

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

Family Planning Focus

According to the National Statistical Office-NSO (Malawi), in just over 40 years Malawi's population has increased from four million people in 1966 to 13.1 million in 2008 to near 15 million today.

The population will continue to increase steadily given today's high fertility rate of five children per woman. Even if the fertility rate declines from the 2010 level of five to four children by 2020, the population will still grow to 26 million in 2030.

The population is growing faster in the Northern and Central regions of the country but growth is slower in the more densely populated Southern region.

Even though, Malawi has made significant improvement in addressing its population issues, especially by increasing its use of modern contraceptive use which is currently at 42 percent), large family size remains the norm despite the high demand for family planning.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To educate listeners about the links between the high birth rate and diminishing resources, consequences of the high birth rate and the need to plan families.
- To dispel the myth that more people equates to better development
- To impress upon community leaders, elders and men a positive attitude toward planning births and having smaller families
- To promote discussion and dialogue between listeners and other community members about the population crisis

The Problem: Increased population and its effects on Malawi's development

Increasing population and high fertility rate remain development challenges for Malawi and as such the country needs to move its successes to scale in order to address these challenges.

Economic development, social development, environmental protection and population size are all related. As the human population grows, the more it costs to provide essential social services and the more income is necessary for economic growth.

Also, the more people who inhabit Malawi, the more forests we cut down, the more water we use, the more garbage we produce, and the more we pollute the air.

So, while we need to grow economically, our natural resources are being destroyed simply because we have too many people.

The goal of the government is to reduce poverty and to make Malawi a strong middle-income country. Unless the rate of population growth is reduced, this is unlikely.

The reason for this population growth is our large family sizes. Currently Malawi's fertility rate stands at between five and six births per woman.

The more children we have per family, the more rapidly our population will continue to grow.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand that over population has a bad effect on the development of their communities and the country.

You should be able to deliver the following key messages to your audience:

- Malawi's population is growing faster than the economy, social services (hospitals and schools) or the environment (land size, trees, and water) can adequately support.
- Fast population growth does not improve the economy.
- Overpopulation will diminish already scarce resources such as firewood, fresh water and quality education.
- Slowing population growth, and therefore the number of children that families have, will improve the health of the women, children and families (it is also important that the listener understands that this is about planning their families, timing the births and spacing their children – and not simply about having smaller families)
- Having fewer children will improve the ability of heads of households to meet the financial needs of family members

Also stress the point that one of the ways to reduce family size is through family planning: couples need to

decide to have smaller families, and use modern family planning methods to realize this goal.

One of the reasons why women have so many children is because they begin childbearing so early in life. Most women in Malawi have their first child before they reach the age of 19, and the majority of these children are unplanned.

By encouraging parents to talk to their children about sex —they can help them delay childbearing and avoid sexually transmitted infections.

Have a round table discussion with two women, two men and a traditional leader.

Let them discuss why they think the population of Malawi is growing so fast.

Also ask them this question: Wouldn't you say that having more people is good for the community's development?

After this discussion bring in an expert (Sandra Mapemba) to talk about the effects of population growth on a community's development. She should also talk about the effects the whole country could face because of over population.

Community Engagement

Urge listeners to send SMS, call or stop by the radio station to talk about how over population has impacted on the development of their particular community.

Useful Contacts

- Population Reference Bureau-PRB- Contact Person; Sandra Mapemba: +265-99-921-9789
- <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2012/malawi-population-2012.aspx>
- Family Planning Association of Malawi-FPAM-Contact Person; Fredrick Chelewani (Executive Director) +265-1-773-915
- Malawi Demographic Health survey 2010

