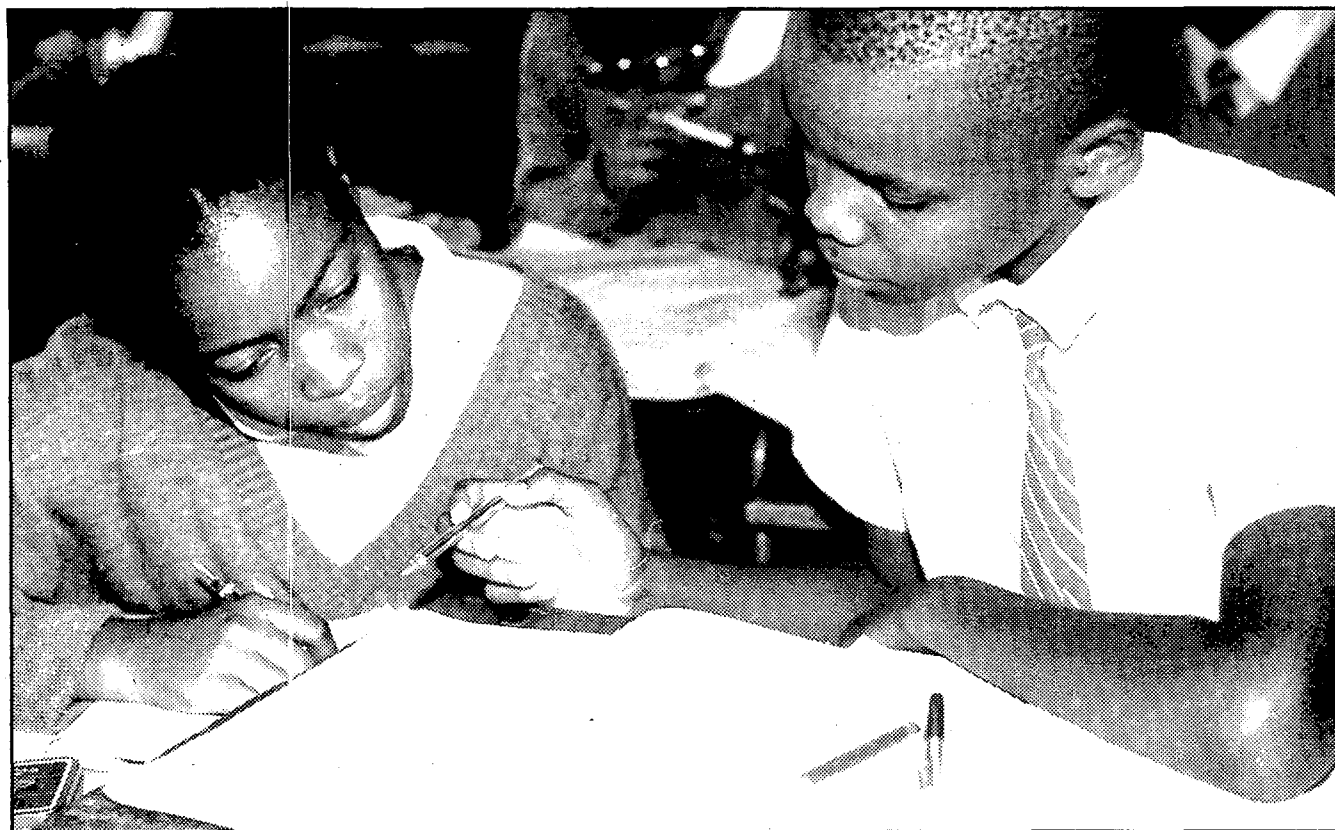




WORLD POPULATION DAY



Pupils in a classroom: Whether they should undergo Family Life Education remains a controversial issue. It is however agreed that their choices in sexuality will determine the population in the next century.

Sexuality remains a controversial issue

"Today, there are over a billion young people between 15 and 24 years of age. Their decisions about the size and spacing of their families will determine how many people will be on the planet by 2050 and beyond. Their decisions will also help determine how they live — in poverty or prosperity; on a green and healthy planet or in a world devastated by human activities."

— Dr Nafis Sadik, the executive director of the United Nations Population Fund. After groping through a childhood full of challenges, adolescents and youths graduate into an adulthood that holds no guarantee for jobs.

Hope exists, though. Efforts are being made to brighten the future — by implementing projects that focus on the unique needs of this segment of the population.

How to meet the many reproductive needs of young people is a responsibility society is struggling to fulfil. Sexuality is source of confusion to many youths. Matters are not made any easier for them when the country fails to agree on how best to impart knowledge on sexuality and its challenges.

When young people falter during their most challenging period by making uninformed decisions, they compromise the quality of their lives and that of future generations.

If they are unable to cope with the biological and psychological changes they undergo, young people find themselves with problems associated with this period.

Failure to prioritise youth reproductive health rights and problems is responsible for high incidences of teenage pregnancies and resultant illegal abortions, Sexually Transmitted Infections including HIV/Aids, early marriages and drug abuse.

Majority of adolescence pregnancies are unwanted and unplanned. Most result from increased sexual activity among this group.

The government explored ways of introducing Family Life Education in schools. This was a measure to intensify its programmes of informing and educating its people on population issues. A controversy quickly emerged over the issue and the plan was shelved.

On this, the National Population Advo-

cacy and IEC Strategy for Sustainable Development 1996-2010 says the major question on family life education is the effect of widespread availability of contraceptives and the increasing independence of young people on traditional family lifestyles norms and values.

This concern ranges from doubts about how women's access to contraceptives will affect relationships with their husbands, to worry over young people making decisions about sexual behaviour outside without family control, to fears of social disharmony as a result of loss of traditional values.

The National Council for Population and Development says many Kenyans fear a complete loss of moral values among young people while others find personal difficulties in reconciling changing circumstances with traditional family relationships and roles.

Women's traditional roles, husband's responsibilities, sons' and daughters' obligations are still under threat. The availability and acceptability of contraceptives is seen by many as both a cause and exacerbation of these problems.

However, even as wananchi and leaders fail to agree on the best way forward, there is evidence that lack of FLE in schools could be responsible for high pregnancy rates among school girls, high incidences of drug abuse and overall wastage in continuing school.

Lack of national consensus on the scope, content and methodology of teaching FLE is thus taking its toll on the country's human resource.

Unlike their forefathers, today's youths are faced with HIV/Aids. As the most sexually active group, the youth are the most exposed to danger. They are highly vulnerable to infection. That is why most HIV and other sexually transmitted infections occur among young people.

Fortunately, there are a number of interventions bringing positive results. The non-governmental organisations have complemented government efforts in through various projects.

Most of these are initiatives of the United Nations' Population Fund's together with the Population Programme of Kenya as elab-

orated in the Fifth Country Programme.

The Family Planning Association of Kenya, with financial from UNFPA, is undertaking a four-year Reproductive Health Advocacy for Youth programme. The campaign focuses on policy makers, opinion leaders, parents and youth at the grassroots level. It is to educate them on youth reproductive health rights.

The project is using District Youth Advocates, the *Youth Variety Show* radio programme and the print media to promote the campaign.

FPAK runs two youth counseling centres funded by the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

Its operations research project in Nyeri is using parents to educate the youth on reproductive health. The project is supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.

At the same time, the Kenya Scouts Association is carrying out a reproductive health outreach programme for adolescents and youth. The US\$1.7 (about Sh102 billion) programme is supported by UNFPA, the United Nations Drug Control Programme and KSA.

The scouts body is drawing on the successes of its previous initiatives in working with the youth to fulfil its mission in the current project.

Its areas of focus are: strengthening institutional capacity; increasing access and quality of integrated reproductive health services; safe motherhood; adolescents and youth reproductive health needs; STIs/HIV/Aids; and information, education and communication.

The Nairobi City Council, through its public health department, is undertaking a reproductive health programme for informal settlements of Nairobi.

Areas covered include settlements within Kibera, Kawangware, Korogocho, Kariakangi, Pumwani and Mathare/Huruma which have an estimated population of one million people.

The programme offers counselling services; distributes condoms and pills; trains medical staff (enrolled community nurses) by updating their knowledge and skills on reproductive health; and creates awareness among leaders and policy makers on the need to promote reproductive health rights and services.

A project on peer counseling is being implemented by the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru. So far, the lessons learned from it are quite encouraging.

Government continues to grapple with population

The government's concern about the country's rapid population growth goes back to 1967 — four years after independence.

Since then, it has been designing and implementing policies aimed at striking a balance between population growth and the ability of the country to provide essential social services to wananchi.

In that year, the government launched the National Family Planning Programme, making Kenya the first sub-Saharan African country to adopt an official policy on family planning.

Fifteen years later, it established the National Council for Population and Development to formulate relevant population policies and strategies to co-ordinate all population-related activities in the country. Population policy guidelines were developed in 1984. Family planning was integrated into maternal and child health division of the Ministry of Health.

The NCPD is responsible for the co-ordination of all population information education and communication activities in the country. However, in addition to ministries, NGOs and the private sector (including various religious organisations) have also implemented advocacy and IEC programmes.

It has the mandate to advise the government on matters of capacity building in the field of population and development.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 agreed upon a programme of action on population and development which changed the scope of population policy and programme, placing emphasis on the welfare of the individual rather than on the achievement of demographic targets.

An updated Population Policy for Sustainable Development was formulated in 1996: Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1997. It incorporated ICPD objectives, widening the scope. This outlines Kenya's development goals, objectives and targets to guide implementation of the population programmes up to the year 2010.

In this document, the government acknowledges and supports the close collaboration that has existed between it and non-governmental organisations, the private sector and communities themselves.

The United Nations Population Fund has been — and still is — a major source of technical and financial support to Kenya through the Country Programmes which now number five.

The UN agency notes that "the proposed support to the Fifth Country Programme will therefore be crucial in assisting the government achieve the goals and objectives set out in the new Population Policy, which in turn sets the pace towards the achievement of the ICPD goals."

UNFPA undertakes the programme, Integrated Reproduc-

tive Health for pastoralist communities in Samburu. The project is implemented by Samburu Aid in Africa (SAIDIA).

It aims at expanding reproductive health services to greater catchment areas and to enhance and increase knowledge based on reproductive health. It also aims at reducing and preventing the spread of HIV/Aids and other Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) through increased community awareness and promotion of barrier methods.

Demographic targets for the Fifth Country Programme include reduction of infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births from 67 in 1995 to 66 by the year 2000; to 63 by 2005; and 59 by 2010.

It plans to reduce the maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 births from 590 in 1995 to 230 by 2005; and 170 by 2010.

Further, an increase in contraception prevalence rate is envisaged (all methods among all women) from 33 per cent in 1993 by the year 2000, to 53 by 2005 and 62 by 2010.

Information and education is among strategies that will see Kenya tackle some population challenges. A well informed public is better placed to understand and practise approaches that can help improve their lives.

The Fifth Country Programme is being guided by many policy documents, both global and national. It shares the goals and objectives highlighted in the 1996 National Population Policy for Sustainable Development. These include to:

- Sustain the demographic transition to further reduce fertility and mortality and especially infant and child mortality;
- Integrate more fully population and environmental concerns into development strategies and planning at all levels (particularly at district level);
- Sustain the collection, analysis and timely dissemination of demographic data on a regular basis for planning and other purposes;
- Increase the awareness of all couples and individuals regarding their rights to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children, and to educate them on the relationship between family size, health and standard of living;
- Increase the availability, accessibility, acceptability and affordability of quality family planning services for all those who are ready for and need them while maintaining confidentiality;
- Increase involvement of men in family planning;
- Promote and expand the Primary Health Care services especially for reproductive health;
- Increase awareness of the spread of STDs/HIV/Aids, and their consequences to the individual and the nation as a whole, in order to promote sustainable behavioural change;
- Promote empowerment of women and the improvement of their status in all role in development.