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United Nations      Department of Public Information – News Coverage and Accreditation Service- New York

POP/807  
13 July 2001

LAGGING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR WOMEN AND POOR GENDER RELATIONS SEEN AS

OBSTACLES TO FERTILITY DECLINE IN MANY POOR COUNTRIES

NEW YORK, 13 July (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) -- Despite an unprecedented transition to low fertility in a majority of developing countries in the world, there still remains a number of countries where fertility is still at high levels i.e. at 5 children or more per woman. Nearly all of these high fertility countries are in sub-Saharan Africa and a majority have been classified by the United Nations as least developed. Several are already severely affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and a number have been experiencing civil strife and political instability in recent years. In Africa alone, the countries that continue to have high fertility account for over a fifth of the population of that continent.

The continuation of high fertility and population growth poses serious challenges to future economic and social development. This concern has prompted the United Nations Population Division to organize a *Workshop on Prospects for Fertility Decline in High Fertility Countries*. Researchers from 14 different countries met in New York from the 9 to 11 July to investigate the conditions that hinder or facilitate fertility decline, to provide insights into the prospects for decline and to indicate policy measures that may facilitate the onset of fertility decline. Five young researchers from Togo, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Cote D'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were invited to attend the Workshop as part of the Out-Reach Programme of the Population Division.

The Workshop concluded that fertility rates in most high fertility countries were declining. The low status of women especially their lagging educational attainment was cited as the main obstacle to fertility decline. Low status of women was also one of the reasons for continuing high family size preferences and for the lack of accessibility and affordability of contraceptives. It was also emphasized that the observed fertility decline in some countries was crisis-driven (either by economic conditions or civil strife) rather than by developments in social and economic conditions, raising questions of the sustainability of their fertility transition. As a result most participants questioned whether the average number of children per woman in those countries would fall below 4 by 2025.

Background documents and other materials from the Workshop are available on the web site of the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <http://www.un.org/esa/population>. For further information please contact Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division, at (212) 963-3179 or e-mail [population@un.org](mailto:population@un.org).