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REPORT ON
POPULATION INFORMATION DISSEMINATION, DIFFUSION AND UTILIZATION:
SOME ISSUES AND CONCERNS

FOR DISCUSSION ONLY

POPULATION INFORMATION DISSEMINATION, DIFFUSION, AND UTILIZATION:
some issues and concerns.

INTRODUCTION

1. Since 1984, African governments and leaders have become increasingly aware of population issues and have been seeking solutions to these in an effort to bring about positive social and economic development for Africa, in general, and for their respective countries, in particular. The process of integrating population variables into the socio-economic development programmes of Africa requires conscious efforts at creating awareness of the underlying population dynamics of the African Region. In this process, the need to more widely disseminate and diffuse population information cannot be overemphasized.

2. The KPA urges countries to give priority attention to training experts in population information and dissemination in order to ensure adequate and prompt dissemination of the results of population research undertaken in each country. At the national level, relevant institutions are expected to carry out the functions related to the dissemination of the research results to identified user groups and individuals. This implies the careful assessment and determination of users, their information needs and requirements to ensure better service provision and enhanced outreach activity. It also means creating the right atmosphere through sensitization for accepting population information and messages. Creating the right atmosphere requires collaboration and integration with population bodies, centres and institutions, such as the Union for African Population Studies. Mass media institutions will also have to be involved. Distribution and clearing house services will have to be re-organized and better managed, and serious promotional exercises undertaken.

3. This background paper attempts to highlight POPIN-Africa's role and some of its activities in the above areas.

A. DETERMINATION OF NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR POPULATION
INFORMATION IN THE REGION

4. The success and promotion of population programmes depend largely on the prompt availability of the appropriate information to the programme implementation staff, researchers, policy makers and inevitably, the funding agency. This presupposes a knowledge of, not only the information needs and requirements of the audience involved, but also of their whereabouts, in order to facilitate the dissemination process.

5. In the Africa region, much of the difficulties facing population information dissemination and diffusion efforts is due to the lack of complete information about the users and their needs. With the greater emphasis now being placed on the availability of population information to the relevant user groups and individuals, the issue of determining the needs and requirements of users becomes crucial to the overall population

information programme, both within POPIN-Africa network and also at national levels. Taking into consideration the fact that information is productive only when it has been made available and used by the appropriate person, the POPIN-Africa coordinating Unit has been intensifying its clearing house and users services. More outreach activities relating to the dissemination, diffusion and utilization of population information in the Africa region, which included conducting user surveys, determining user profiles, and carrying out evaluation of its activities, are planned for the coming months.

(i) Users' Survey

6. One of the determining factors in an effective population information dissemination service is users since they constitute the consumers of whatever information is generated by the clearing house or other service systems; they choose what to read, when to read and how to utilize the information at their disposal. Theirs is the "readers market" as it were. Therefore, their concerns should be accounted for at every stage of information generation, processing and distribution, otherwise it will be difficult for information officers to "break even" and stay in the information business.

7. In order to penetrate the complexities of the readers' market with population information, it is important to know the characteristics of a large cross section of the users. It is important to know who they are, what they want, where they are, and how to reach them with our products. In other words, the information officer should do his "market survey" before launching his new product, or even before going into production. He who knows his users thoroughly is more likely to sway the market to his side than the one who operates "by the seat of its pants". Users survey therefore, becomes one of the most important first steps in reaching out to users with population information.

8. Accordingly, POPIN-Africa planned to carry out a major users survey in 1989 in order to establish a comprehensive record of users' profiles for its outreach programme in subsequent years. Staffing and other constraints prevented this exercise from being undertaken in the course of this year. It is planned to recruit a consultant in 1990 to assist the Coordinating Unit (CU) with designing the appropriate instruments for carrying out the survey.

(ii) Assessment and Evaluation

9. Moreover, it is further planned that while employing the formal methodologies of assessing users' needs and requirements, the Coordinating Unit will utilize other non-formal, but effective methods of assessment to enable it cover as large a group as possible. By analyzing the contents of letters from users requesting information from the CU it will be possible also to determine patterns of needs and use. In order to achieve user satisfaction, the successes and failures of the outreach exercise will be evaluated to find out its strength and weakness in serving users. This will provide the CU with more information

for planning new programmes and re-organizing existing ones at periodic intervals.

B. SENSITIZATION AND AWARENESS CREATION
(ROUND TABLES, SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS)

10. For a very long time in Africa, it was anathema to talk about population concerns, especially family planning. In many countries, population control programmes were either non-existent, or were not treated with the importance it deserved. None would, therefore, even think of population information as a vital link between the population control programme and socio-economic development. Part of the difficulty has now been identified as the lack of proper information, coupled with the fears and ignorance associated with it. It is apparent now that the general public and the authorities concerned, lacking correct information, have felt unsympathetic and unconcerned about population issues. There is, therefore, urgent need to provide basic population education and information to generate more sensitivity and awareness.

11. The need for sensitization and awareness creation seminars, roundtables, as an important entry point into implementing population information programmes, cannot be overemphasized. Sensitization eliminates misconceptions and wrong notions about programmes and activities; it eliminates fear and rumour - mongering thereby encouraging cooperation and collaboration among parties affected. Sensitization has the advantage of making persuasion and motivation easier to achieve, thus leading to a healthy group or individual participation in the programme to be implemented.

12. Conscious of these facts, POPIN-Africa has made considerable efforts, over the past two years, 1988-1989, to increase awareness about its programmes, activities, goals and strategies.

13. In November 1988, POPIN-Africa, in collaboration with the Pan African News Agency (PANA) and the Union of Radio and Television Networks in Africa (URTNA), organized a roundtable encounter in Dakar, Senegal for African journalists and mass media organizations. As media personnel, who hold the key to effective channels of communication, this group is considered an important component in POPIN-Africa's strategies for reaching the larger community with the appropriate information on population. The occasion also provided an opportunity for POPIN-Africa to communicate information about its programmes through an exhibition of publications from some POPIN-Africa collaborating centres, as well as a demonstration of the bibliographic database maintained by the Centre for African Family Studies (CAFS).

14. POPIN-Africa also recently (May 1989) participated in a sensitization and awareness creation seminar in Yaounde, Cameroun, organized by UNESCO and UNFPA for African journalists. The opportunity was further used to brief the participants about POPIN-Africa's activities.

15. During the recent National Seminar on Population issues in

Ethiopia's National Development, held in Addis Ababa, in July 1989, POPIN-Africa again took advantage to distribute some of its publications to interested participants.

16. More of these activities are planned for the future to serve as foundations for the awareness creation programmes to be carried out in the next plan period. Major population-related conferences/seminars/workshops in the Region will be targetted for these activities, so that specialized target audiences (demographers, planners etc.) could be better briefed about POPIN-Africa's objectives, and to get them involved in population activities in the Region.

17. POPIN-Africa also intends organizing awareness seminars for population and family planning institutions within the African region. These seminars will serve two purposes, as channel through which POPIN-Africa could pass information to various centres about its activities, and also to provide the opportunity for identifying the appropriate institutions that could serve as POPIN-Africa members, thus helping to strengthen any collaboration activities to be undertaken at the national level.

(i) Collaboration with mass media agencies & institutions

18 In Africa today, the mass media (radio, newspaper, television) constitute one of the major channels of communication through which the required services and messages are popularized, especially to the urban dwellers and 'pace-setters'. POPIN-Africa is convinced that through collaboration with institutions such as PANA and URTNA, and indeed with other media groups, journalists and producers in Africa for the dissemination of population information, the required impetus for reaching out to a larger proportion of the African population will be provided. Already, POPIN-Africa has solicited the collaboration of PANA, URTNA and a few media agencies, through the Round Table Encounter held in Dakar in November 1988. The PAWID meeting of 16-20 October, 1989 further buttressed the relationship between POPIN-Africa, URTNA and PANA, and established new links with the African Council on Communication Education (ACCE); Centre for Applied Research on Population and Development (CERPOD); Agence Presse Senegalaise (APS); UNESCO/BREDA; School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, Legon; the Office of the National Committee for Central Planning (ONCCP), Ethiopia; the News Agency of Nigeria; Multimedia Limited; and the Ethiopian Herald. It is our belief that support from the above groups and individuals will strengthen POPIN-Africa's clearing house programmes and other outreach activities.

19. POPIN-Africa's new approach to user services and information dissemination seeks to involve the partnership of PAWID members as indicated above, pulling together the total expertise and technical services available in these institutions, to reach larger groups of users with relevant population information through appropriate methods of publicity and promotion.

(ii) Publicity and Promotion

20. Information, education and communication (IEC) is one of the focus of POPIN-Africa in its promotional activities. Recently, at the first PAWID meeting, it was noted with concern that the "I" of the IEC promotion and diffusion process was largely ignored by IEC experts. POPIN-Africa intends to re-inforce activities in this area. In the past, promotion and publicity have been done largely through publications such as the POPINFO the African Population Newsletter, POPINDEX-Africa, Scanning Sheet, and the POPIN-Africa Country Bibliography Series, etc. It is proposed to supplement these publications with Audio-Visual and Slide productions on POPIN-Africa's activities and programmes and re-packaged information for identified target audiences.

21. It should be noted, however, that the production of the POPINFO has met with a few setbacks as a result of lack of full cooperation from network members. As a publication intended primarily for disseminating news items about the activities of network members, the response from collaborating institutions through feeding the CU with information, has not been encouraging. PAT members are, therefore, requested to work out mechanisms so that a regular flow of news information ensures a more satisfactory production frequency for POPINFO. It is planned also that specialized brochures on POPIN-Africa be produced to serve as means for briefing interested persons/institutions in the Region. The active collaboration of POPIN-Africa collaborating centres is required to provide the needed information on administrative and functional linkages of the network for such an exercise.

22. The area of materials production will be given serious consideration in the coming months and the necessary technical assistance will be sought to develop the needed capacities and capabilities. In this effort, computerized textual formatting techniques, desk-top publishing and related skills for materials production will be promoted among network members, through the organization of specialized seminars and workshops for the purpose.

C. DOCUMENTS DISTRIBUTION AND MAILING LISTS

23. The duplicates distribution programme known as POPAF-DUPS has had encouraging success which, in turn, has led to an increase in the size of the POPIN-Africa mailing list which now stands at over one thousand, five hundred for both institutional and individual users. In order to provide the needed services for this large number of users, there is need for constant updating of the mailing list. This will have to be done with the full collaboration of POPIN-Africa member institutions. In this regard, it will be useful for PAT members to assist in identifying appropriate mechanisms for updating the lists, so as to enhance the CU's distribution and document back-up services.

24. The first PAT meeting of 1988 recommended that members of the Network should exchange periodically their mailing lists in

order to maintain an updated and complete information of users. Unfortunately, this recommendation has not seriously been implemented so far. The second PAT meeting is, therefore, urged to ensure its implementation by taking some concrete steps. Indeed, a mailing list that is several years out of date is misleading and serves very little useful purpose for both users and the providers of information.

25. In the past, modest document backup services have been provided through photocopy services. Consideration of cost and the volume of requests for photocopy services have been such, that it has not always been possible to satisfy all expressed needs. To enable the CU to continue to provide these services on a continuing basis, it is crucial to work out a proper framework for the exchange of documents and materials among network members, without unnecessarily adding to the costs of operation.

26. At the last meeting, it was recommended that ways be found to introduce a coupon system by which cooperating members could be credited/debited with the costs involved in document back-up services. While the problem still exists, it is essential that PAT devise a working mechanism to resolve this, so that there can be a smooth exchange among members. Some concrete actions should, therefore, be worked out without encountering currency exchange and related problems

D. PROPOSED NEW ACTIVITIES

27. In order to create permanent facilities for providing adequate information to back up the network's cleaning house activities and functions, the Coordinating Unit is proposing the establishment of three new databases in the course of 1990.

(i) Database on African Population Experts (POPEX)

28. Since 1967, when the first issue of the African Directory of Demographers was produced by the ECA Population Division to provide access to the history and background of African population specialists, five additional editions have been published. The vital objective behind the exercise was to foster closer contacts among demographers and other related professionals on African demography. Such has been the demand for this product, that it has now become imperative to develop a more permanent framework for updating, sharing and retrieval of the assembled information. Over the years, all the procedures involved in collecting and processing the data on experts, have been manual and there has been no permanent file.

29. In order to ensure efficiency in operations and regular updating and reviews, the Coordinating Unit plans, as of 1990, to create a new database which will be devoted only to identifying and maintaining a comprehensive and up-to-date file on experts working in the area of African demography, population studies and related fields. Apart from producing printed directories/inventories out of this file for general dissemination throughout the Region, it will now also be possible to generate searches, as needed, relating to specialists in

several fields whose expertise can be tapped by ECA member States to implement national population programmes.

30. The POPEX file will be distributed to POPIN-Africa members in magnetic form (diskettes etc.), and members will be expected to provide the Coordinating Unit with new information and facts which could be used to update the file to ensure its continued relevance and useability for the network. It is also expected that POPEX will constitute the African contribution to the global inventory and directory being planned for, under the auspices of Global-POPIN.

(ii) Database on institutions/agencies/programmes involved in population activities in Africa (POPINSTI)

31. Information pertaining to African institutions engaged in population-related activities needs to be collected, assembled and stored, so that it can be retrieved in response to relevant dissemination functions. It is important for the network to have a store of information on those institutions and agencies engaged in implementing population programmes. This will provide a ready source of information on institutional expertise, resources and facilities which could be tapped in interpreting and repackaging demographic information for broad-massed audiences.

32. The POPINSTI file would comprise the full profiles on identified institutions, their location, their professional resources (staff), their training, research and other activities, their library documentation, and information-related activities, as well as other pertinent data. It may be recalled that RIPS started a similar exercise during the first phase of the PIDSA project. It is therefore, planned to work closely with RIPS to reactivate and create the new file, POPINSTI.

(iii) Database on press information on African population issues (POPPRES)

33. With the increasing interests being generated in the Region about the close involvement of press and mass media agencies in African population issues, there is now a growing volume of population information which is appearing as news features, articles, commentary and the like. This information is not subject to the normal bibliographic processing for publications, but some means has to be found to identify, collect and store it and re-distribute to network members to keep them informed about new and emerging perspectives on the subject as seen by policy-makers, politicians, planners etc.

34. The Pan-African News Agency (PANA) is planning to establish a population desk for which it is seeking funding from UNFPA to enable it introduce a population bulletin (wire service) to be diffused to its 44 African news agency members. The Coordinating Unit intends to work closely with PANA serving as a source of population information in conformity with the recommendations of the 1988 Roundtable Encounter for POPIN-Africa to establish a press section. The database on press information

(POPPRES) will enable POPIN-Africa to systematically collect, store and retrieve press-related information which could be utilized by interested users in the Region.

CONCLUSION

35. Population information collection, processing, dissemination and utilization constitute a multifaceted activity that needs "all hands on deck" for proper implementation. Although POPIN-Africa is already engaged in some of the areas identified above, it is, no doubt, evident that it cannot go at it alone without the full support of other network members.

36. The problems that have been identified and the solutions that have been proposed, can only be meaningfully addressed through a common bond of action by network members. It is hoped that this second meeting of PAT will address itself to these problems and find concrete, lasting and appropriate solutions to them.