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The Consequences of Demographic Changes. The Importance of Future Planning

Demographic change, as well as its consequences, is visible in patterns of population growth, distribution, and composition over time. Today at 6.2 billion, most of the world's population resides in economically underdeveloped areas and three quarters in 22 out of more than 185 countries, including two demographic "billionaires", China and India. In 1950 Europe's population was just over half a billion persons and by the turn of the 21st century half again larger, or 727.3 million persons. In the same period, India with a smaller population of 357.6 million in 1950 grew almost three times to 1 billion persons. Population momentum will continue to add 70-77 million persons annually through 2020, again primarily to the developing world, as a result of past high fertility. Increasing urbanization and internal and international population migration are additional demographic forces of population change for the coming decades.

The consequences of demographic change for a region or a nation can challenge systems at all levels and range from the negligible to the historically significant, as in the socioeconomic impact of the Soviet Union's major loss of men of military age during World War II. As another example, with Germany and the Philippines as demographic "twins", we see former's population of 82 million in 2000 expected to drop to 70.8 million in 2050 and the latter's of 80 million to grow to 128.4 million. Over this half century, the German government, local communities, families and individuals will be adjusting to the prospects of a smaller population, with 12% under age 15 and 31% over age 64, while Filipino society will adjust to fewer youth (declining from 38% to 20% of population) and more elderly (growing from 4 to 14%). The profiles of development policy and planning will inevitably be different in these two nations.

The study of demography offers dimension and scale to all local and global development efforts. Micro-level studies variously examine the determinants of individual progression from birth to death, through life stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and

aging, as well as how persons engage in schooling, sexual activity, childbearing, marriage, living arrangements, work and retirement. Macro-level studies examine the management of population dynamics to address aggregate consumption needs for jobs, housing, food, education, transport, health care, safe water, or energy. “Political crisis” demography focuses on relationships between population change in composition and distribution and environmental and economic resource constraints. Recent efforts to understand the fatal origins of disease in adulthood or factors behind aging processes, infectious disease transmission, behavioral genetics, and adolescent development have productively partnered with demographic surveillance studies. Demography, because of its less theoretical and more methodological nature, easily interacts with other disciplines to build new knowledge and learning. That science notwithstanding, its findings, which are generally based on large samples or censuses of individuals, clearly are also relevant to the development community’s endeavors to improve the human condition, through policy, programs or planning.