

## Population Policies and Programmes in the Post-ICPD Era: Can the Pacific Island Countries Meet the Challenge?

By Stephen Chee, William J. House and Laurie Lewis \*

\* Stephen Chee, Director, William J. House, Adviser on Population Policies and Development Strategies, and Laurie Lewis, former Adviser on Population Statistics, UNFPA Country Support Team, Suva, Fiji. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

*Innovative policies need to be incorporated into comprehensive and detailed implementation plans*

The Pacific island countries and territories were among the strongest supporters of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held at Cairo in 1994, and the adoption of its Programme of Action (United Nations, 1994). Indeed, government ministers and representatives of the Pacific countries including Australia and New Zealand, had met at Port Vila, Vanuatu, in September 1993, to identify key population and development issues of concern to the subregion and to formulate policy recommendations that would serve as its position in the collective approach to negotiations in the drafting of the Programme of Action. It is striking how much of the agenda spelled out in the 1993 Port Vila Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development is incorporated within the ICPD Programme of Action. The purpose of this article is to assess how much progress has been made in realizing the ICPD vision of improving the human condition in the Pacific island countries and to propose actions that must be considered to address prevailing constraints.

Compared with some other subregions and according to some standards of performance, the Pacific islands are quite developed and well endowed. The Pacific island countries and territories are politically stable, relatively peaceful and have social structures which are still able to cater to the basic needs of their populations. During recent years, throughout the subregion, improvements in life expectancy, health and education reveal that much progress has been made. The countries and territories comprising the subregion enjoy a relatively high standard of living compared with many other developing countries in the ESCAP region since physical and human resource endowments are relatively favourable. Some of the positive indicators include the following:

- Annual income levels in the Pacific island countries are relatively high compared with other developing countries, ranging from about US\$ 460 in Kiribati to US\$ 3,400 in Cook Islands
- Average life expectancy is relatively high by world standards, at over 60 years in almost all the Pacific island countries, with the exception of Papua New Guinea, and rising to 70 years in some countries
- Absolute poverty is virtually non-existent, although relative poverty is a concern in some countries  
Overall literacy rates are generally higher than the average for developing countries
- Primary education is virtually universal in all the Pacific island countries, although school dropout rates are high
- Access to health services and qualified medical staff is comparable to that in many middle-income countries
- Infant mortality rates are low compared with those in many developing countries
- Modern transport and communications infrastructures are readily available
- Large parts of the population have access to safe water supplies.
- ICPD goals: how do the Pacific island countries fare?

The ICPD Programme of Action lays out three specific long-term goals in three major areas to be met over the next two decades, as well as intermediate goals to be achieved within one decade, i.e. by the year 2005. These goal indicators and their threshold levels for the year 2005 are portrayed in table 1.

**Table 1. Indicators and threshold levels for achieving goals of the ICPD Programme of Action by the year 2005**

Goal	Indicators	Threshold levels
<i>Goal: Access to reproductive health</i>		
	Proportion of deliveries attended by trained health personnel	60 per cent
	Contraceptive prevalence rate	55 per cent
	Proportion of population having access to basic health services	60 per cent
<i>Goal: Mortality reduction</i>		
	Infant mortality rate	50 infant deaths per 1,000 live births
	Maternal mortality ratio	100 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births
<i>Goal: Universal primary education</i>		
	Gross female enrolment rate at primary level	65 per 100 eligible population
	Adult female literacy rate	50 per cent

Using these goal indicators and threshold levels as benchmarks, according to the data available, most of the Pacific island countries have already met the quantitative goals of the ICPD Programme of Action on almost all the above-mentioned dimensions, with the exception of the contraceptive prevalence rate and maternal mortality ratio (which is an inappropriate indicator for monitoring maternal health in countries with small populations) for a few countries.

These solid achievements represent high levels of overall investment in the past, dedicated efforts by governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and generous development assistance from external sources. In addition, as a World Bank study notes: "Favourable physical environments and rich cultural traditions, including the extended family system, customary land ownership and benefit sharing practices, have endowed their populations with a relatively safe and secure lifestyle" (World Bank, 1993).

However, this picture obviously generalizes conditions in the Pacific, and the optimistic scenario is certainly not applicable to all countries since the demographic and development situations vary quite dramatically. Even among the 15 island countries and territories in the South Pacific covered by UNFPA, from Papua New Guinea to Niue, the variation is quite large, such that generalization is likely to be hazardous. Indeed, the experience facing each and every country is often very different and even a simplified classification of the nation states into Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia hardly does justice to the social, economic and demographic situations each of them faces. The demographic indicators for the subregion are portrayed in table 2.

**Table 2. Selected demographic indicators for 15 Pacific island countries and territories, 1995**

	Year of last census	1995 estimated population (1,000s)	Population per sq km	Annual population growth rate (%)	Sex ratio	Crude birth rate (1,000)	Crude death rate (1,000)	Total fertility rate (TFR)	Infant mortality rate (IMR)	Percentage of population		Dependency ratio	Expectation of life at birth (years)		Percentage of population urban	Annual growth rate in urban population (%)
										<15	65+		Males	Females		
Melanesia																
Fiji	1986	784	43	1.5	103	23	5	2.9	13	35	4	62	70	74	41	2.4
Papua New Guinea	1990	4,250	9	2.3	112	34	13	4.7	82	42	2	79	51	52	15	4.1
Solomon Islands	1986	378	14	3.3	108	37	4	5.2	46	47	3	90	69	73	17	6.4
Vanuatu	1989	169	14	2.8	106	38	9	5.3	58	44	4	90	62	64	18	4.9
Micronesia																
Federated States of Micronesia	1994	108	154	2.1	105	33	8	4.7	46	44	4	89	64	68	28	4.3
Kiribati	1990	82	89	2.5	98	37	12	4.5	65	40	4	79	61	66	36	2.7
Marshall Islands	1988	55	304	3.5	105	34	9	5.5	63	50	3	113	60	63	69	4.0
Nauru	1983	11	523	2.7	-	24	5	2.7	26	-	-	-	-	-	100	2.7
Palau	1990	18	36	3.3	117	22	7	2.8	25	30	6	56	67	67	71	2.8
Polynesia																
Cook Islands	1986	19	79	1.1	109	30	6	3.7	25	34	8	72	70	70	60	2.0
Niue	1994	2	9	1.0	100	17	5	3.5	12	38	7	82	-	-	29	-
Tokelau	1991	1	-	-6.7	96	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tonga	1986	98	140	0.6	101	29	6	3.5	17	37	6	76	66	70	41	3.4
Tuvalu	1991	10	372	1.7	100	30	9	3.4	41	34	5	64	65	71	46	4.0
Samoa	1991	165	42	0.5	110	36	5	4.8	22	41	4	82	67	70	21	1.7

Source: National censuses, South Pacific Commission, 1995, Demographic Estimates for Asian and Pacific Countries and Areas ( Noumea, South Pacific Commission ) and UNFPA CST estimates.

In contrast, other social indicators provide a mixed picture, exceeding expectations in many of the smaller countries at their stage of development, but emphasizing the uncertainties and developmental dilemmas for some of the larger countries. The countries of the subregion face daunting challenges to their prevailing living conditions and lifestyles in the future. This situation exists because high natural rates of population growth are exerting intense pressure on social services and economic institutions, such that sustained economic growth and sustainable development will be extremely difficult to achieve. Given the lack of dynamism in these island economies, the sustainability of present living standards, including social services, such as health and education, may be at risk. The challenge will be to ensure that past achievements are maintained and that the quality of life of Pacific islanders continues to progress. However, the road ahead presents new and profound challenges at a time when national development policy options are limited and when public sector budgets are under intense pressure, since rates of economic growth have been disappointing and donor support

declining.

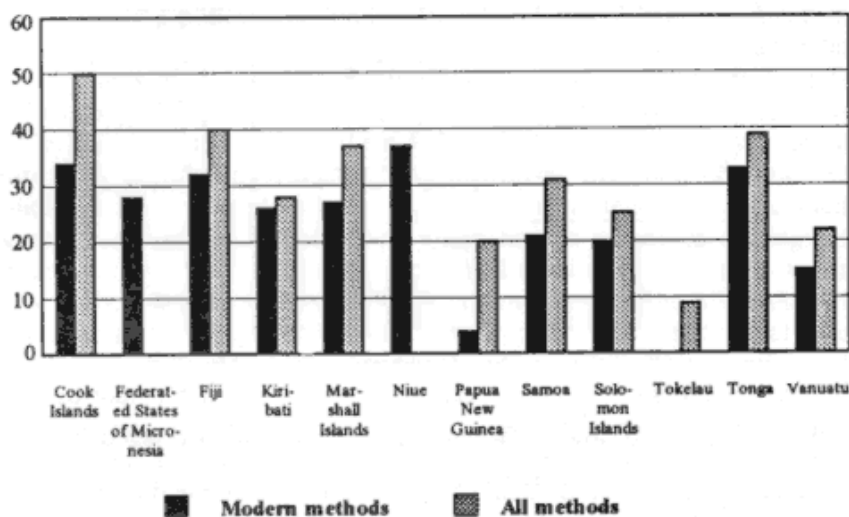
Furthermore, long-time harmonious social conditions in the island countries are under threat as the traditional social fabric is challenged by modernizing influences channelled through formally educated youths, latter-day communications systems and visiting family members based overseas. The dominance of Parliament by the nobles in Tonga and the chieftain system elsewhere are under challenge by democratizing activists; women's rights movements have grown to press for an improvement in the status of women and a reduction in overt discrimination; and recently educated youth are challenging traditional authority in the home and community. Symptoms of this confrontation between the traditional and the modern are found in rising urban shanty towns and concomitant increasing crime rates, particularly in urban Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Solomon Islands; the opening of women's crisis centres to deal more transparently with domestic violence inflicted on wives; significant adolescent fertility in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Marshall Islands as young unmarried females become sexually active at an early age but fail to use a contraceptive method; an increasing number of reported sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and the threat of an AIDS epidemic, especially in Papua New Guinea; a growing incidence of suicide, particularly among the urban youth of Samoa; evident food insecurity in some rural areas as traditional social safety nets come under threat; and increasing obesity and associated non-communicable diseases as sedentary lifestyles and processed foods replace traditional diets. As population sizes grow and pressure on limited land intensifies, there are increasing cases of challenges to the traditional authorities over access to land and its uses.

## Population and development challenges in the Pacific island countries

### Why should population matter?

The total population of the 15 island countries and territories which UNFPA covers in the South Pacific, from Palau to Niue, is only about 7 million, i.e. less than the population of metropolitan Calcutta or Manila. Why should a country like Kiribati, with a population of only about 80,000, or even Papua New Guinea with just over 4 million people, worry about their population size and growth rate? The reason is because critical factors, such as population size and structure, growth rates, distribution patterns, and migration and urbanization trends, have a direct impact on the potential for realizing sustained economic growth and sustainable development. Indeed, the development of human capital, including the provision of adequate infrastructure, productive employment, housing, health and education facilities, potable water and food, and the management of natural resources and the environment, are key ingredients for attaining social and economic development. Yet, rapid population growth in some of the Pacific island countries is having an adverse impact on their ability to create the necessary preconditions for realizing sustainable development.

Figure 1. Contraceptive prevalence rates in selected Pacific island countries and territories



Source: Various Governments' and United Nations' estimates.

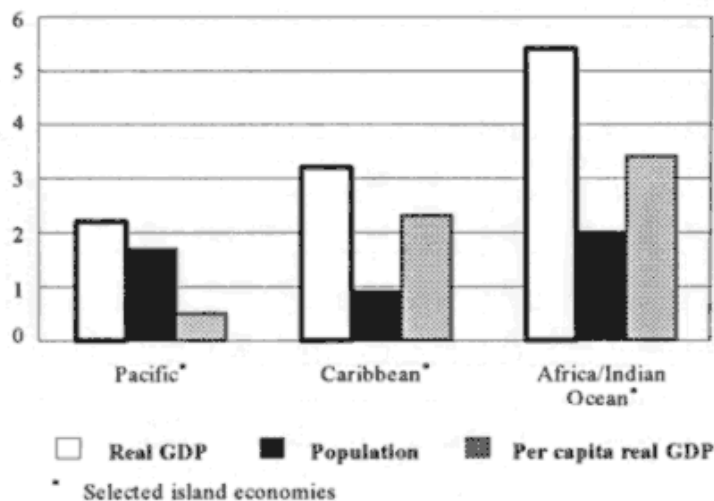
For example, several Pacific island countries, including Solomon Islands and Marshall Islands, have very high fertility, where women bear an average of at least five children. One reason why fertility is so high is that modern contraceptive use is relatively low in these countries compared with many other developing countries at similar levels of income per capita. While available data on contraceptive use are not very reliable, in only a few of the Pacific island countries does the estimated modern contraceptive prevalence rate exceed 35 per cent and in some, it barely reaches 20 per cent, as portrayed in figure 1. Opinions vary on whether this is due to limited access to contraceptives or to a low demand for family planning. Much more research is needed on the relative importance of contraceptive demand and supply in order to provide essential data and information for planners and policy makers. There is no doubt much unmet need in many of the other Pacific island countries which impinges adversely on the health of women and children and the future development prospects of their countries.<sup>1</sup>

### Population growth rate exceeds economic growth rate

The population growth rate has exceeded the rate of economic expansion in the majority of the Pacific island countries during the past decade with the result that per capita income has stagnated or declined. The contrast with other island countries around the world is portrayed in figure 2, which demonstrates the poor performance of the Pacific island countries. While the world's population is growing at about 1.5 per cent annually, population growth in the Pacific island countries exceeds 2 per cent annually. At this rate, their combined estimated population of just over 7 million in 1998 is growing by more than 150,000-180,000 people per year. What this suggests is that a population equivalent to the combined size of Tonga and Marshall Islands is being added to the subregion each year. It means that

Papua New Guinea, for example, would have to cater for an additional 90,000 people or more each year, and that Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands would double their populations in about 17 and 20 years, respectively. What does this situation suggest might happen to these countries' quality of life as we know it today?

**Figure 2. Contrasting performance of developing regions in terms of percentage GDP and population growth per annum**



Source: World Bank, 1993. Pacific Island Economies: Toward Efficient and Sustainable Growth, Vol.1, Overview (Washington Dc, World Bank).

While rapid population growth per se is not a cause for concern if accompanied by commensurate levels of economic growth, in the Pacific island countries, with low growth rates and less than dynamic economies, high population growth rates may result in declining or stagnating levels of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Indeed, evidence is emerging of growing poverty, environmental degradation, rapid urbanization and rising social problems that all reflect the consequences of high population growth.

Meanwhile, the lack of structural change, particularly in rural areas, has accentuated rural-to-urban migration, perhaps stimulated by rising levels of education and increased job expectations, contributing to the construction of urban squatter settlements that have emerged in Suva (Fiji), Honiara (Solomon Islands), Port Vila (Vanuatu), Nuku'alofa (Tonga), Tarawa (Kiribati), Majuro (Marshall Islands) and elsewhere. While absolute poverty and destitution, in the sense of severe malnutrition, are largely absent from these countries, there is concern over growing household inequality and relative poverty, including rising income disparities both between urban and rural areas and within urban areas, rising joblessness and expanding criminal activity.

While some of the Polynesian countries have managed to relieve such population pressure in the past by "off-loading" some of their citizens to the so-called Pacific Rim countries, this "escape valve" may be closing as Australia and New Zealand tighten the conditions of entry for potential settlers. Furthermore, large-scale donor aid has supported infrastructural construction and operating costs but, there too, "donor fatigue" has led to a downward trend in the supply of this source of funding.

## Population growth, urbanization and the environment

Both population growth and increasing urbanization are having deleterious and damaging effects on the environment of the Pacific island countries. Environmental degradation is evident in a number of countries, particularly in urban areas, as population influx and natural growth exert pressure on clean water supplies, sanitation and coastal reefs and in-shore fishing grounds. The quest to generate economic growth and foreign exchange has led to the unsustainable depletion of natural resources, particularly fish stocks and forests.

### Current age structure

The structure of Pacific populations is such that it is broad at the base of population pyramids and through the childbearing years, ensuring that population growth will be substantial for the foreseeable future. At the same time, Pacific populations, like those in the rest of the world, are changing shape, with growing numbers of people over age 60, which will affect development prospects for the twenty-first century. Furthermore, youth dependency (the ratio of the young dependent population under 15 years of age to the population in the working ages of 15-64 years) will remain significant. Currently, the share of the under 15 years age group in the total population exceeds one third in all the Pacific island countries; every 100 persons in the working age group must support 50 or more dependants, i.e. those aged under 15 and those 65 and older.

### School-age populations

School-age populations are anticipated to increase very substantially in several countries, particularly in Melanesia. Yet, in the South Pacific in recent years, the share of education spending both in terms of GDP and in government budgets has been declining. The rising school intakes will place an intolerable burden on the financing of education. Moreover, insufficient employment opportunities will be created to cope with the rise in the number of working-age people in view of the recent poor economic growth rates. Currently, several Pacific island countries are unable to provide for universal primary education or are not attempting to absorb all qualified primary leavers into secondary school as a matter of policy. Given the known relationship between rising girls' educational attainments and subsequent

declines in rates of fertility, such countries are likely to impede further demographic behavioural change.

## Gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women

The need for women's equality is stressed throughout the Programme of Action, being viewed as an ethically mandated end in itself. The improvement of women's political, social and economic status, and improving women's health are viewed as essential for stabilizing population growth and achieving sustainable development. Yet, women are grossly under-represented in the political arena in all the countries of the subregion. They have only nominal representation in the Parliaments of the countries and ministerial portfolios for women are even rarer. Their economic status, as reflected in their occupational attainments and earnings levels, is distinctly inferior to men. In some Polynesian and Micronesian countries, their share in the labour force barely reaches one third; in Melanesia, where women are more likely to be engaged in subsistence farming, their participation is somewhat higher.

## Economic restructuring and reform

Meanwhile, economic restructuring and reform are curtailing the major source of public sector employment in these countries, with no obvious viable alternative. Income and employment prospects face a major crisis in Cook Islands and Marshall Islands as a massive downsizing of the public sector goes on. Other countries in Micronesia, which also depend on Compact of Free Association funding, face an impending crisis as the end of that arrangement draws near. Thus, it is impossible to be overly optimistic about the prospects for generating sustained economic growth and sustainable development in the Pacific subregion in the coming decade. New sources of economic growth, including a rejuvenated rural economy, have yet to emerge. Without economic growth, past advances made in human resources development, including improved health and women's status, will be much more difficult to maintain. Not coincidentally, countries with the highest rates of population growth have the lowest per capita income and, perhaps, the poorest prospects for raising real income levels.

## Pressure on land and food security

Such pressure will intensify in situations where demarcation disputes over traditional, communally owned and unregistered land are growing rapidly. Food security in the island countries is also threatened by burgeoning populations and because land resources, from which to harvest domestically grown food supplies, are limited. Taste patterns are also changing, such that a rising share of the islanders' food is imported. In some Polynesian countries, where large numbers of overseas residents return to reclaim parcels of land, the situation might be volatile.

National and household-level food security is also threatened in some cases as prices of locally grown food become uncompetitive with less nutritious but cheaper imported processed foods and where taste patterns have been irrevocably changed. The foreign exchange costs of imported foods are rising rapidly, yet, in most cases, export earnings fail to respond. Without a slowing down in population growth, more domestic saving and overseas investment to promote dynamic economic growth, and greater foreign exchange earnings from exports, the funds to pay for the rising food bill will dwindle, thus endangering household food security.

## Health budgets

Pressure on health budgets, personnel and infrastructural facilities is already severe in many of the countries, particularly on rural facilities, such that the ability to provide universal and high-quality reproductive health services and a wide choice of family planning methods and services will become increasingly difficult.

This short analysis has underlined the importance of population-related and induced problems which must be dealt with in an integrated manner. Economic restructuring to promote sustained growth, innovative development strategies and population policies are not dichotomous options but must be viewed as integral parts of an essential comprehensive strategy to address profound development problems affecting the island countries.

## Population policies and programmes

Many of the countries of the subregion have formulated explicit population policies in the recent past while others are currently in the process of revising policies. A status appraisal of this situation is given in table 3 for most of the countries. Countries such as Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands formulated population policies in the late 1980s, but their impact was negligible. One explanation for their failure is that a strong institutional structure and identified coordinating unit to oversee the implementation of the policies were lacking. Another reason was the absence of a detailed implementation plan with full budgetary and human resources costings of the needs of the various sectors to carry out the policies. Perhaps a major reason was the seeming lack of political commitment to the allocation of scarce financial resources and high-level manpower to ensure that the implementation strategies were being carried out in a systematic and coordinated manner. In many instances, the population policy implied that there was a population programme with overriding national goals and objectives. In reality the "programme" often consisted of component parts or sectoral interventions which were implemented in an uncoordinated fashion with no assurance that they were not conflicting with the overriding national goals.

**Table 3. Status of population policy in countries and territories of the South Pacific**

Country/territory	Status of population policy	Principal demographic concerns
Cook Islands	None	—
Federated States of Micronesia	To be revised	To reduce fertility: health-oriented improvements
Fiji	Implicit policy in development plan	To limit population growth
Kiribati	In preparation	—
Marshall Islands	Revised and endorsed	To lower fertility

Nauru	None	—
Niue	In preparation	To promote return migration and repopulate
Palau	Completed	To reduce out-migration, curb alien immigration
Papua New Guinea	Policy exists but implementation poor; currently under revision	To lower fertility, reduce urbanization
Samoa	Draft available	To lower fertility, promote sustainable development
Solomon Islands	Revision in preparation	To lower fertility
Tonga	In preparation	—
Tuvalu	In preparation	To lower fertility, reduce urbanization
Vanuatu	In preparation	—

The lack of a coordinated approach to implementing all the elements of a population programme has been readily apparent. In some instances an awareness-raising campaign for family planning has effectively raised the demand for contraceptive services and a binding constraint has emerged on the supply side as service facilities, staffing positions or contraceptive supplies have been less than adequate.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, reproductive health/family planning service clinics sometimes have been erected and staffed without an appreciation of the need to create the requisite demand for such facilities.<sup>3</sup> Often, population policies have as an explicit objective the intention to retard the rate of rural-to-urban migration because of the deleterious social and economic consequences of too rapid urbanization. At the same time, rural development policies have been negated by a definite urban bias towards national development programmes as social infrastructure and industrial development have continued to be concentrated in urban centres despite public pronouncements of intentions to reverse this pattern. Other key areas, such as human resources development and labour force planning, international migration, food security, environmental degradation and land tenure, in the absence of a rigid policy framework, have been almost totally neglected as population-accommodating or population-influencing factors.

More recently, a new more holistic and comprehensive approach has been taken throughout the subregion and it is beginning to produce very positive results. Population awareness-raising workshops and seminars have been organized in various countries. These have served important purposes in initiating the complex process of designing a national population policy and programme, and of helping to identify the nature of population-related problems, formulating broad-based strategies to address them, and establishing the institutional and other requirements for drafting formal population policies. As a result, many Pacific island countries are currently preparing to draft policy statements or are revising existing policies to be endorsed by the political leadership.

## **Capacity-building in population: key future actions**

### **The ICPD Programme of Action as a blueprint for capacity-building**

The ICPD Programme of Action, endorsed by 180 governments at Cairo in 1994, provides a blueprint for developing national capacity in population and development activities. Despite the small size of their populations, Pacific island countries are finding that the ICPD Programme of Action provides an innovative integrated population and development framework for governments and groups to prepare their own national plans and programmes of action. For the Pacific, the strategy for implementing the Programme of Action might be at two levels: national and regional. Practical implementation, however, depends primarily on action at the country level. The political commitment of government leadership at the highest level is central to implementation of the Programme of Action at the national level.

For the Pacific, the strategy for implementing the Programme of Action might be at two levels: national and regional. Practical implementation, however, depends primarily on action at the country level. The political commitment of government leadership at the highest level is central to implementation of the Programme of Action at the national level.

### **The need for capacity-building in population programmes**

Governments in the Pacific are aiming to create modern societies that, at the same time, maintain or improve the quality of life around a stable and resilient family system. As in all cases of successful modernization and development, this means sustaining a national society that is in balance with the natural resources base and the environment.

Despite the popular image of a favourable natural resource endowment in the Pacific, the principal resource of the island economies is their populations. The quality of the population, in particular the skills and competitiveness of the labour force, will have a decisive influence on prospects for promoting sustained economic growth and sustainable development in the long run.

Countries increasingly recognize that investments in population programmes, including reproductive health, family planning and sexual health (RH/FP-SH), have multiple positive development impacts and high rates of return. When population programmes involve participation from a broad range of grass-roots society, they are the most effective. The health benefits of RH/FP-SH are widespread. Women are healthier if they space and bear fewer children, and give birth to healthier children who have a greater chance of survival. Contraception made available to adolescents can reduce the incidence of STDs and curtail the need for abortions, particularly unsafe abortions, and prevent girls from dropping out of school at an early age.

To induce change in demographic behaviour without coercion, particularly with regard to fertility and migration behaviour, comprehensive and holistic innovative programmes will require formulation and implementation. Rural development may well retard rural-to-urban and overseas migration. Improving the quality and quantity of reproductive health and family planning information and services can induce couples to employ more effective contraceptive methods to ensure that their desired and achieved fertility levels are more likely to be in unison. Raising the lifetime opportunities of the girl child and improving the status of women in society can go a long way to empowering women to be able to determine their own fertility behaviour. The creation of a political, social and cultural environment

Meanwhile, planners and policy makers must be prepared to implement policies and programmes which are population-accommodating, necessitating major investments in the health and education sectors just to maintain the far from satisfactory current provision of services. Such rapid population growth will also have major implications for the labour markets of the subregion, since the small formal sectors cannot hope to accommodate all the newcomers from the education system, particularly when economic growth and employment creation have stagnated for at least the past decade in most countries.

### **Key future actions**

To implement policies and programmes to influence demographic outcomes (population-influencing policies such as reproductive health/family planning programmes, information, education and communications, raising women's status, including education) or to accommodate increasing numbers of people (population-accommodating policies such as increased health and education services, employment opportunities, food provision), an essential prerequisite is a sound research base and database. Such data should be timely and current, reliable, divisible by sex, geographic area and socio-economic group, and amenable to in-depth analysis. To be utilized effectively in policy formulation and planning exercises, it is inadequate simply to collect demographic data, e.g. point estimates of fertility, mortality and migration. To explain inter-geographic area or inter-socio-economic status differentials in behavioural patterns is the *raison d'être* of the study of population-development interrelationships. Thus, such demographic data must be accompanied by information on the socio-economic variables relating to the same unit of observation. Yet, a cursory survey of data sources and availability in the Pacific reveals the gross inadequacy of currently available data, according to this extensive list. Evidently, more research and improved data collection are prerequisites for the design of programmes than can fulfil the ambitious goals of the ICPD Programme of Action for Pacific island countries.

The major strategies and actions needed in the subregion include improved working knowledge and skills for all RH/FP staff and personnel at all levels to meet the challenges of new integrated approaches to RH/FP promotion and management. This will involve the redefining of the roles of most health institutions in the provision of RH/FP services and care, and then training the staff to meet the emerging needs; and improved and upgraded facilities at all levels, especially at the primary level, to meet the minimal and basic needs of the services to be provided. This will entail the provision of equipment and supplies; improved family planning methods in the rural areas at the primary health care level in conjunction with the training of staff providers; strengthened RH/FP information systems, especially at the primary health care and health centre levels; and strengthened service provision through "mobile clinics" wherever possible and feasible.

We would like to raise some words of caution, however, as new interventions are designed in RH/FP. In the post-ICPD era, it may be easy to forget that the provision of contraceptives might well be the most effective (and cheapest) strategy for improving maternal and child health (Caldwell, 1996). Social marketing of condoms undoubtedly improves the health of users' families through birth spacing and provides protection against STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Extended social marketing of other contraceptives would require a higher level of responsibility for client education: proper use, contraindications and instructions on side-effects. Yet, family planning programmes that address the reproductive health needs of women are valuable and urgently needed. But what about their high costs, which may reach prohibitive levels where they require face-to-face contact between trained health workers and clients, particularly in the resource-poor Pacific island countries? Our fear is that the more affluent middle-classes may benefit from the provision of these more costly services at the expense of the less well-off whose access to more basic services, including contraceptives, may suffer.

### **Conclusions**

Social indicators provide a mixed story in the Pacific island countries, exceeding expectations in many of the smaller countries at their stage of development, but emphasizing the uncertainties and development problems for the larger Melanesian countries.

New population-related problems are also presenting themselves in the form of rising rates of adolescent fertility, STDs entailing the ever-present threat of an HIV/AIDS epidemic, and disenchantment with local, rural-based clinics and health facilities. Rural-to-urban migration continues unabated and immense pressure is being exerted on the urban infrastructure, the job market and the environment. As traditional authority breaks down, there is concern over rising substance abuse, crime, domestic violence and suicide in some countries (Ruzicka, 1998).

These challenges require innovative population-accommodating and population-influencing policies to be incorporated into comprehensive national population and development policies and programmes. Such policies need to go hand in hand with detailed implementation plans which have yet to be formulated in most of the island countries. These should entail a detailed accounting of the financial and human resource costs of implementing the policies, including the resource requirements for meeting the goals and targets of the ICPD Programme of Action, particularly those relating to new interventions in the sector of reproductive health.

The greatest challenges will be to integrate population issues fully into the development planning process, particularly at the grass-roots level, at a time when national development policy options are quite limited and when public sector budgets are under intense pressure as rates of economic growth have been disappointing and donor support has been declining.

The challenge to national governments and donors alike will be to ensure that past achievements are maintained and the quality of life of Pacific islanders continues to progress.

### **Endnotes**

From a 1995 household survey in Vanuatu, House (1999) estimates the modern contraceptive prevalence rate to be 21 per cent and the rate of unmet need for limiting future childbearing to be 30 per cent of currently married women. In Fiji, a campaign to promote vasectomy seems to have created the requisite demand. Yet, the conventional wisdom has it that a man must wait for 18 months or more at the public hospital to undergo the operation.

Some rural clinics appear to be grossly underutilized and their staff underemployed in many of the island countries.



## References

Caldwell, J.C. (1996). "Unresolved issues in the Post-Cairo era: implementing the ICPD Programme of Action" Arab Regional Population Conference, Cairo, December.

Ruzicka, Lado T. (1998). "Suicide in countries and areas of the ESCAP region" *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 13(4):55-74.

United Nations (1994). *Population and Development: Programme of Action Adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development* (New York, United Nations).

United Nations Population Fund (1996). *A Revised Approach for the allocation of UNFPA Resources to Country Programmes*, New York.

World Bank (1993). *Pacific Island Economies: Toward Efficient and Sustainable Growth, Vol.1, Overview* (Washington DC, World Bank).

---

*Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, [www.unescap.org/appj.asp](http://www.unescap.org/appj.asp)

Print this page