

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: Population Growth

Malawi is still experiencing rapid population growth and early pregnancies and marriages are some of the things that are contributing to it.

There is a clear link between early marriage and population growth: the earlier young girls get married, the more children they are likely to have.

According to a report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) entitled, *Marrying Too Young*, 50% of women aged 20-24 in the country, are married before the age of 18, the eighth highest figure in the world.

Furthermore, the United Nations says, of the 16 million adolescent girls who give birth every year around the world, about 90% are already married.

According to these facts, one can clearly see that early marriages are heavily contributing to population growth, and as Malawians we need to find solutions to this problem because it is not sustainable and it is reducing the quality of life.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To increase knowledge of listeners on how early marriages contribute to population growth
- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on early marriages and population growth
- To help journalists engage their communities in the search for solutions in ending early marriages

The Problem: Early Marriages Contributing to Rapid Population Growth

According to the UNFPA, between 2011 and 2020, more than 140 million girls will become child brides. If current levels of child marriages continue it will mean that 39,000 girls will marry too young each day.

Early marriages in Malawi, which in most cases are forced marriages by the parents or guardians, hinder the young girls' right to determine their own reproductive destiny. It also often results in early and numerous pregnancies. This, of course, leads to rapid population growth.

Young girls who marry early are most likely to get married to a man who is older than them. This often means the young girl has little or no say in the relationship.

Girls who are married off early are usually not aware of the use of family planning methods and are not in a position to discuss and plan their family with their husbands.

Therefore, they are more likely to have frequent and unplanned pregnancies in comparison to girls who marry later. This adds to the country's already high population.

According to the UNFPA, girls who marry early do not go far with their education. As a result, the girls' lack of knowledge and skills may make them more reliant on high numbers of children for security within the marriage. Some girls even believe that when they bear many children, their husbands will not leave them for other women.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand how early marriages are contributing to population growth.

Present the following information to your audience.

Early marriages result in a longer childbearing period, unless contraception is used. However, many young married girls face difficulty in getting access to birth control methods.

There are several reasons for this. For instance, their husbands may not allow them to use any kind of birth control or they may not be aware of what family planning methods are available.

As discussed in our previous bulletins, Malawi's population growth is driven by a high fertility rate – the number of children born per woman is between five and six. Therefore, girls who marry young tend to have more children over the course of their lives than women who marry as adults.

Apart from contributing to rapid population growth, early marriages also leads to several reproductive health problems. For instance, the risks associated with early pregnancy when girls marry young include: maternal death, obstetric fistula, premature delivery, and anemia.

According to the Ministry of Health, teenage pregnancies contribute to 20-30% of maternal deaths in the country.

Solutions

The best solution is working together as a community to end child marriages. As communities, there is need to work together to encourage young girls to work hard to get an

education, so that in the future they can become responsible citizens. Educated girls are more likely to make informed decisions on the number of children they want to have and the type of family planning methods they want to use - without being pressured by their husbands

There is also need for traditional leaders to ensure that parents who are forcing young girls to get married are given tough punishments, together with the men who marry these girls.

Communities can help in disseminating messages about how early marriages contribute to population growth by coming up with messages and writing them on the wall of their houses and toilets, just like most communities do with malaria and sanitation messages.

Conduct an interview with two young women from your area who got married when they were still young. Find out from them why they decided to get married, how many children they have and if they are able to make reproductive health decisions without any resistance from their husbands.

Interview a Traditional Authority-T/A from your area and ask him/her if early marriages are popular in the area and how he/she thinks this contributes to population growth. Also ask him/her how they can solve the problem.

Interview Maxwell Matewere of Eye of the Child and find out how early marriages are contributing to the rapid population growth in the country. Also find out from him what the communities can do to end early marriages.

Useful Contacts

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- <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2004/english/ch9/pages5.htm>;
- http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/child_marriage_20130307/en/



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