

The Global Family Planning Revolution: Three Decades of Population Policies and Programs

*Edited by Warren C. Robinson and John A. Ross
Washington, DC: World Bank, 2007. 470 pages
Available online from <http://www.worldbank.org>*

Return of the Population Growth Factor: Its Impact Upon the Millennium Development Goals

*By the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health (APPG)
London: APPG, January 2007. 69 pages.
Available online from <http://www.appg-popdevrh.org.uk>*

Population Issues in the 21st Century: The Role of the World Bank

*By the World Bank
Washington, DC: World Bank, 2007. 70 pages.
Available online from <http://www.worldbank.org>*

Reviewed by GIB CLARKE

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A trio of reports released in 2007—two from the World Bank, one from the UK Parliament—examine the past, present, and future of family planning programs. All three volumes highlight successes and failures; elucidate best practices and lessons learned; and offer recommendations for next steps.

The Global Family Planning Revolution: Three Decades of Population Policies and Programs offers 23 case studies of early national family planning programs, tracing their progress from idea to completion and covering as many as 30

years of successes, failures, and adjustments. Editors Warren C. Robinson and John A. Ross boldly claim that these case studies—all written by key program personnel—comprise a history lesson for the next generation of family planning practitioners. The cases meticulously detail each program's socio-economic, cultural, and political context, and include a full chronology of events. The reader is indeed left with a profound understanding of the family planning movement's birth, struggle to grow, and ultimate success.

The rich history in the case studies is supplemented by a powerful introduction from Steven Sinding, former director general of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Sinding provides a global context, presenting the key debates (such as the importance of family planning and the best methods for

implementing national programs), critical events and conferences, and influential organizations and individuals that helped shape family planning programs.

In case after case, I was struck by the fact that these programs were truly pioneering, developed with little to no precedent, no models to emulate, and no literature to consult. Due to the lack of precedent, the programs show incredible variation in planning and execution. Some programs were executed with support or direction from the government, while others stayed below the political radar. Some programs worked principally through their health ministry, while others relied on population commissions to coordinate the work of several agencies. Finally, some programs stressed condoms, others promoted intrauterine devices (IUDs), and some changed commodities over time.

Despite their differences, most of the programs were successful, with contraceptive prevalence rates (CPR) increasing and total fertility rates (TFR) declining. The level of success was influenced by the particular methods of implementation, but also seems to be a function of higher socio-economic status, education levels, and the status of women in the country.

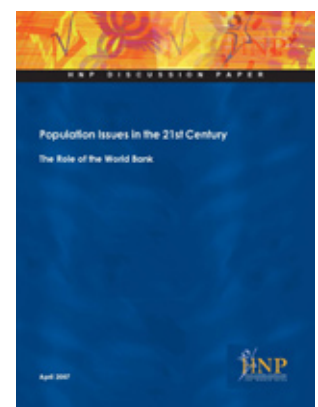
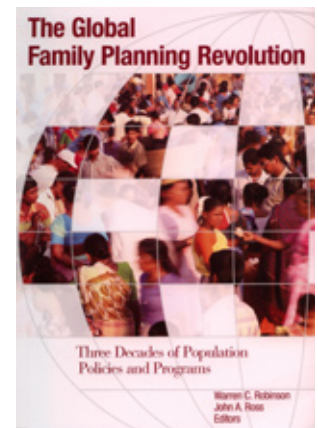
Though much can be learned from the cases presented in *The Global Family Planning Revolution*, it falls short in a few areas. First, while the overwhelming majority of the world's high fertility countries are in sub-Saharan Africa, the book includes only two cases from that continent. Second, the authors acknowledge that coercion existed, but downplay its significance too much; the Tunisian chapter, for example, dismisses coercion as "not generalized" (p. 62). For the family planning revolution to be reborn, it must fully own up to its early mistakes.

Whereas *The Global Family Planning Revolution* looks at largely successful programs in the past, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health focuses on family planning's total exclusion from the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in its report, *Return of the Population Growth Factor: Its Impact*

Upon the Millennium Development Goals. This exclusion is potentially crippling to the family planning movement, as many funding decisions and programmatic priorities are based on the needs identified in the MDGs. Indeed, as the authors note, despite evidence that the unmet need for family planning is high (27 percent of women of reproductive age in sub-Saharan Africa and 16 percent in Southeast Asia) and rising, funding for family planning has not kept pace (p. 15). Rather than decry population's absence and argue for its inclusion as the so-called "Ninth MDG," the authors instead point to evidence—collected in UK parliamentary hearings and submitted briefs—that attaining the MDGs is not possible without addressing population growth.

This accessible and clearly written report is to be praised for its straightforward arguments and easy-to-follow charts. Addressing each MDG in turn, it identifies why continued population growth will make reaching the identified targets more difficult for developing countries. The report concludes with six simple recommendations to donors and the family planning community alike, focusing on removing financial, social, and technical barriers to family planning.

For the most part, the arguments are sound. Reaching the second MDG, achieving universal primary education, will be difficult under any circumstances. Adding in population growth, the authors claim, means that some countries will be "running to stand still"; for example, countries with high population growth need to add two million teachers per year to sustain a teacher-to-student ratio of 40, an already strained educational environment (pp. 21, 29). Success on the third MDG, gender equality and women's empowerment, is not possible until women have the knowledge and means to control their own fertility. Short birth intervals, a frequent component of high birth rates, often contribute to children's poor nutrition, thus making the fourth MDG (reducing childhood mortality) more difficult to achieve. Lack of birth spacing, high-risk pregnancies, and complications from unsafe



abortion can all decrease maternal health, which is the fifth MDG. The world is already facing difficulties with the seventh MDG, ensuring environmental sustainability, and population growth—especially in areas where growing numbers of people are dependent upon limited stores of forests, fish, or other natural resources—makes it harder still.

On the other hand, the claim that population growth—particularly urbanization—has a negative impact on efforts to fight HIV/AIDS and malaria (the sixth MDG) is less convincing. Some experts argue that urbanization instead improves access to health services (UNFPA, 2007). The relationship between population growth and poverty (the first MDG) is the subject of much controversy. *Return of the Population Growth Factor* uses several instances of correlation between rising populations and worsening poverty to make the case for family planning. Other studies are neither as conclusive nor as optimistic; and some point out that the causal chain works both ways: Poverty can lead to higher fertility, as well (Kelley, 1998; National Research Council, 1986; Pritchett, 1997; Simon, 1981).

Population Issues in the 21st Century: The Role of the World Bank picks up where *Return of the Population Growth Factor* leaves off, with an assessment of the importance and relevance of population issues and recommendations for future priorities for the field and for the World Bank in particular. The authors point out that while family planning programs have been tremendously successful, 35 countries (31 of which are in Africa) still have TFRs of five or higher. In some of these countries, the population will double or triple by 2050 unless dramatic steps are taken.

Population and development are intricately linked, and this report identifies synergies at the World Bank, including those within the office of Health, Nutrition and Population, which is well-positioned to tackle the multi-faceted issue of population. The authors focus on equity, both between and within countries, since inequities—whether due to age, ethnicity, edu-

cation, economic status, or living situation—usually limit access to information and services. Members of disadvantaged groups are often not empowered to negotiate sex or make decisions about their contraceptive use.

Despite the World Bank's confidence in its multi-sectoral approach, the authors are clear about the challenges the Bank faces. First, they point to severe under-funding of population initiatives by donors, developing-country governments, and international organizations (including the Bank itself). Second, developing countries are not prioritizing population—perhaps taking the signal from funders and the MDGs. World Bank strategic plans such as Country Assistance Strategy Reviews and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers address population only occasionally, and when they do, the policies they include are usually not effective. Finally, the authors ask why Africa has yet to share in the global success of family planning programs. Why is the demand for children so much higher in Africa than anywhere else in the world, despite declines in child mortality? Unlike most other developing countries, people in the majority of African countries list opposition to family planning and health concerns (in addition to wanting more children) as the principal reasons for not using contraception; relatively few women cite lack of access, funds, or knowledge. The authors recommend researching what makes Africa different in these respects, and how programs can be tailored to address these factors.

The Role of the World Bank should be taken with a grain of salt, as the introduction states that its results are “preliminary and unpolished...to encourage discussion and debate” (p. ii). No financial or programmatic commitments are attached to this report. Even so, it is a step in the right direction.

Taken together, these three reports describe the family planning movement, providing a useful history of the factors that have made these programs successful. They also describe a movement in crisis as it grapples with its new status and lower levels of funding. Now that it

is no longer the darling of donors such as the World Bank, USAID, and private foundations, is family planning content to reposition itself and to play the “enabling” role in development that the Parliamentarians describe? Or will it prove its worth once again as a stand-alone intervention?

The Role of the World Bank offers welcome signs that the negative tide that started at the 1984 Mexico City population conference may be beginning to turn. *Return of the Population Growth Factor* cites the inclusion of universal access to reproductive health as a target under the MDG on maternal health as a symbol of progress. But old debates about family planning’s relevance and tactics are still evident. To resolve them, the family planning community should continue to document their positive results on social and economic indicators, and to loudly and consistently emphasize the voluntary nature of their programs. As the case studies

in *The Global Family Planning Revolution* show, success did not come quickly or easily. The same kind of patience and creativity demonstrated by these programs may well be required if family planning is to achieve a comeback.

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Governance as a Trialogue: Government-Society-Science in Transition

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For many years, the field of water management was dominated by large dam construction and the belief that large-scale technological advances could solve the world’s water challenges. Today, integrated water resource management (IWRM) is the preferred (though not perfect) model; while it has existed in various forms for decades, only within the past decade has it emerged as the new paradigm for managing water and other resources to ensure a sustainable supply of good-quality water for both people and the environment. Many water managers now grapple with the challenge of developing

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and implementing IWRM plans that must address the many disparate interests involved.

