Discussant's Remarks

Global Population Studies: Shaping the Future

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Overview

Preliminaries

With Malawi studies as an example of great demography/epidemiology work done in the developing world:

- ▶ Step back and look at the big picture
- ▶ This is an interesting moment in history: climate crisis, BLM, extremism, pandemic, etc.
- ▶ Where have we been and where are we going?

Framing of population studies, demography, global health **in the Global South**

Big Questions that we don't often discuss:

- ▶ Why do this kind of work at all?
- ▶ What are the products or benefits?
- ▶ Who benefits and how?
- ▶ Who pays for (and thereby frames) the work?
- ▶ What or who (in a big sense) informs or motivates the work?

There are lots of answers!

Role for population-based scientists in Big Challenges

Three Big Challenges:

- **Climate crisis**
- Health: epidemics, pandemics, etc.
- Extremism: inequality, nationalism, migration, etc.

Role for population-based scientists in big challenges

Population-based science for the big challenges:

- ▶ Understand the role of **global** and regional population size and dynamics in the big challenges
- ▶ **Global** and regional population forecasting that works with climate, ecology, and economic models → planning scenarios
- ▶ Careful measurement of population and health processes at **global** and regional scales
- ▶ **Deep integration and collaboration with related disciplines:** earth and biological sciences, related behavioral sciences, health scientists, statistics, and computer science

Some personal background

Where I come from and what I am:

- ▶ Born in Kenya
- ▶ Ages 0–15 in Kenya, Tanzania
- ▶ PhD dissertation in Zambia
- ▶ 5-year postdoc in South Africa working at demographic surveillance system sites; helped found the INDEPTH Network
- ▶ I am American **and** African with a career working mostly in/on Africa
- ▶ Married to woman from Brazil
- ▶ My wife and children are Hispanic in the USA

Windmill: a failure

Watching my father work in community development:

- Northern Kenya, remote village, no water source, women walk many miles for water daily
- Solution from outside: deep well with windmill – low tech and reliable, no more women walking
- Result: windmill ran for a year or two and then fell over
- Reason: man appointed by village to do easy, infrequent maintenance did not do his job at all
- Explanation: dishonorable duty, no pay attached, everyone thinks women walking is OK
- **Conclusion: needs misunderstood, solution ignored simple social dimensions**

Seeds, fertilizer, and wheelbarrows: a success

Watching my father a bit later with a much bigger project:

- ▶ Central Tanzania, many remote villages, very poor crop yield, no vegetables, poor nutrition, etc.
- ▶ Solution from outside (USAID): crop watering is the problem, high tech irrigation, deep wells, diesel engine-driven pumps, pipes, sprinklers, etc.
- ▶ Father's intervention: focus groups with community leaders and farmers → the *actual* issues
- ▶ Discovery: no problem with water, only 3 real problems: no seeds, no fertilizer, and no farming implements (hoes and wheelbarrows) – this is 1980s Tanzania

The seeds: a success

▶ Solution: illegal import operation across closed border with Kenya: seeds, fertilizer, hoes/wheelbarrows

▶ Result: exceeded all pre-defined metrics of success for the project, and there were happy farmers growing what they like to eat and being healthy

▶ **Conclusion: incorporate local knowledge and perspective, be creative, and don't do high tech for the sake of it!**

▶ (My Dad got fired for running an illegal import operation)

Global problems require perspectives from around the globe

- ▶ The big issues are truly global in scope
- ▶ Effective solutions to the big issues can only be global
- ▶ **We urgently need a truly global approach to population-based sciences**
- ▶ **A global approach requires equal participation from all regions**
- ▶ Global North has the vast majority of resources and expertise
- ▶ Comparatively (much) less input or leadership from Global South

Global South

The Global South will play key roles in the Big Challenges and their solutions

- ▶ Resources: share

- ▶ Expertise and experience: rapidly improve **in-place** training and mentorship

- ▶ Research: proactively develop mutual/shared/equal partnerships that prioritize local perspectives to motivate, frame, conduct, and interpret work; **include everyone at all stages of research – planning, funding, conducting, disseminating, actioning**

- ▶ Intervention: strongly privilege local approach and locally-motivated solutions – **support instead of lead**
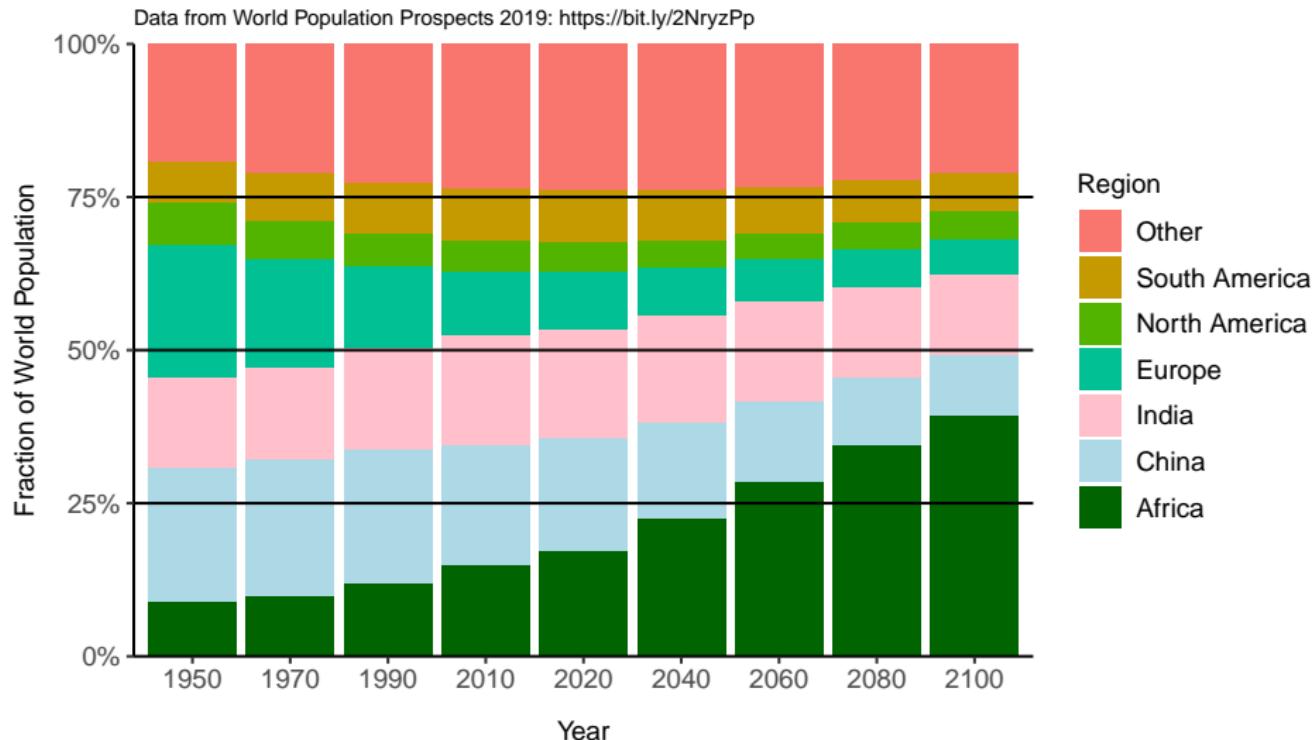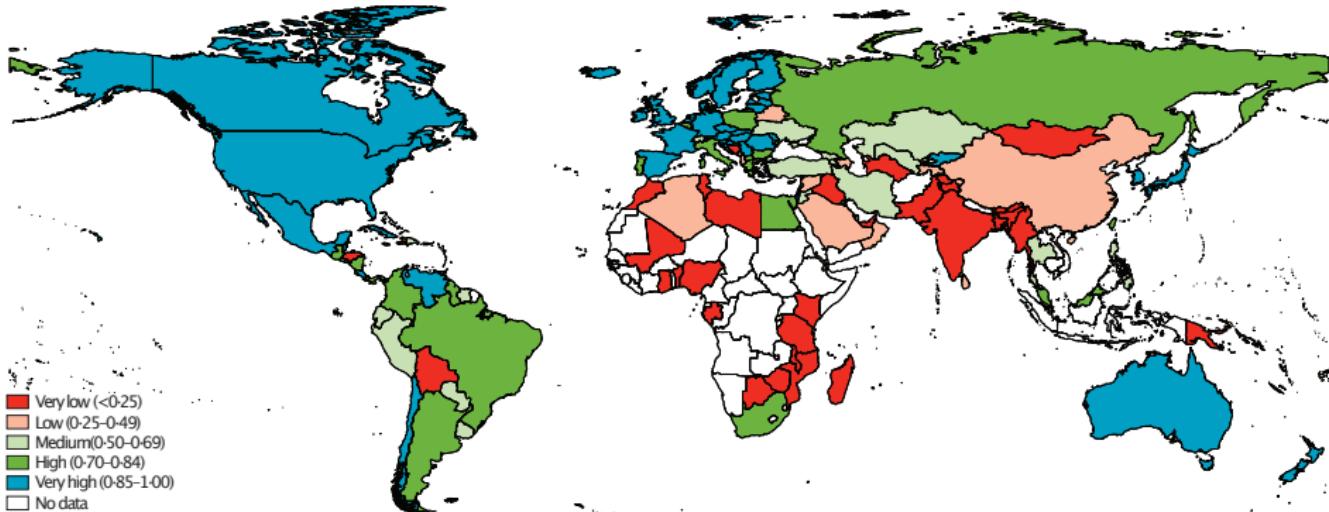
Population composition by region

(UN DESA Population Division, 2019)

Data from World Population Prospects 2019: https://bit.ly/2NryzPp
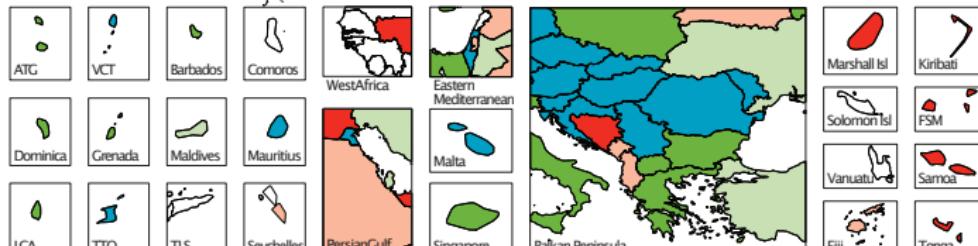
Vital statistics performance index

(Mikkelsen et al., 2015)

Very low (<0·25)
Low (0·25–0·49)
Medium(0·50–0·69)
High (0·70–0·84)
Very high (0·85–1·00)
No data

Caribbean

ATG
VCT
Barbados
Comoros
WestAfrica
Eastern Mediterranean
Marshall Isl
Kiribati

Dominica
Grenada
Maldives
Mauritius
Malta
Solomon Isl
FSM

LCA
TTO
TLS
Seychelles
PersianGulf
Singapore
Balkan Peninsula
Vanuatu
Samoa

Fiji
Tonga

Big Challenges and Big Questions – GLOBAL

The situation:

▶ The Big Challenges require a global approach

▶ Global means including everyone

Need to consider the Big Questions in this light:

▶ Why do this kind of work at all?

▶ What are the products or benefits?

▶ Who benefits and how?

▶ Who pays for (and thereby frames) the work?

▶ What or who (in a big sense) informs or motivates the work?

African Population and Health Research Center – APHRC

- ▶ **Africa-led**
- ▶ Nairobi, Kenya
- ▶ Dakar, Senegal
- ▶ Population & health research
- ▶ Research capacity strengthening – *training*
- ▶ Policy engagement and communications
- ▶ High impact, growing quickly
- ▶ URL: aphrc.org

APHRC

APHRC
African Population and
Health Research Center

Home   Who We Are   What We Do   Media Center   Resources   Get Involved   DONATE

INFORMING POLICY DECISIONS IN HEALTH, EDUCATION AND URBAN PLANNING SECTORS ACROSS THE CONTINENT

FEATURED

GUIDELINES FOR TRAINING, REMOTE INTERVIEWS AND DATA COLLECTION IN THE NEW NORMAL

Increasingly, researchers have been embracing remote data collection because of the numerous advantages of the approach. These include the ability to reach diverse participants in far off places at lesser costs, real time data synchronization, and viability in circumstances that do not allow deployment of the traditional face to face interviews.
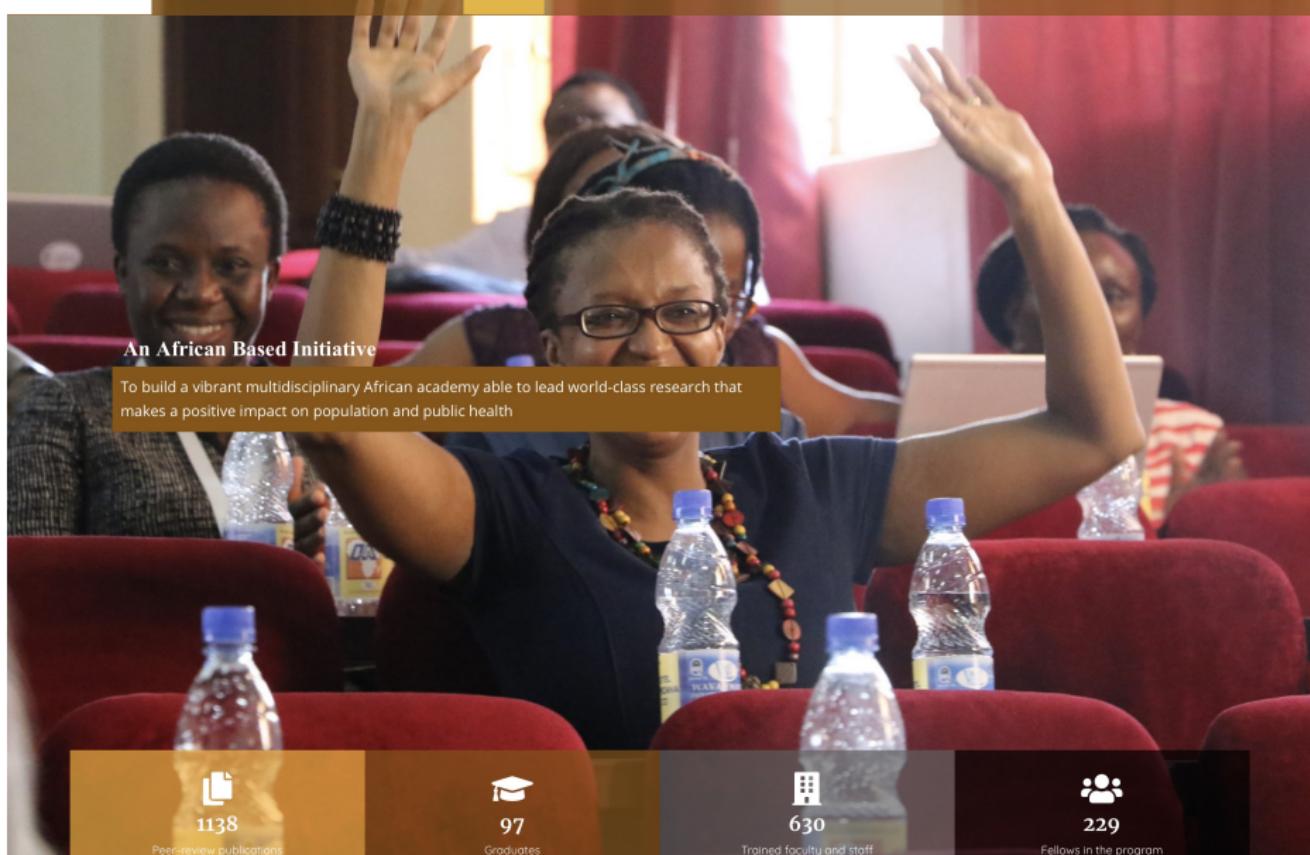
LEARN MORE

Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa – CARTA

Mission: Build high-level capacity for population and public health-related research in Africa

- **wholly within Africa and Africa-led**
- Consortium of African universities
- PhD training across consortium
- Support young researchers: PhD, postdoc, faculty
- Build critical mass of locally-trained and highly effective researchers
- URL: cartafrica.org

CARTA

An African Based Initiative

To build a vibrant multidisciplinary African academy able to lead world-class research that makes a positive impact on population and public health

| 1138	97	630	229
Peer-review publications	Graduates	Trained faculty and staff	Fellows in the program

Thoughts on a possible way forward – human capital

▶ Using APHRC & CARTA as examples, build and support **in-place human capital development** and research capacity in the Global South

    ▶ Requires Global North to continue funding and supporting, but not controlling

    ▶ *maybe,* instead of students from Global South training in Global North, researchers and instructors from Global North go to Global South for periods of time to teach and provide research mentorship

▶ Prioritize investments in **data** over developing new models to substitute for data

Thoughts on a possible way forward – data

- Encourage **rapid innovation in methods** to utilize all data, defective or not
    - Census
    - Vital statistics
    - Surveys
    - Research surveillance system, e.g. health and demographic surveillance
    - Big data and digital exhaust
    - Remote sensing
    - Verbal autopsy (cause of death)

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