

UNFPA And Population Education

Higher Education, Lower Fertility

STUDIES by United Nations Organizations have revealed a stunning fact about the relationship between education and population: Educated women have fewer children than less educated or uneducated women.

In Brazil, for example, uneducated women have an average of 6.5 children each, whereas those with secondary education have only 2.5 where women's status and education are good and use of family planning is higher, fertility is lower. This phenomenon is increasingly conspicuous in various countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The importance of education of women, particularly adolescents, about the facts for life — sex, marriage, reproduction, maternal health, etc. — cannot be too much emphasized. Adolescent fertility is one of the most serious problems facing young people and their communities, but also seems to be one of the most difficult to deal with, in many instances.

Many married adolescents are "mothers too soon", especially in rural areas of many developing countries, where early marriage is widely practised. On the other hand there is an increasing occurrence of out-of-wedlock adolescent pregnancy, especially in early child-bearing, particularly in developing countries, often means larger families, which, together with shorter time spans between generations, contribute to rapid population growth.

Thus, delaying age at marriage has implications for fertility and future life options of young people. This means there is a paramount need to convince the young people that they can control many of the events in their lives, including those related to reproductive behaviours — when to marry, when to have the first child, how many children to have, etc. This

is why population education was devised and developed.

Definition: The definition of population education has not changed much over the years. It is generally agreed that population education is the process of helping people understand the nature, causes and implications of population processes as they affect, and are affected by, individuals families, communities and nations. It focuses on family and individual decisions influencing population change at the micro level as well as on broad demographic changes.

Population education is also an educational response to various aspects of demographic problems — social, cultural, economic and environmental. It helps learners to understand interrelationships between population dynamics, environment and sustainable development with the purpose of promoting

rational attitude and behaviours for improving the quality of life.

The efforts by UNFPA in this field began in 1970, immediately after its inception in 1969, in close cooperation with UNESCO.

In 1971 the first UNFPA-funded population education projects were executed in El Salvador, the Philippines and Colombia by UNESCO. Other countries also came into the scene of population education gradually, but it was not so prominent before the International Conference on Population held in Mexico City in 1984 when concern with population, and subsequently population education, seized momentum, changing the situation dramatically.

For the past some twenty years more than 90 countries received or were receiving support from UNFPA to develop national population education activities in formal and non-formal education systems, in

close collaboration with UNESCO. At present school programmes are implemented in 71 countries for which an average 4 per cent of the total UNFPA budget (\$238.2 million in 1992) is expended.

UNFPA's approach to population programming is a holistic one. Rather than funding projects in an ad hoc fashion and assuming that they will somehow come together to form a coherent national programme, the Fund undertakes lengthy exercises with Governments to develop comprehensive strategies for a national programme.

Students are not the only audience for population in schools. Others include teachers and administrators, parents, religious leaders, and policy makers. Each has particular needs which have to be met if population education is to reach children effectively.

(To be Continued)