

Population Teaching, Training and Research in Mongolia

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Introduction

Starting in the Sixties and early Seventies- for the first time in the world history- attention on a global scale was given to the increasing importance of population in the development process. Though a scholar like Robert Malthus already raised the issue of the conflict between population and resources in the eighteen hundreds, very little attention was paid to it on the world political arena till the second half of the present century. Until then, the efforts that had been undertaken in population were scattered, poorly documented and had not been evaluated. Also, with the exception of some Western and Asian countries, there was limited knowledge and little perception of the urgency of population issues.

High fertility together with decreasing mortality levels in the developing countries, which experienced the first stages of the demographic transition, as well as the baby-boom during the period after the Second World War in Western and Socialist countries began to make politicians, planners, scientists and many other aware of the negative impact the population growth could have on the quality of life of the world population in the future.

In addition to many international initiatives to analyse the causes for high population growth, a special UN-Agency for population issues (United Nations fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), was set up 1969 which was later officially renamed as United Nations Population Fund. Three International Population Conferences have been organized till now; the latest one was held at Cairo during September, 1994. These conferences have been instrumental in focussing the attention of the world leaders to the various population problems. World Population plan of Actions adopted in these conferences deliberate in detail the inter-sectoral linkages of population with socio-economic development. Though the principle of integration of population and development is almost universally agreed upon, in practice much remains to be accomplished in many developing countries: a data barrier as well as the analysis and dissemination of findings hamper the efforts of the population and development planners. Actually what is needed is an increase in efforts to collect, analyze, disseminate and use data in population policy and programme planning.

With regard to this need, the situation in Mongolia is not very different as compared to many other countries in the world. In its initial stages of transformation from a socialist centrally- planned economy to a market-oriented democratic society, the need for thorough understanding of population dynamic and the interrelationship between population and social, economic and cultural variables was profound. Knowledge of the level and determinants of fertility, mortality and migration as well as its changes are essential for reasonable planning and policy. Not only are these demographic indicators, which determine the size, composition and distribution of population, variable, but so too is information on the relationship with socio-economic system. Examples of this important information include level and future changes on urbanization, household formation, changes in family life styles due to socio-economic and perhaps cultural changes, the future size of the urban and rural labor force and its socio-economic consequences.

Though Mongolia has the advantages of a relatively well developed data collection system and the Government of Mongolia have also shown keen interest in the importance of population aspects in the development process of the country, the efforts made till now in the

area of analysis and utilization of population data for policy formulation have not been adequate. This is mainly due to fact that although statisticians and economics are abundantly available in the country, the number of well trained demographers is very limited.

The population teaching and research center

To meet this need a Demographic Laboratory at the Mongolian National University was created through Governmental Order No. 254 in January, 1990. The Laboratory was later renamed as Population Teaching and Research Center and has been designated to serve as the National Center for teaching and research in Demography. In addition to financial support from the Government of Mongolia in the Amount of 5.1 m Tugrik covering the cost of personnel, buildings, utilities, local training, maintenance and equipment, the center is also sponsored by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The UNFPA's contribution in the form of a project amounting US\$ 204.000 (1992-1996), mainly consist of technical assistance. The Population Teaching and Research Center is located on the premises of the Economic Institute of MNU and currently has six full time staff members, a UN Technical Adviser in Demography and an English Teacher.

Objectives

The Center has two main objectives. First, it aims at skills building in the field of population at the national and aimak level by having a full-time teaching programmes for students and short-term training programmes for teachers, researchers and governmental officers. Secondly, the Center aims at carrying out a research programme dealing with high priority policy oriented subjects concerning population and related topics in order to provide the Government with fundamental information for socio-economic planning and the formulation of population policy.

The teaching programme

With regard to the first objective, Human Resource Development, one of the major activities of the Center is to conduct a 4-year Higher Diploma Course in Demography. The first two years prepare the students for the specialized demographic programme provided in the last two years. The first two years contain basic and preparatory courses and students gain knowledge in different related subjects such as economics, statistics, geography etc., whereas during the last two years specific attention is focussed on population studies.

Studies in population stress the interdisciplinary nature with a balance between demographic analysis and sociological, economic, cultural, political and other dimensions of the field. Purpose of the programme is to improve student's abilities to collect, analyse, interpret and present population data, particularly, with assistance of personal computers. Specific learning outcomes include knowledge of research design procedures, principles and methods of demographic analysis, fundamental demographic concepts and indicators and demographic aspects of social and economic change and related policies. Because of the placement of a UN Technical Adviser at PTRC, the teaching and research programme incorporate latest international insights in the field of population research. Consequently, the programme relies heavily on international literature, mainly written in English. To make the students capable of reading demographic literature available in English, the services of an international English Teacher has been also hired by the PTRC. The students are provided with intensive English writing and speaking training during 3 years of their course. Further, to make the popular demographic literature available to wider audience and researchers, the PTRC is continuously trying to get the English literature translated in Mongolian. Till now two books

have already been translated and distributed among the concerned organizations even at aimak levels.

The teaching programme also contains specialised modules like "Women, Population and Development", "Population, Development Planning and Policy", "Population research Methodology", and "Population in Mongolia". To meet the growing demand for population courses, the PTRC also organises teaching programmes for other Departments of the Mongolian National University such as Management, Politics, Journalism, etc.

Career prospects

Keeping in view the overall employment scenario in Mongolia, the students completing the higher Diploma in Demography have a bright career prospects. Almost all the students who have passed till now from the PTRC have got jobs in different organisations such as Ministries, University, Research Institutions, etc. In view of the number of international organisations getting interested in getting various socio-economic studies conducted on Mongolia and Mongolian Government giving lot of importance to incorporation of population issues in the overall developmental planning of the country, the future career prospects also appears to be bright for Demographer in Mongolia. A number of teachers have been also send abroad for short and long term training courses.

Short term training courses

Another activities being carried out by the Center with regard to Human Resource Development is organization of short-term training courses in Demography for mid-level officers who are working at central and local Government organizations in the field of Population. Till now three such courses have already been organized starting from 1993-94 in collaboration with the Ministry of Population Policy and Labor. The last such course was organised in April, 1996. Another short term course on interlinkages between health and population was organized in February, 1996 for the senior officers of the Ministry of Health and senior teachers of the Mongolian Medical University. As an outcome of this training course teaching of Demography is likely to be introduced for the medical students of the Mongolian Medical University. To sensitize the officers working in various Ministries about the importance of incorporating gender issues in the overall developmental planning of the country, the PTRC also organised a short term training course during February-May, 1996 for mid level officers of Mongolian Women's Federation, State Statistical Office, Civil Registration Bureau, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Population Policy and Labour. Actually PTRC is now in a position to organise short term training courses on population and related issues on receiving a request from any organization in Mongolia.

Research programme

In addition to skills building , conducting research is another major tasks of the Population Teaching and Research Center. During the short history of the Center full and part-time researchers have already accomplished research and related activities. For example, in collaboration with the State Statistical Office recommendations were formulated to improve the demographic data collection and processing system and papers were prepared on "Current Unemployment Levels and it's Possible Solutions", " Factors Affecting Health of Ulaanbaatar's Population", "Causes of Infertility and It's Consequences" and " The Education System in Mongolia". In 1992, two Scientific Conferences were organized in collaboration with the State Statistical Office, the Ministry of Population Policy and Labor and the Ministry of Health.

The PTRC also conducted a Demographic Survey in Mongolia during October-November, 1994 with the main objectives of (i) to have collected and analysed data on (a) past and present levels and patterns of fertility and infant and child mortality; (b) determinants (proximate) and differentials of fertility and infant and child mortality; (c) behavioral aspects concerning fertility; fertility preferences, knowledge on and attitudes towards family planning; (d) socio-economic background variables of households and individuals; in order to enhance knowledge and understanding of changes in population dynamics in relation to societal processes in the past and present, with the particular emphasis on the recent period since the start of socio-political and economic changes, (ii) to have strengthened the research capability of the PTRC, (iii) to have assisted policy-makers, administrators and researchers in designing, assessing and evaluating population related programmes and strategies. Furthermore, to have raised awareness among these people regarding the potential value of demographic and health surveys for planning and policy-making. The Survey covered 1763 households and 2030 women and 1026 men in the age group of 15-49 years spread in 6 aimaks namely, Hovd, Uver-Khangai, Arkhangai, Dundgovi and Hentii. The survey also covered Ulaanbaatar City. The survey was funded by the UNFPA and the Government of Mongolia. The report of survey was distributed to concerned national and international agencies during January, 1996.

In order to assess the changes in the level and trends of various demographic parameters such as birth rate, death rate, infant mortality rate after the first survey in 1994 and to also know the change in the level and pattern of contraceptive prevalence in Mongolia, PTRC also conducted the Second demographic Survey in Mongolia during June-July, 1996 covering 1600 households spread in six aimaks and capital city of Ulaanbaatar. The report of the Survey is likely to be available by the end of December, 1996.

To fulfill its responsibilities as a research institution, the PTRC has also started the publication of "Mongolian Journal of Demography" to provide an outlet to the researchers and experts working in the field of population and related issues to publish their researches for wider readership. The first issue of the Journal is now in your hand.

Population reference unit and computer center

To serve both training and research activities, a Population Reference Unit and a Computer Center have been set up at the PTRC. The library contains, in addition to books, journals and other materials like the Population database POPLINE on compact disk. The total number of books/reports/journals available in the library is about 800. Computer inventory of the materials in the library is also available. Library facility is available not only to the students of the PTRC but to the teachers and researchers of other Departments of the Mongolian National University, officers from different Ministries and even to other interested persons.

To impart up-to-date training to the students, a computer center has been also set up with 10 high quality Personal Computers (PC). These PCs are loaded with latest computer software packages such as Windows, WordPerfect, Lotus, HG etc. All the demographic software packages developed by the UN and other agencies such as PEOPLE, WORKER, SPSS, MORTPAK, DEMPROJ, PCEDIT/ XTABLE, EASWES etc. are also loaded in the PCs. An intensive module on SPSS is taught to the students. Regular exercises are also given to the students to familiarise them fully with these software packages. The Personal Computers are also used in the short term training courses organized by the PTRC.

Future activities:

Within a short period of four years of its establishment, the PTRC has tried to accomplish a number of activities in the field of teaching, training and research of Demography

in Mongolia. However much more remains to be done. The UNFPA funding is likely to be available in the next country programme also for strengthening of the PTRC. Some of the new activities likely to be undertaken by the PTRC in future may be systematic teaching of post-graduate course in Demography, preparing materials to be used in the distance education in population and related issues, diversify it's research activities in other socio-economic areas and to conduct more and more short term training courses.

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