Information gaps and data needs for monitoring policies
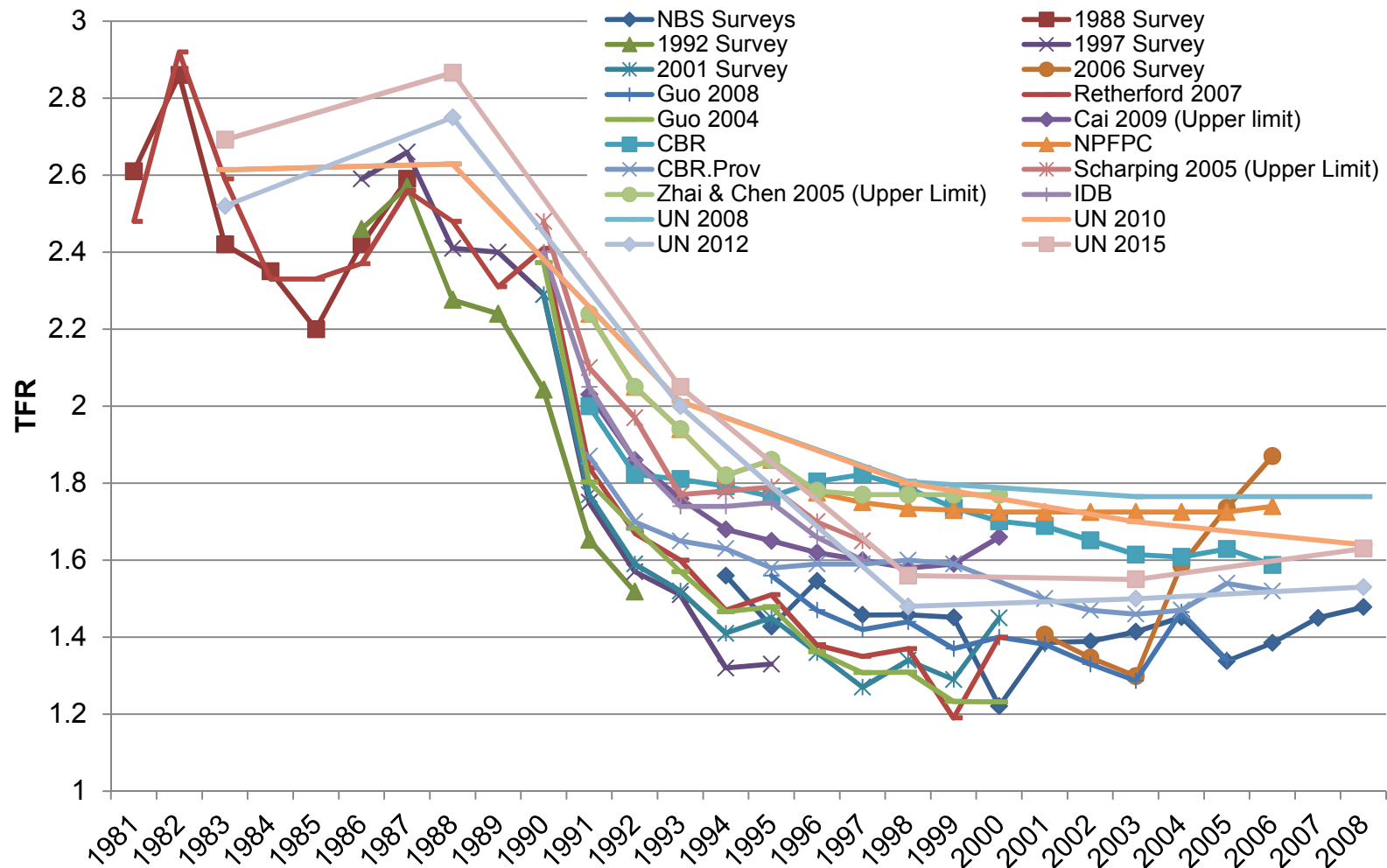
Dr Stuart Gietel-Basten

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WHAT DATA DO WE NEED?

Types of data

- **Demographic data**
  - To count; to measure; to evaluate; to project

'Finding' China's TFR

Measuring demographic change

- **Various data types**
  - Civil/vital registration etc.
  - Census; population registers; rep. surveys
  - Relative advantages of each
- **Reliability, accessibility, comparability**
- **New locations of low fertility**
  - Challenges of capacity, reliability
  - Need to improve regional measures?

Improving 'demographic literacy' as much as the data

- Policymakers, media, scholars
- **Fertility measurements**
  - TFR; 'birth rate'; period/cohort; tempo/quantum
  - 'Baby boom'; 'Baby bust'
- **Allied measurements related to policy**
  - Ageing measures; forecasts/projections
- **False premise? False promise?**
  - E.g. Prontalist policies

Types of data

- Demographic data
  - To count; to measure; to evaluate; to project
- **Data to define 'problems' and 'needs'**
  - To design effective policies

Designing policy for people, not for countries

- **Consensus** [I hope!]
  - *Policies to allow individuals to meet their aspirations and overcome challenges in their lives rather than to meet a 'national target'*

- New instruments to understand **complexities of contemporary, individualized lifestyles**
  - Gender, labour market, welfare etc.

- ***TFR is not the only outcome variable!***

Towards a 'life-course' approach

- Understanding **changes in roles and pressures over the life-course**
  - 'New social risks'
  - SDT characteristics in surveys (e.g. E. Asia)
- Better **definitions**
  - 'Employed/unemployed'→'labour market status' [esp. in informal economies]
  - Opportunity costs = integrate time-use, wage surveys etc.
- More **complex modelling**?
  - Low fertility as a 'symptom' of these pressures?

Integrating qualitative data

- Growing attention to **'talking to people'**
  - **Experts; stakeholders; citizens**
  - More in-depth view of challenges, 'trade-offs',
  - What do people **'need' or 'want' from policies**
  - *Family formation a highly complex exercise in a highly complex social-economic system*
- More projects integrating into **mixed-methods approaches**

Types of data

- Demographic data
  - To count; to measure; to evaluate; to project
- Data to define 'problems' and 'needs'
  - To design effective policies
- **Data to evaluate**
  - To see what policies have been effective

What are we evaluating?

- **First rule of policy evaluation**: *What was the point of the policy?*

- Past view (and still in some parts: *decline, then raise, fertility*
  - pTFR up/down (long-term, cTFR)

- In **'person-centred' policy**, with fertility as a 'secondary outcome?
  - Much harder; requires a much more complex approach

Longitudinal approaches

- Longitudinal **surveys** (similar to ageing) to track **quantitative** changes in circumstances
  - More or less complex modelling exercises to identify changes in *t* and *t+1*
- Integrating longitudinal **qualitative interviews**
  - Supplementing surveys
  - Finding life-course/policy interactions

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Data access and transparency

- Great **disparities in access** to data
  - Non-local? Local?
  - Different types of data
    - Surveys; censuses; population projection assumptions; academic research (e.g. code)
- Requires change in **mindset**
  - Data as protected asset? Security? Competition?
  - Replicability; check reliability; refine/advance analysis; collaboration

Comparability and harmonisation

- **Great advances** made
  - IPUMS; HFD; HFC; UN
  - DHS; GSS; EB [SHARE; SILC etc.]
- **New sites of low fertility 'left behind'?**
  - Esp. E/SE Asia; MENA; Latin America
- **Practical importance** (e.g. policy)
- **Theoretical importance** (the same transition?)

Get serious about policy evaluation

- Data collection an integral part of process
- Requires much closer interaction between demographers and policymakers to deliver an 'End-to-end' understanding
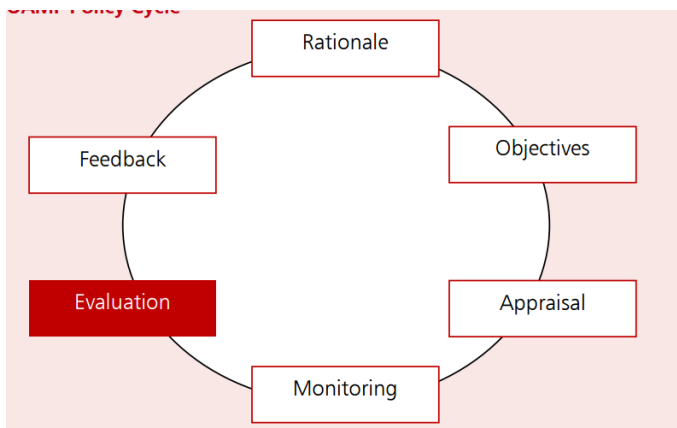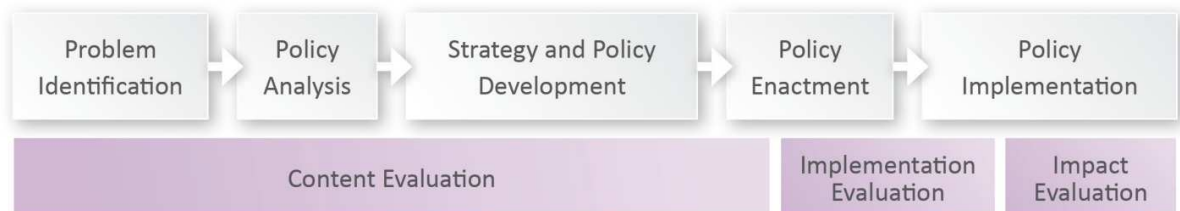

Figure 3. Policy Development Phases and Types of Evaluation

HM Treasury 2011; CDC 2012

Conclusion:
Two Biggest Challenges?

- Move away from low fertility as a **'problem to be solved' to a 'symptom' of other societal issues? (and building data around that)**
  - **Re*imagining* our standard repertoire of questions and analysis**
- Low fertility world **moving into locations characterised by less data infrastructure**
  - *Ironically* also **no DHS coverage** etc.
  - **Short-term**: work to develop (and increase access) to data systems; Population Situation Analysis [UNFPA]
  - **Long-term**: capacity building (people, infrastructure, facilities)