

The power to choose the number, timing and spacing of children can bolster economic and social development.

17 October, 2018, Addis Ababa: A new report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) shows that the global trend towards smaller families is a reflection of people making reproductive choices to have as few or as many children as they want, when they want. The “State of World Population 2018” report, in various case studies globally, demonstrates that when people lack choice, it can have a long-term impact on fertility rates, often making them higher or lower, than what most people desire.

The report continentally launched today under the theme “the Power of Choice: Reproductive Rights and The Demographic Transition,” indicates that family size is closely linked with reproductive rights, which, in turn, are tied to many other rights, including the right to adequate health, education, and jobs. It notes that where people can exercise their rights, they tend to thrive and where these rights are stifled, people often fail to achieve their full potential, impeding economic and social progress.

The State of World Population 2018 calls on countries to enhance sexual and reproductive health and rights and choices to better manage the demographic transition. The report emphasizes that the resulting change in population age structure can help countries realize the demographic dividend, bolstering economic and social development.

Speaking at the launch of the report, the UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA, Dereje Wordofa, stated that harnessing the demographic dividend is firmly premised on the enjoyment, protection and respect for fundamental civil, political and socio-economic rights of young people including young women.

“Ensuring these rights and enabling youth and women to make informed choices will undoubtedly contribute to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063,” he underlined.

The report classifies all countries in the world by the current dynamics of their populations' fertility. It makes specific recommendations for policies and programmes that would help each country increase reproductive choices. It further reflects that the demographic transition, particularly the fertility decline, has been much slower in the African continent compared to other less-developed regions and emphasizes the need for increased and targeted investments in education and health, including sexual and reproductive health.

In his keynote address at the launch, the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission Amb. Kwesi Quartey underscored the importance of the report which he noted complements the African Union's focus on harnessing the demographic dividend of the youth. The report, he said, would influence decision making and inform responsive development policies and strategies, particularly on issues of health and wellbeing of the people, migration, urbanization, employment and entrepreneurship, education and skills development, governance and youth empowerment.

He concluded stating, "for us, this spirit is captured and well-articulated in the AU roadmap on harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth which recognises the importance of investing in the younger population because the youth bulge can either be a dividend or a potential crisis, and significantly impacts on the development trajectory of the continent."

The State Minister and Deputy Commissioner of National Planning Commission, Ato Getachew Adem said Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan mainstreams population issues and give due emphasis to improving access to family planning as well as creating a conducive environment for the fast growing working age population to actively participate in the country's development process.

According to the Minister, addressing population issues in a sustainable manner and seizing the demographic dividend calls for a joint and collaborative effort of all actors and the different sectors, including through the generation or evidence

based information for advocacy and policy dialogue on population and development matters and the revision of different national policies, strategies and programmes in the country.

To make freedom of choice a reality, says the report, countries can prioritize universal access to quality reproductive health care, including modern contraceptives; ensure better education, including age-appropriate sexuality education; advocate for a change in men's attitudes to be supportive of the rights and aspirations of women and girls; and make it easier for couples to have more children, if they want them, by enabling greater work-life balance through measures such as affordable child care.

The State of World Population 2018 states that the way forward is the full realization of reproductive rights, for every individual and couple, including taking measures to dismantle all the barriers—whether economic, social or institutional—that inhibit free and informed choice.

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