



Woodrow Wilson  
International  
Center  
for Scholars

*Environmental Change and Security Program*

***Making the Case for U.S. International Family Planning Assistance  
(Report Launch)***

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Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

***Edited Transcript—Ruth Levine***

So I'm just going to make a few -- a few reflections from the perspective as somebody who's not inside USAID, but rather outside and looking at a whole host of development and health and gender related issues, depending on the hour of the day.

So I'll make a few reflections and then I have two recommendations for areas to -- ideas to work on. So these reflects are really mostly around Steve's presentation, where he talked, really very clearly, about how complicated the relationship -- understanding the relationship is between income poverty in the household, macroeconomic national income growth, and fertility. And that's certainly true, and anytime you have sort of a research question that traces its roots back to Malthus and Marx, you know, that it's something that hard to figure out. And I think the prospects for getting to know some sort of clear, definitive, conclusive agreement about that, that everybody or analysis that everybody believes is probably a bridge too far, but I'd like to suggest that there are different sort of dimensions that might be useful to be looking at, and I know that there certainly are policy researchers who are doing this and some of the remaining foundations that are supporting it.

So I just want to pose this and talk a little bit about the policy side shoe, so on the demographic variables to be thinking about -- certainly fertility and the rate of population growth is one, but it's in many ways more interesting to think about undesired fertility as earlier speakers were saying, and also, again, as was stated, how changes in age structure are so important. And the policy implication of that is really trying to understand which of the countries that currently have high fertility, persistent high fertility, have the potential to achieve relatively rapid decreases in population growth, along with the complimentary kinds of policies that need to be in place to take advantage of the demographic bonus. It isn't all of the countries with relatively high fertility. A number of them have such poor governance environment, such poor institutional environments, that I think it's not very plausible to say that the demographic dividend or bonuses is theirs for the capturing. But there are some where that clearly a [unintelligible] could be perused.

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There's another demographic variable that's often not taken up, which is migration: Both international, but perhaps more importantly for this conversation, internal migration, urbanization, and the impact on both the big megacities and secondary cities. You know if you project forward 10-15 years, the people we care most about are not going to be in those remote villages and actually now many of them are in variant secondary cities whose infrastructure is completely overburdened by the rapid growth of population, both through natural and migration, natural fertility and through migration.

So I think sort of broadening our perspective I'm not telling you anything you don't already think about, but broadening the perspective and talking about those issues may have somewhat more traction than talking only about rapid population growth as a kind of aggregate phenomenon. Then, in terms of outcome variables, there's a lot of work that's been done about changes in income poverty at the household level, and this GDP question. And then USAID, I think, has been a pioneer in talking about and studying, providing the resources to study the impact of family planning and changes in fertility on major health outcomes, so that's clearly a kind of approach that has a lot of salience.

There are others as well, I think, that haven't been studied as much but may be promising in the future. So these are harder concepts to measure them, perhaps infinite child mortality or some reproductive health outcomes. But concepts like happiness, which there's a -- you know, there's a growing kind of academic industry of trying to come up with metrics for happiness, often based on household surveys, asking people questions about dimensions of their lives and welfare. And there's a case being made that some kind of broader, more holistic concept of human welfare beyond GDP per capita is really much more meaningful, and so I think somehow connecting reproductive choice, family planning, to outcomes that include happiness, would be something that could potentially over the medium term be very fruitful.

Somewhat more near term is looking at issues of -- and talking about the impact on women's empowerment on environmental impacts as we heard earlier on food security, on the savings rate, very important to question right now, and on social stability, I think that's something that as the current youth bulge hits a contracting economy, there's going to be a lot discussion about what to do with the unemployed youth and the extent to which that causes social disruption. There may be a way to both use that for researches to better understand

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that phenomenon, and also to use that in arguments for thinking about the future, the importance of -- of reducing undesired fertility.

On the sort of policy variables or, you know, what to do, I think there's a good -- that the report does a very nice job of sort of sticking to the area's demonstrable strength for USAID. I think at the same time it's useful, and I know folks in the POP office do this, to reach out to groups that focus on other things, beyond increasing the access to family planning services, and developing new and better contraceptive technologies. So those include things like policy measures to increase the access that women have, to productive resources, reducing gender discrimination, gender-based violence, increasing demand and quality of education for girls, and hugely important is on the AIDS prevention front. Both because there's potentially, I think to be fully demonstrated, but potentially some promise in integrating services. But also because the AIDS programs are eating everybody else's lunch.

If you project forward, it doesn't take much imagination or arithmetic to see that the commitments that have been made around universal access to treatment, along with the really very limited success of prevention programs, lead to a conclusion that by 2016 or so, it's very plausible that AIDS programs -- under that scenario -- that AIDS programs will not just dominate the plausible envelope for official development assistance, but actually occupy almost all of it.

So I think that there have been huge successes in the AIDS domain, not just raising resources but actually the quality of the programs, the achievements, the results, but it's really the area of AIDS prevention that has fallen so far behind and for everybody, whether you care mostly about AIDS or not, but for everybody it's incredibly important to support effective AIDS programs.

So with those somewhat, hopefully not completely incoherent reflections, let me close with two recommendations. One is -- and this is sort of about areas to get more leadership around family planning and population issues. And one is a very obvious one, which is to look way past the GH. I mean, I think if there's one thing that we're saying these days, it's that our

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And the second, on the leadership front, is you know, if you want to change how open economists are at the World Bank to these concepts, then I think we need to think about the gender, age, national origin of the next president of the World Bank, and maybe whether or not she's a vegetarian.

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