

PROGRAMME PLAN

Research on Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction, Reproductive Health and Population Dynamics (ECONPOP) 2009-2013

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A research funding programme launched jointly by the Research Council of Norway and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, with co-funding from Norad and administered by the Research Council of Norway

Summary

The Research Council of Norway is launching a new research sub-programme under the Norway – Global Partner (NORGLOBAL) umbrella programme. The new sub-programme, called ECONPOP in short, will focus on economic growth, poverty reduction, reproductive health, and population dynamics in cooperation with the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which will provide half of the funding. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Research Council of Norway's (RCN) matching funds will provide the other half of the funding.

ECONPOP is intended to help build expertise, inform public debate and provide input into policy-making both in Norway and internationally, with particular emphasis on Sub-Saharan Africa.

The goal of this programme is to understand how poverty, economic growth and cultural conditions interact with reproductive health and population dynamics in low-income settings, particularly in the sub-Saharan region of Africa.

An anticipated outcome of the programme is to inform policy debates centring on economic growth and poverty reduction in low-income countries about the role of reproductive health and population dynamics in achieving these economic goals and imbed the recognition that gender equality and the empowerment of women is an essential factor in obtaining these policy goals.

Researchers at institutions in Norway have the opportunity to submit high quality research proposals in cooperation with partners in the South, and in Africa in particular. A more detailed description of the research plan can be found in the following sections.

Background

The relationship between reproductive health¹ and economic growth has long been a challenge to researchers as well as policy-makers, while their empirical connection has been difficult to establish. A lack of reliable demographic data is another limiting factor demanding attention. Substantial developing country government and donor resources in both policy development and research have been devoted to family planning and reproductive health programs. On the other hand, relatively little attention has been paid to how reproductive health programs affect economic objectives, and how to gain economic benefit from them. There is newfound momentum to understand the linkages between family planning and economic development, and opportunities for more reliable planning and assessment mechanisms than in the past. With poverty gaps growing in many parts of the world, and strongly competing interests on the development agenda, the stakes are high. Solid, well-communicated research has the potential to demonstrate the central role of population issues in economic progress.

Since the mid-1960s real income growth in sub-Saharan Africa has differed widely from country to country, but has remained close to zero on average. As a consequence, the number of people in poverty in sub-region has increased from about 164 million in 1981 to 316 million in 2001². The range of solutions proposed (and being attempted) is far-reaching, from major institutional change at the highest levels to targeted health, nutrition and education pilot projects within a few districts – but most observers agree that the development of appropriate policies and programs is hampered by lack of knowledge about the determinants of economic growth and the factors that lead to an exit from poverty. In this context, an interdisciplinary approach involving economics, demography, sociology and other social sciences has much to offer.

For example, a recent report from the POPPOV research network³ stated that

The empirical relationship between reproductive health improvements and the variables that are directly or indirectly impacted by it however, has been difficult to establish at both the macro and micro-levels. The main reasons are that reproductive health and population dynamics impact economic growth and poverty reduction

¹ “Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well- being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant. In line with the above definition of reproductive health, reproductive health care is defined as the constellation of methods, techniques and services that contribute to reproductive health and well-being through preventing and solving reproductive health problems. It also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations, and not merely counselling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases.” - *Final Plan of Action*, United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo, 1994

² World Resources Institute, 2005: *The Wealth of the Poor*, Washington, D.C.
(http://pdf.wri.org/wrr05_full_hires.pdf)

³ *Population Dynamics and Economic Development: Filling the Research Gaps*. Center for Global Development and Population Reference Bureau. Prepared by S. Joshi, R. Nugent and M Cagley. March 2009.

through a number of pathways, and empirical research has not always had an easy time establishing the causal relationships involved in the population/reproductive health and economic development relationships, just as it has had a hard time establishing causality on economic development with nearly all the factors that influence its pace and trajectory.

The POPPOV report identifies three main limitations of current research into linking reproductive health and population dynamics with poverty reduction and economic growth:

1. The difficulty of quantifying concepts such as empowerment of women, decision-making authority and social networks, and developing the appropriate metrics with which to track and measure these variables,
2. The ability to generalize and scale up results from case studies in particular locations and cultural settings;
3. The ability to assess and compare the costs and the cost effectiveness of reproductive health programs.

Clearly, new and novel research initiatives are needed to address these difficult research questions and produce results that are of use in planning programs and interventions intended to reduce poverty, improve reproductive health, improve gender equality and empower women.

The research outcomes of the ECONPOP programme will inform policy debates with solid evidence and careful recommendations. The most relevant research will increase knowledge of interest to policymakers and include a plan for disseminating and communicating the pertinent results to advocates and policymakers for use in developing countries. The research programme seeks to answer both macroeconomic and microeconomic questions.

The programme gives the opportunity for researchers in Norway in academic disciplines that traditionally have had limited or no working relations to come together and strive towards common research objectives that will require inputs from several fields of expertise. At the same time, it will compel Norwegian researchers to work closely with colleagues in the South and to help increase the number of both female and gender aware male scientists in the South and build up their competence in relevant areas, which is exactly in the spirit of Norway's ambition of becoming a "global partner" in research. The programme will finally be an occasion for Norwegian researchers to actively participate in a top-level international network of researchers in the field of economics, reproductive health and population dynamics.

Programme Focus and Priority Research Areas

The aim of this research programme is to understand how population dynamics and reproductive health outcomes impact economic growth and poverty reduction, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Traditionally, much of the focus of previous research was on how poverty and economic development (or the lack thereof) impact population growth and demographics. The ECONPOP programme is primarily concerned about the opposite causality: How reproductive health outcomes and population dynamics impact economic development on different levels. In this, economics, demography, sociology, psychology and other social sciences have much to offer in terms of the underlying determinants of health. Public health research methodology comes into play in assessing the reproductive health outcomes.

Poverty and reproductive health

Household poverty has been shown to have strong links to the health of household members, and reproductive health is a major influence on the health of women and children, as well as men. For instance, maternal mortality is the health indicator that shows the greatest disparity between rich and poor countries and between rich and poor people within countries. Access to family planning information and reproductive health services can help reduce the risk of ill-health, improve health status, improve child health outcomes, and avoid household shocks through fertility, morbidity, and mortality. Research is needed to further understand the role of reproductive health in helping households avoid falling into poverty and rise out of poverty. Reproductive health outcomes influence female labour supply and labour productivity, as well as household savings and investment behaviour. The societal costs of maternal mortality, of adolescent girls dropping out of school because of unwanted pregnancies, of infertility, and of the HIV-AIDS pandemics are important questions to address in research

Economic growth and population dynamics

Models of economic growth have varying degrees of complexity in dealing with population dynamics. Populations grow in size and change in composition, including their age structures, gender breakdowns, and geographic distributions. These changes are not exogenous, but are influenced by and influence the economic, social, and physical environments in which people live.

Significant research has hypothesized the impact of a “demographic bonus” in parts of Southeast Asia in the past half-century, where rapid declines in fertility created a window of time during which working-aged populations had fewer dependent children to care for, and increases in life-expectancies had not yet created a significant population of elderly dependents. During this window of time, workers were able to invest and save a higher fraction of their incomes, including investing in education and health care for their children. These increased investments paid dividends during the next generation through an increasingly skilled workforce and higher levels of capital per worker, both of which boosted the productivity of labour. Understanding the conditions under which such a demographic bonus may be realized, and the likelihood of such a bonus in sub-Saharan Africa are areas for additional research.

The demographic transition is well underway in many countries, but still lagging in some, especially in Sub Saharan Africa. A better understanding of the dynamics of transition at this point in history (with, inter alia, increased globalization and migration, urbanization, the development of the HIV-AIDS pandemic), could provide better tools for planning and programming.

To summarize, the broad research themes in this programme include:

- What do population trends (fertility, mortality, gender proportion and migration) imply for economic growth, income distribution, and poverty levels? (i.e., macro-economic approaches);
- How do reproductive health outcomes affect economic outcomes at the household level, including the productivity, labour force participation, and savings behaviour of women, children, and households? (i.e., micro-economic approaches);
- How do other variables (e.g., cultural and religious contexts, prevailing governance and institutional structures, gender relations) influence the relationship between reproductive health and poverty reduction?

Demarcation, Integration and Strategic Initiatives

We invite the research community to propose projects on relevant issues for poverty eradication and economic growth through understanding the role of population dynamics and investments in reproductive health. Projects with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa will be particularly well-received, as will projects with a focus on other parts of the developing world that have applicability to sub-Saharan Africa. The aims are to a) create interdisciplinary initiatives in the research sectors with the relevant expertise and the ability to build on earlier findings; b) build institutional linkages to organisations and scholars (particularly female scholars) in sub-Saharan Africa and plan projects jointly with African colleagues; and c) exploit existing data, improve data collection efforts where necessary for reliability and/or supplement data collection efforts with new initiatives that link economic development with population and reproductive health information in ways that help disentangle the causal relationships involved in improving economic outcomes.

Strategic aims

The main strategic aim of the programme is to inform policy debates about economic growth and poverty reduction in low-income countries about the role of reproductive health and population dynamics in achieving these economic goals. In service of this goal, the programme also hopes to make investments that strengthen the ability of Norwegian and, primarily, African scientists to link economic and demographic phenomena and improve the extent to which research can describe the directions of causality for economic and demographic phenomena.

Demarcation and relationship to other programme areas

The research areas and themes above demarcate the interest and focus of this programme. However, it is important that the Research Council assists Norwegian development research in achieving a more deliberate emphasis on collaboration and comparative research programs. Opportunities exist within this programme to achieve this collaboration, including encouraging significant cross-fertilization between Norwegian and researchers and research institutions in the South, particularly in Africa, and bridging disciplinary gaps to encourage economists to incorporate demographic and reproductive health insights (and vice versa) into their research.

ECONPOP will be a sub-programme within the larger NORGLOBAL programme that started in January 2009 with the aim of organising all development research programmes in the Research council of Norway under a single umbrella. The primary purpose of this umbrella programme is to promote development and strengthen research capacity in the South. ECONPOP will thus fall under the responsibility of the NORGLOBAL Programme Board, but will have its own budget, administrative set-up and scientific reference persons, as for instance is the case with the POVPEACE programme (Poverty, Peace and Conflict). In fact, ECONPOP is expected to have a particularly close relationship with POVPEACE, since it embraces both a focus on poverty and relates to forms and root causes of violence focus.

Organisation and Funding of the Research Programme

Encouraging research of the highest calibre is paramount in the administration of this research programme, and is more important than the size of projects selected for funding. The programme's commitment to building strong research partnerships and capacity, and to make data available to scholars to conduct wider peer-reviewed research argue for a smaller number of larger projects offering benefits of "economies of scale", and for projects to be supported over a period of up to three years. Priority will be given to projects with a total budget of NOK 3 – 5 million. It is expected that a substantial part of the budget be allocated to institutions and researchers in the South.

Such projects do not necessarily have to be located in one institution. In fact, formal ties with other institutions both in the North and particularly in the South, with an emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa, are part of the objectives of the programme. The development of networks, cooperation mechanisms and clusters of projects in which several researchers and institutions collaborate is welcome. Larger-scale projects can contain doctoral and/or postdoctoral components, as well as established networks and international collaborative partners. Again, participation from sub-Saharan Africa is particularly encouraged. Networks and cooperation that cut across "traditional" academic fields, expertise and programme areas such as economics, reproductive health and demography are particularly encouraged. Cooperation beyond the traditional university setting will also be looked upon favourably.

Specific requirements of the ECONPOP programme

The interdisciplinary nature of the problems addressed by the ECONPOP programme necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. The major elements of the programme described in the preceding sections should be part of a research project to some extent, with a focus on how reproductive health, population dynamics and poverty may have effects on economic growth (or the lack of it) on a macro or micro scale, rather than the converse relationship.

The programme also aims at strengthening science and technology capacity building in the South, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and part of the funding of a research project may be earmarked for strengthening data collection and the establishment of data banks in the participating countries, as well as the training and support of researchers in the South. In fact, a project could also be lead by a researcher based at an African institution as long as the applying institution in Norway accepts administrative responsibility. Cooperation with researchers and institutions in other parts of the world are also encouraged.

As some of the funding is provided by Norad as part of the Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation, all projects should include strong participation of female academics in the South, in sub-Saharan Africa in particular. The research should include thematic areas relevant for women's sexual rights and gender relations.

Proposals with a geographical focus outside Africa may still be considered for funding, however, funding of these proposals may be restricted if the rest of the programme portfolio does not have a considerable Sub-Saharan focus. A comparative perspective would in any case be considered favourably.

In summary, in addition to scientific quality, the following elements will be considered when assessing proposals in the programme:

1. Multidisciplinarity
2. Focus on economic
3. Focus on women's reproductive health and sexual rights
4. Strong participation of institutions and researchers in the South, especially in Africa
5. Strong participation of female researchers, especially in Africa

Selection process

All applications will have to follow the standard guidelines for electronic applications of RCN of Norway within the given deadlines. No individual extensions of these deadlines can be granted except in well-documented cases of *force majeure*.

Assessment of proposals will be done primarily through peer review. Applications that meet the standards will then be forwarded to international experts (referees) in the respective research fields for an initial assessment of the proposals. A special panel will be appointed to subsequently make an overall assessment in relation to the programme objectives and requirements and to rank the incoming proposals. The final decision of the allocation of Grants will be made by the Programme Board of the NORGLOBAL programme ("Norway – A Global Partner").

Performance indicators

All projects are required to report to the RCN through periodic progress reports that will be monitored by the Programme Board as well as the RCN administration. A set of key performance indicators are included in the standard progress report form. In addition, projects are expected to make annual presentation of their achievements in the annual conference of the Programme and to make their results accessible according to the guidelines set to in the Communication Plan.

Dissemination and communication

In order to achieve the objectives of the programme, the dissemination of the achievements and results of the projects supported by the programme must be assured. A separate Communication Plan will be prepared in that context. The principal investigators and researchers funded by the programme will bear the main responsibility for following this plan.

As the Hewlett Foundation is the main sponsor of the programme, funded projects will be invited to participate at the annual international research conferences organised by Hewlett in collaboration with the Population Reference Bureau. These conferences gather researchers funded from similar programmes on population, reproductive health and economic development, principally the USA, UK, the Netherlands and France.

Financial frame

Funding for the programme is administered by the Research Council of Norway and will come from three different sources, with the Hewlett Foundation providing for half of the amount. The portion of funding coming from the different sources over the four-year period is as follows (all figures in NOK):

Funding source	Amount
Hewlett Foundation	13 000 000
RCN matching funds	3 250 000
Norad (Women rights & gender equality)	9 750 000
Total	26 000 000

The disbursement of funds will occur primarily in the years 2010, 2011 and 2012 when projects will be in their implementation phase. Expenses in 2009 will primarily be for administrative expense, including the assessment of proposals, and expenses in 2013 will primarily be for the final instalments to the participating projects, to be disbursed upon receipt and the approval of their final reports. The estimated budget for the programme period is as follows (all figures in NOK):

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
500 000	7 000 000	8 000 000	8 000 000	2 500 000

Time frame and progress plan

The programme starts in 2009, after the approval of the programme plan by the NORGLOBAL Programme Board. A call for proposals will be made in June with a deadline for submission of proposals by September 2nd 2009 at 12:00 PM. There will only be one call for proposals.

Grants are expected to be awarded by November 2009, allowing for projects to be started by January 2010 for up to a three-year period. Following is a preliminary progress plan for the programme. Projects are expected to be completed December 31st 2012 and submit their final report by January 31st 2013. The deadline for the submission of the final report of the programme to the Hewlett Foundation is March 30th 2013. Following is a schematic progress plan for the programme.

Activity/period	2009				2010				2011				2012				2013		
	Quarter	I	II	III	IV	I													
Funding application	■																		
Call/submission proposal		■	■																
Assessment of proposals				■															
Allocation of grants				■															
Project implementation					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Annual seminars				■															
Final reporting																		■	■
International conferences	■		■		■					■				■					■