Fertility and Poverty: The Role of Gender and Reproductive Health

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Worldwide fertility development is inevitably linked to economic growth.

Our focus is on the impact of poverty on fertility (the total # of children born alive).

In Kenya, a rapid fertility decline occurred at the end of 1980s and early 1990s, then the decline slowed down.

Separating poor and non-poor women we find a continues decline among non-poor but not among poor women.

We also traced difference between regions studied - Coast and Western areas which is related to culture and religious factors.
Objectives

- **Research Goal**
  - To understand the slowdown in fertility decline in the context of poverty at the household level in different cultural and religious contexts. What happened in Kenya and why?

- **Research Objectives were to:**
  - explore the interplay between fertility and poverty;
  - examine the role of child mortality on fertility and poverty; and
  - explore the impact of gender systems on the relationship between fertility and poverty.
Our Approach

- **Design:** A follow-up from previous case studies 20 years ago in rural villages in Western-{patriarchal/Christian} and Coastal-{matri-patriarchal/Muslim} regions.

- **Data Sources in the follow-up 2010-2013:** Qualitative and Quantitative
  - Case studies of rural villages - Focused biographies among sampled men, women and community leaders.

- Examined fertility changes in Western and Coast Regions over a twenty-year period (1988-2011).

- The 2011 case study re-interviewed some of the informants from 1988 and their descendants, supplemented with additional informants.
Key Findings

- The slowdown in the fertility decline is traced among poor women, while continuous decline has taken place among non-poor women.
- Two patterns are identified both in the quantitative and qualitative analyses: in the Western region fertility decline slowed down while in the Coast region it increased among the poor.
- Poverty status and child death are both associated with higher fertility rates. Replacement of dead children and shorter birth intervals resulted in higher total births.
Despite differences in the cultural (patriarchal and matriarchal legacies) and religious (Christian and Muslim) contexts having large families is considered important to:

- Women when children are a means to gain resources and security; and for
- Men, children are a source of pride and a means to demonstrate power in the absence of employment and income.

Reproductive health improvement has enabled poor women to reach fertility desires in Coast.
Poverty is key to understanding the stall in fertility decline.

Special attention and targeting are needed to address the needs of the poor and to reduce poverty-related inequalities.