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POPIN-Africa: consideration of some strategies
for the African Regional Population Information
Clearinghouse and Network during 1992-96.

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INTRODUCTION

The Population Information Network For Africa (**POPIN-Africa**) is one of the major components of the regional development information system and network which the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) instituted in the 1980s in an attempt to provide adequate information resources and backup to support the socio-economic development planning efforts of its member States. Since its inception in 1984, **POPIN-Africa** has attempted to build up the infrastructural base for launching, in the long- term, its goals of improving the flow of population information and data so as to attain greater regional self-sufficiency in the sharing of population information resources (technical information and data, included) in support of the overall development goals of the Region.

In a region largely devoid of sophistication in information processing techniques and known for its rather low consciousness of the value of information as a major support in development efforts, the process towards attaining **POPIN-Africa's** goals has been slow. Momentum is however beginning to pick up and much progress is expected in the coming years. These preceding years of the implementation of **POPIN-Africa** have largely focused on institution building in order to put in place the needed structures for the eventual smooth functioning of the project as part of an overall regional population information programme aimed at collecting, processing, storage, retrieval and utilization of population information and data in the Region.

In programming activities for the next phase of **POPIN- Africa**, it is essential therefore that we place the project in proper perspective and in the context of the overall regional population programme itself. Taking its mandate from the provisions contained in the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action (KPA) (1984)¹, the **POPIN-Africa** project translated the four KPA recommendations pertaining to population information and dissemination into its long term objectives. In May this year, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) again articulated its concerns in this area by presenting to the Ministers of Economic Planning during the 25th session of the Conference of Ministers, a paper entitled "Population issues for ECA member States during the 1990s."

Under the sector, information dissemination, the paper notes among others, the following:

"Admittedly, success in integrating population factors into development planning depends upon creating an awareness of population problems at different levels of decision making, particularly at those dealing with the allocation of resources to family planning and other population-related programmes."

In this regard, a strategy should be instituted, if not already done, to strengthen existing population information, education and communication (IEC) programmes. Such programmes should be institutionalized so as to provide a continuous chain for collecting, processing and disseminating population information and

messages relevant to population and development interrelationship within the overall national population programme".²

SOME AREAS OF FUTURE CONCERN.

The emphases placed in the above-mentioned documents clearly indicate the future thrust that a regional population information programme should pursue. In the spirit of these recommendations, and also those made recently by the UNFPA Evaluation Team which evaluated, in July 1990, the implementation of POPIN-Africa, as well as the recommendations emanating from the POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee which recently met in Accra, Ghana, the project plans to address the following major concerns and issues during its next phase (viz. 1992-1996):

(i) creation of an enabling environment intended at strengthening network components to ensure more effective participation, and support especially for national population information activities when these will be developed at a later stage;

(ii) institution building - particularly in training to upgrade technical skills, managerial expertise of those responsible for managing the projected population information programme at the various levels of network operations;

(iii) assessment of the needs and requirements, especially of member States. The promotion of political commitment will be crucial to bringing about eventual programme success in this area; and the phasing-in of the development of national level activities at a later stage commensurate with assessed needs and levels of development, in partnership with other agencies promoting similar goals in the Region.

In order to consolidate gains already made (up to 1991), and to be cost-effective and to tap all relevant available resources and channels for implementing POPIN-Africa's programmes, the following broad package of activities will be pursued namely, to:

(i) seek the needed resources to ensure adequate technical backstopping for population information activities at the national and sub-regional levels;

(ii) expand membership in the network to include all interested centres, institutions which could catalyze the development of national population information units;

(iii) liaise closely with the sub-regional and existing sectoral units to strengthen and re-vitalize their operations, and consolidate their operational efficiency in order to further assist backstop national operations;

(iv) organize training seminars/workshops to build up skills for maintaining network operations and develop training materials (guides, manuals etc.) to support such training efforts;

(v) continue to liaise closely with the African mass media to assist in creating the needed awareness among target audiences in the Region;

(vi) develop an appropriate regional clearinghouse of population information and

data including comprehensive databases incorporating information and data on population and development interrelationships in Africa to serve the target audiences (policy-makers, planners, researchers, the media and general public).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that new structural arrangements are required if the network is to meet its targets during 1992-1996. Such arrangements will necessarily take into account plans by UNFPA to locate three multidisciplinary teams in Dakar, Nairobi and Harare to assist in implementing the African Regional population programme; and also ECA's plans to restructure the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) to serve effectively as ECA's sub-regional operational arms in the Region. In view also of the network's own current structure which has participating nodes at the sub-regional and sectoral levels, it becomes imperative to review the network's future linkages and working arrangements to ensure the maximum utilization of the total resources available so as to better offer services to current and potential users in the Region. Accordingly, the following propositions are made to guide the path of **POPIN-Africa's** development, especially during the next phase.

NEW WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND LINKAGES.

The Co-ordinating Unit will continue to perform its network coordination functions while the Sub-regional and Sectoral Participating Centres (SRPCs/SPCc) which would have been strengthened in the course of 1991, as directed by the Advisory Committee, will constitute effective backstopping stations for the activities of existing, potential and newly designated members of the network. To all intents and purposes therefore, these SRPCs/SPCs will now become purely technical backstopping centres which can inject into the network their special and unique resources to back up the services and outputs of the network as a whole.

The Advisory Committee's recommendation regarding close collaboration with ECA resources and facilities in population information networking brings up the question of how the five MULPOCs-the effective "field" offices of the ECA-can also be made to better assist POPIN-Africa in reaching out to ECA member States.

The SRPCs/SPRCs will be required from 1992 to assist in servicing the population information needs of the five MULPOCs which will constitute additional nodes of the network. The advantage of using the MULPOCs are many and self-evident and may be summarized as: strategic sub-regional locations which will guarantee full coverage of the entire Region over time; the existence of physical infrastructures and other facilities for the use of the network; a mandate that is consistent with the aims and objectives of **POPIN-Africa**; and an unmatched political leverage with member States which, in the long run, will take sovereign decisions on the establishment of **National Population Information Centres (NPICs)** and promote their development.

The propriety of the choice of **MULPOCs** as **POPIN-Africa's** major network nodes

is justified by the fact that each of these outfits has behind it, a history and sub-regional experience spanning at least twelve years.

(West Africa MULPOC: based in Niamey, was established in 1978, covers 16 countries.

(Eastern and Southern African MULPOC: is based in Lusaka, was established in 1977, and covers 18 countries.

(The Central African MULPOC: based in Yaounde, was established in 1978, and covers eight countries.

(The Gisenyi MULPOC serving the three member countries of the Great Lakes Community in Central Africa, was established in 1977.

(The North African MULPOC: based in Tangiers, Morocco, was established in 1973, and serves six countries)).

In addition to the possibility of their serving as sub-regional population information focal points, the **MULPOCs** have specific responsibilities to backstop all ECA Regional programmes, provide advisory services to member States on request and assist them in human resources development, as well as in project identification and formulation. With minimal resources for these centres to backstop the network's operations they can readily serve as collaborators in helping **POPIN-Africa** fulfill its goals. Jointly with these **MULPOCs**, it is envisaged that the strengthened technical backstopping stations (RIPs, IFORD etc.) will be in a position to provide qualitative services and support to the multidisciplinary teams being installed in Dakar, Harare and Nairobi. The modalities for co-operation and collaboration are being worked out, but efforts will be made to ensure a satisfactory framework for the delivery of services and outputs to support the work of the UNFPA multidisciplinary teams.

DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIVITIES AND EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

As recommended by the POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee, the UNFPA Country Offices will have primary responsibility for the funding and establishment of National Population Information Centres (**NPICs**). The POPIN-Africa Co-ordinating Unit will continue to liaise with these offices and with Member States to promote the development of NPICs and to provide technical backstopping as these countries develop NPICs. This will involve liaising with the National Population Commissions (NPCs) or their equivalent bodies with which the MULPOCs and the ECA have privileged access. As NPICs get established, (and this is expected to take several years), the role, relevance and importance of the **SRPCS/SPCs** will begin to change and diminish. At the same time, national centres and units will begin to gain greater prominence and take on their rightful role as leaders for assembling the national knowledge base needed for providing the required population information and data in ECA member States. However, in order to ensure that national level activities will

be adequately supported both by the member States themselves as well as by funding agencies (e.g. UNFPA), promotion and sensitization of relevant national authorities should continue. This will ensure that population information activities are planned as integral parts of the national population IEC programme, rather than be brought in only after IEC programmes are formulated and under implementation, and resources have already been allocated elsewhere. Such a move will facilitate the process of institutionalization of national population information centres when member States will be ready to implement them. Population information activities should therefore be regarded as being integral to the successful implementation of IEC programmes and catered for accordingly to support the formulation, monitoring and evaluation efforts in the implementation of national population policies and programmes. If relevant population education and communication programmes are to be installed in member states to develop appropriate messages and bring about the needed attitudinal changes, more efforts should be also be concentrated on population information. Afterall, it constitutes the body of knowledge which should feed population education and communication efforts on a regular basis.

It is thus expected that during the next phase of the project, greater emphasis will be placed on the needed institution building to establish firm foundations towards future regional information networking. Training in computerized information processing techniques, establishment of relevant data bases taking into account the levels of development information infrastructures and the absorptive capacity of ECA member States to effectively utilize such resources, will guide the general orientation of the project's activities in the coming years. Given a favourable environment of adequate resources, trained personnel to undertake the diversified activities envisaged under population information networking, and better oriented and more committed ECA member States, it should be possible, by the end of the next phase, to have in place, in several locations in the Region, viable and active nodes which could effectively 'network' together.

It is only at this stage, that it becomes possible to work out more meaningful linkages and relationships to share and utilize the total population information resources of the Region as a whole.

In its efforts at institution building, the POPIN-Africa Co-ordinating Unit will continue to relate directly with associate network members including Pan-African News Agency (PANA), Union for Radio and Television Network in Africa (URTNA), International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)- Africa Region, UNESCO-BREDA, Union of African Population Studies (UAPS), University population programmes such as Unité de Recherche Démographique (URD, Togo), the Population Impact Project (PIP) of the University of Ghana, and the Population Studies and Research Institute of the University of Nairobi, to mention a few of such associate members.

The pooling together of the resources of the ECA and its institutional structures including the MULPOCs, the **POPIN-Africa Co-ordinating Unit** and its participating

nodes and the very rich consortium of associate members which will bring to the network their special expertise and interests in population matters will surely enable the ECA to place at the disposal of the Region, one of the most relevant and cost-effective arrangements to bring the Region's total **population** information knowledge base and resources to assist policy-makers, planners, researchers, and the general public. Outside of the Region, the Co-ordinating Unit will also work closely with centres of excellence to help introduce innovative technologies which could enhance and promote the faster development and sustainability of the Region in this critical area. An example of this would be technology transfer in new areas such as CD-ROM in close collaboration with the Population Information Programme (PIP) of Johns Hopkins University and similar external centres of excellence to further strengthen and upgrade POPIN-Africa's technological competence. Similar assistance will be sought from the population information programmes at the other UN Regional Commissions (ESCAP, ECLAC etc.) to facilitate transfer of appropriate technologies and skills.

CONCLUSION.

As the above narration has attempted to indicate, the next phase of the POPIN-Africa project will be concentrated at further ensuring the strengthening of the nodes of the network especially at the sub-regional and sectoral levels and then gradually at the national level. The main thrust will continue to be institution-building in order to develop a very strong regional clearing-house for population information and data in Africa. This preparatory work will ensure that there will be strong nodes to facilitate effective networking at a later stage. Sensitization and awareness creation efforts of ECA member States will also be pursued to ensure that the present momentum at the national level is not lost. Training and skills development activities in the area of population information and documentation will be intensified so as to enable documentation centres and units to be developed within the context of regional population IEC programmes.

Within this UNECA overall strategy, it is expected that many viable national population information centres and units would have been created to assist the attainment of POPIN-Africa's goal of improving the flow of population information and data in the region and thus facilitating the integration of population issues in overall socio-economic development planning in Africa.

The specific activities to be undertaken during the period will be indicated in the new project proposals which will be developed for 1992-1996 and which will reflect the recommendations of the UNFPA Evaluation Team (July 1990), of the POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee (October, 1990) and whatever guidelines and comments will emanate from this forum.

The accompanying schema, which is only indicative, attempts to show the linkages and networking arrangements of **POPIN-Africa** during its next phase of development.

References:

¹ Kilimanjaro Programme of Action for African Population and Self-Reliant Development; UNECA: Addis Ababa, 1984. 9 p.

² Population Issues for ECA member States in the 1990s, (paper presented at ECA Conference of Ministers; Tripoli, Libya, May 1990. 15 p. (E/ECA/CM.16/34).

E C A

SECTORAL PARTICIPATING CENTRES

CAFS ESAM/ RESADOC CDC

RIPS

IFORD

POPIN-AFRICA

CO-ORDINATING UNIT

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

SUB-REGIONAL LEVEL

MIDIPOCs

: Niamey, Yaoundé, Tangiers, Gisenyi, Lusaka

NATIONAL LEVEL

UNFPA
COUNTRY
OFFICE

National Population Commission

National Population Information Centre (NPIC)

Population Information Network for Africa : Linkages

MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF POPIN-AFRICA

DATE	EVENT
1979	ECA Conference of Ministers in Rabat, Morocco, requests ECA Executive Secretary to <u>expand</u> activities in the area of population information and documentation
1981	ECA Conference of Ministers in Freetown, Sierra Leone, requests Executive Secretary to <u>intensify</u> activities in population information, documentation and <u>dissemination</u>
1982	14-16 June: 1st Consultative Meeting on POPIN-Africa is convened by the ECA Population Division in Addis Ababa
1983	1-3 November: 2nd Consultative Meeting on POPIN-Africa is held in New York
1984	<p>9-13 January: 2nd African Population Conference in Arusha, Tanzania adopts Kilimanjaro Programme of Action (KPA). Four of the 79 recommendations call for the development of mechanisms for disseminating demographic data and for the setting up of population information networks in African States.</p> <p>January: POPIN-Africa Co-ordinating Unit begins operation with funds from UNFPA</p> <p>January - December: Sub-Regional Participating Centres (SRPCs) are established at IFORD, RIPS, CDC and the Sahel Institute/RESADOC</p> <p>10-12 December: POPIN-Africa convenes first Review Meeting in Addis Ababa. Network members determine work programme and adopt common bibliographic worksheet.</p>
1985	<p>Creation of POPIN-Africa's first database POPREF. First issue of <u>POPINDEX-Africa</u> produced.</p> <p>Initiation of POPIN-Africa Duplicates Programme (POP-AF Dups)</p> <p>First inputs received from RIPS, and RESADOC are merged into the POPIN-Africa 'referral' file.</p> <p>CAFS joins POPIN-Africa as Sectoral Participating Centre (SPC).</p> <p>17-19 December: 1st Session of Advisory Committee is held in Addis Ababa.</p>

- 1986 6-23 July: POPIN-Africa study tour of Asia-Pacific POPIN (Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia)
- Production of first draft of GUIDELINES FOR THE DESCRIPTION OF POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING LITERATURE IN AFRICA
- September: 1st POPIN-Africa Training Seminar/Workshop on methodologies for input/output mechanisms in Addis Ababa. Network members agree on standards for information exchange.
- POPINDEX-Africa Volume 2 is produced.
- Publication of Country Bibliography Series initiated. The first one on Kenya is produced.
- 1987 Needs assessment and project proposals prepared for Nigeria, Zaire, Senegal, Tanzania and Kenya.
- RESADOC compiles bibliography on the population of the Sahel
- 16-18 November: 2nd Session of POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee held in Nairobi.
- November: Tri-partite Project Review is held, also in Nairobi.
- November: ESAMI becomes the second Sectoral Participating Centre of POPIN-Africa.
- More inputs from participating centres added to the 'referral' file to which IFORD makes its first contribution.
- 1988 5 November: Jointly with PANA and URTNA, POPIN-Africa organises Roundtable Encounter for journalists on population information dissemination and diffusion in Africa in Dakar, Senegal.
- 7-12 November: Exhibition of population information materials and demonstration of the CAFS bibliographic database on population at the Second African Population Conference in Dakar.
- 1988 5-9 December: 1st Meeting of POPIN-Africa Technical Working Group (PAT)
- RIPS compiles bibliography on population of Ghana for the POPIN-Africa Country Bibliography Series.

1989

February: Expansion of databases
POPEXP (population experts)
POPINS (population institutions, programmes etc. in Africa.
POPRES (press information on African population perspectives)

June: Experimental issue of POPINDEX-Africa (median issue) is produced

16-20 October: Meeting of the POPIN-Africa Working Group on Population Information Dissemination and Diffusion (PAWID) in Addis Ababa.

December: 2nd Meeting of POPIN-Africa Technical Working Group in Addis Ababa.

1990

May: POPIN-Africa exhibits at ECA Conference of Ministers meeting in Tripoli, Libya.

June: POPIN-Africa participates in IPFF-Africa Regional Council Meetings in Lome, Togo, exhibits materials and briefs the Association of Chief Executives of Family Planning Associations in the Africa Region.

July: UNFPA Evaluation of POPIN-Africa

15-18 October: 3rd Session of POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee in Accra, Ghana.