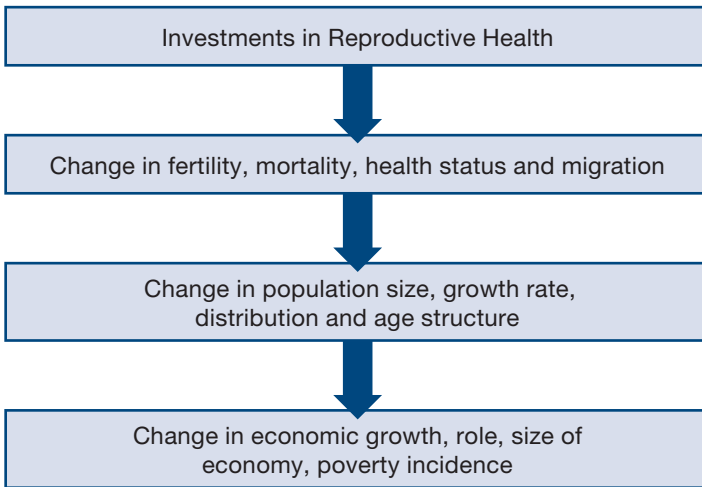
- Ashraf, Field and Lee (2010) find, using random assignment to treatment groups in Zambia, that married women participating in a contraceptive program with their husband are less likely than married women who participate alone, to experience a corresponding reduction in unwanted births.
- de Walque et al. (2012) find, in Tanzania, a significant reduction in the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections in the group that was eligible for USD \$20 payments, suggesting that conditional cash transfers may be a promising tool for incentivizing safer sexual practices.
- Duflo et al. (2013) find, in a study conducted by J-PAL Europe and IRESCO in Cameroon, that the effects of prevention messages and how they are delivered varies across areas of Cameroon, suggesting that local contexts are critical to the design of HIV prevention campaigns.

Other micro-level studies such as Bloom et al. (2009) and Muhoza, Broekhuis and Hooimeijer (2009) rely on statistical analyses of survey data to assess the effect of changes in policy or exposure to information. Using abortion legislation as a proxy

## POPPOV PARTNERS

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## Basic Demographic Relationships



for fertility, Bloom and his co-authors find that reduced fertility increases women's labor force participation.

Other research provides insight into methods for confronting empirical challenges associated with efforts to prove causation, including taking advantage of natural experiments to investigate a range of outcomes:

- Keilland and Gaye (2010) use the experience of droughts to test their hypothesis that relocating children to households in other areas is a response to economic stress in Senegal.
- McKelvey, Thomas and Frankenberg (2012) exploit the interruption in contraceptive supply that accompanied a regional financial crisis and assess the effect of price changes on contraceptive use in Indonesia.

- McLaren (2011) uses the phased roll-out of AIDS treatment to assess the effect of access on employment outcomes in South Africa.

PopPov researchers also have generated new data sets that include reproductive health and demographic variables, identified new instruments in macroeconomic analysis to allow for causal inference, and evaluated a range of antipoverty and reproductive health programs and policies that affect the health, wealth, and education of women and children. Their findings have bolstered already existing evidence and provided new evidence on programs and policies linking economics and reproductive health-related issues.

Some PopPov researchers are already making their results available to audiences in country: Filippi and her research team in Burkina Faso; Hill and the research team in Ghana; Leibbrandt and Lam and their team in South Africa; Ashraf and her team in Zambia; and Baschieri and Dube in Malawi. Some researchers have forged partnerships with government agencies, and policymakers have drawn on findings in considering health, family planning, and education programs. PopPov research findings may be useful for presenting country-specific evidence regarding: (1) potential pathways between reproductive health and economic well-being, and (2) implementation of health, information, and behavioral programs or interventions.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Descriptions of the research, policy briefs, and a bibliographic database of PopPov-supported research are available at [www.poppov.org](http://www.poppov.org). The Population Reference Bureau (PRB) is the Secretariat for the PopPov Network—academics, funders, and practitioners engaged in the initiative. Staff contacts are:

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## POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

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