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# Evaluation of the Population and Poverty Research Initiative (PopPov)

Executive Summary

Julie DaVanzo, Sebastian Linnemayr, Peter Glick, Eric Apaydin



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The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

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# Evaluation of the Population and Poverty Research Initiative (PopPov): Executive Summary

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Since 2005, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, with collaboration and co-funding from research councils in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, and Norway and from the World Bank, has invested in a portfolio of social science research on the relationship between population dynamics and micro- and macroeconomic outcomes. It is known as the Population and Poverty Research Initiative (PopPov), and its geographic focus is on sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The starting premises that led to the development of PopPov were that evidence showing that population dynamics could affect economic outcomes might increase the interest of ministers of finance in funding population policies and that they might be most convinced by rigorous research done by respected economists. The core aim of the program has been to build (or, in some cases, rebuild) and advance the field of economic demography, orienting the work toward research that would be relevant for policy and would increase recognition by economic policymakers of the value of lowering the rate of population growth and investing in family planning (FP). The program also aimed to strengthen the capacity of researchers in SSA. The PopPov initiative tried to achieve these aims through four main components: (1) grants to support research on PopPov core topics of interest, (2) fellowships to support graduate students preparing their doctoral dissertations, (3) conferences and workshops to support the development of networking opportunities, and (4) other dissemination activities. PopPov has funded 56 doctoral fellows and, together with its partners, has supported 61 research projects. Seven international conferences and addi-

tional workshops have been held, and there have been several other dissemination activities. The Population Reference Bureau (PRB) and the Center for Global Development (CGD) have been the secretariats for PopPov. Since 2008, the Institute of International Education (IIE) has administered the fellowship program.

In November 2012, to help guide its decisions about both the substance and means of future investments, the foundation issued a request for proposals (RFP) for an evaluation of PopPov. The RAND Corporation was selected to conduct the evaluation. The RFP for the evaluation asked four evaluation questions (EQs):

- EQ.1. To what extent did PopPov reengage or strengthen the field of economic demography?
- EQ.2. What contribution has PopPov research made to the evidence base regarding relationships between demographic change or behavior and economic outcomes?
- EQ.3. How and to what extent did PopPov investments yield policy-relevant and influential research?
- EQ.4. How did the design of the PopPov program affect its ability to build the field, expand the evidence base, and inform policies and practices? How did the implementation of the PopPov program contribute or pose challenges to achieving these outcomes?

Our full report provides detailed responses to each of these questions.<sup>1</sup> This document summarizes our main findings and recommendations. This is preceded by a brief history of PopPov and its research grant, fellowship, and conference components; a description of the data and methods used for our evaluation; and a summary of our findings regarding the evaluation questions just noted.

The opinions expressed are ours and do not necessarily reflect the views of the foundation.

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<sup>1</sup> Julie DaVanzo, Sebastian Linnemayr, Peter Glick, and Eric Apaydin, *Evaluation of the Population and Poverty Research Initiative (PopPov)*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-527-WFHF, 2014. As of early 2014: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR527.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR527.html)

## Background and History of PopPov

In 2004, the Hewlett Foundation supported CGD to form and convene the Population and Development Working Group to develop

a research agenda to investigate the relationship between reproductive health [RH] and population dynamics, and key features at household, community and national levels, . . . with a special focus on the type of research that would be useful to economics and health sector policymaking by national governments and donor agencies working in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>2</sup>

The working group identified four research questions (RQs) on which they felt empirical research would be useful for the medium-term policy agenda:

- RQ.1. What implications do projected trends in fertility and mortality changes have for economic growth and income distribution and the incidence of poverty?
- RQ.2. How does investment in RH affect economic conditions at the household level, including the productivity, labor force participation, and saving behavior of women, children, and households?
- RQ.3. How do different types of investments in RH affect the health of women and children?
- RQ.4. How do the type and organization of services affect their effectiveness, including the ability to reach poor and vulnerable populations?

These became the research questions that PopPov has sought to address. The working group identified four priorities for data collection:

- the collection of both *demographic* and *economic information* as part of *cross-sectional household data*
- the collection of *panel data* at a site in SSA

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<sup>2</sup> CGD, Population and Development Working Group, *Population Dynamics and Economic Development: Elements of a Research Agenda*, Washington, D.C., July 28, 2005, p. 2.



- the development of *subnational data* in several relatively large countries
- the seeking of opportunities to use *random assignment evaluation* methods (randomized controlled trials [RCTs]).

Also with Hewlett Foundation funding, in May 2005, CGD conducted the Policy Roundtable on Economic Development and Population Dynamics, a discussion with key experts to enhance the policy relevance of the research agenda. It concluded that studying the relationship between RH and economic outcomes at the household, community, region, and national levels was an important area of inquiry; that timely dissemination of new evidence to policymakers should be a priority; and that finance ministers are a key audience for this type of research. The round table helped shaped Hewlett staff's thinking about the types of evidence needed to convince policymakers, such as high-caliber research by highly regarded international and local researchers.

### **The PopPov Research Grant Program**

In October 2005, the Hewlett Foundation made a grant to PRB to select and fund *teams of research excellence* at internationally recognized universities to study the intersection of population, FP, and RH with economic development. Initially, PRB held two funding competitions:

- by invitation only, to create teams of U.S.-based researchers; this supported two research projects, and relatively little of the research was on SSA
- an open competition, to create global teams that included Africa-based researchers; this supported four research projects, all on SSA.

The Hewlett Foundation viewed economists at the World Bank as a key target audience for research showing, presumably, that population and RH can affect poverty and economic outcomes, and foundation staff felt that World Bank decisionmakers would be most convinced by research done by economists at the bank and that ministers of finance would listen to economists at the World Bank. In December

2005, the foundation made a grant to the World Bank, which was matched by an equal amount of World Bank funds. The World Bank had an internal competition for these funds, resulting in 15 projects.

Four European organizations have participated as partners in the PopPov effort: the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which has supported four research projects; the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek, or NWO) WOTRO Science for Global Development; three projects); l'Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD) and l'Agence Française de Développement (AFD) in France (seven projects); and the Research Council of Norway (RCN) (six projects). Each of these European partner organizations received funds from the Hewlett Foundation and matched these with a near-equal amount of its own funds. Each partner has focused on researchers in its own country (in collaboration with those in the developing countries being studied), though the French funded researchers in any EU member country.

For the first several years of PopPov, PRB and each of the European partners had a separate call for proposals. In 2012, PRB and three of the European donors developed a common joint call for research that was a collaborative initiative of researchers from one or more of the participating countries with researchers from developing countries, with priority given to SSA.<sup>3</sup> There was no particular emphasis on economics like there had been in some other PopPov RFPs. All research teams invited to submit a revised proposal were required (and funded) to hold a meeting with stakeholders in the study country. Six proposals were funded: one by WOTRO, one by RCN, two by ESRC, and two by PRB.

### **PopPov Dissertation Fellowships for Doctoral Students**

In late 2005, the Hewlett/PRB Dissertation Fellowship program was created with the goal of increasing the skills of the next generation of researchers to (1) do research on topics at the intersection of population, FP, and RH with economic development and (2) communicate

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<sup>3</sup> The French were not involved because they had already expended their PopPov resources.

effectively to policy audiences. PRB was the initial implementing institution for the fellowship program, and fellowships were initially available only to students studying at a university in the United States or Canada. In late 2007, the administration of the fellowship program moved to IIE, and the fellowship program was expanded to students studying at universities in SSA.

From the inception of the program through 2013, 365 applications had been received, and 56 fellows had been selected, of whom 40 (71 percent) are economists. Eight of the funded fellows have been students studying at a university in SSA, one at a university in Canada, and the rest at U.S. universities. Four of the fellows who have studied in the United States or Canada are nationals of a country in SSA. As of August 2013, 36 of the fellows are known to have completed Ph.D.'s, 15 are still in progress, and one dropped out of the program; there are no recorded outcomes for the remaining four. In 2008 and 2009, there were separate calls and separate reviews for U.S.-based and Africa-based candidates. The reviewers judged the applications from SSA to be academically less rigorous than those from the United States and Canada. After the 2009 competition, it was decided to combine the call for applications into one call for all students and to select the strongest applications overall, regardless of where the student matriculates; this represents a shift from attention to field-building in SSA toward a stronger emphasis on research rigor.

### **PopPov Annual Conferences**

There have been seven PopPov conferences—London in November 2006, Arusha December 2007, Dublin January 2009, Cape Town January 2010, Marseilles January 2011, Accra January 2012, and Oslo January 2013—and the eighth will take place in Nairobi in January 2014. The conferences bring together fellows and researchers funded by PopPov with some non-PopPov researchers and some advocates and policymakers to expose them to the latest research findings and encourage interaction among them. Hence, the conferences have aspects related to various PopPov goals: field-building, building up of an evidence base, and dissemination to policymakers. Nearly 500 people have attended at least one PopPov conference. More-recent

PopPov conferences were opened competitively to outside researchers, in contrast to previous conferences that were mostly PopPov members presenting PopPov research. Discussants have tended to be former or current principal investigators (PIs) and “friends of PopPov.” In recent years, there have been preconference workshops on communications and methods, open to all conference attendees. In 2013, a poster session was added.

## Methodological Approaches for the Evaluation

Our evaluation is based on several types of information:

- *information from records or reports or available online*, including information on the PopPov website, such as PopPov conference programs and lists of publications; the “State of PopPov” (SOPP) report;<sup>4</sup> and previous evaluations of PopPov conferences, research output, and policy relevance<sup>5</sup>
- *key-informant interviews* with nearly 100 individuals,<sup>6</sup> both those who are part of the network and those outside, which collected both factual information and subjective impressions about PopPov
- *an online survey* we designed and administered to solicit information and the opinions of PopPov fellows and PIs and co-PIs of research grants regarding all aspects of the initiative. The first part of the survey, administered to fellows and PIs, collected objective information on the characteristics of the respondent, his or her projects, and papers and key presentations coming out of the research. The second part, administered to all respondents, was

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<sup>4</sup> Marlene A. Lee and Kate Belohlav, “Investigating Elements of a Population, Poverty, and Reproductive Health Research Agenda,” draft, June 2013. In our evaluation, we restrict our attention to the projects covered by the Lee and Belohlav report and do not cover some of the early projects funded directly by the Hewlett Foundation; these early projects mainly supported meetings and workshops.

<sup>5</sup> See our full report (DaVanzo et al., 2014) for references to the other evaluations mentioned here.

<sup>6</sup> See DaVanzo et al., 2014, Appendix A.

anonymous and collected information on the respondent's opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of various aspects of the PopPov initiative. The overall response rate to Part 1 of the survey was 65 percent (83 percent for fellows and 49 percent for PIs of research grants). Response rates were lower for Part 2 (68 percent for fellows, 39 percent for PIs, and 38 percent for co-PIs).

From these various sources (and follow-up email correspondence with some respondents, as well as reviewing some of the papers), we have formed a database with entries for the 259 papers we identified as having been written with PopPov funding.

## Findings for the First Three Evaluation Questions

This section summarizes our findings for the first three evaluation questions. We cover EQ.4 in our recommendations at the end of this summary.

### **Evaluation Question 1. To What Extent Did PopPov Reengage or Strengthen the Field of Economic Demography?**

PopPov has increased the number of economists working on PopPov issues, although many of these were already working on these topics or, in the case of the fellows, intended to work on them. The initiative has not brought many new senior researchers into the field. This is partly the result of the design because the initial competition and the direct grants were by invitation only to people already in the field. However, there have been a few notable exceptions, and the program has enabled researchers already in the field to do more than they may have been able to do without PopPov funding (e.g., additional fieldwork). PopPov has also increased the number of European researchers working on population, health, and development topics.

The majority of the doctoral fellows funded by PopPov are economists. Many view the fellowship program as PopPov's biggest success; it has reached many who would not have been eligible otherwise for dissertation funding. Many of the fellows are continuing to do research

on PopPov topics. The newly instituted alumnus grants for fellows are helping several of them do this.

However, a considerable amount of PopPov support for research grants has gone to non-economists, and 75 percent of the journal articles produced so far with PopPov funding have been in non-economic journals.

**Evaluation Question 2. What Contribution Has PopPov Research Made to the Evidence Base Regarding Relationships Between Demographic Change or Behavior and Economic Outcomes?**

As of August 2013, we identified 259 papers supported by PopPov—an impressive number. Of these, 68 have been published in journals, eight are book chapters, and 27 are under journal review. Nearly half (46 percent) of papers prepared for PopPov address the questions regarding the effects of demographic variables on economic outcomes (broadly defined, e.g., to include education); 27 percent are micro analyses (RQ.2), while 19 percent are macro (RQ.1). Another 14 percent of the papers address RQ.3 (on how investments in RH affect the health of women and children), while 3 percent address the effectiveness and equity issues of RQ.4. However, more than one-third of the papers are not on one of the four PopPov research questions; many of these (24 percent) look at topics outside the scope of these questions (e.g., marriage, migration), while others look at the effect of the economic variables on fertility and RH variables—the opposite of the direction of causation in RQ.1 and RQ.2.

Some PopPov research has been published in prestigious journals, e.g., *The Lancet* (two articles) and *The American Economic Review* (four articles). Of the 68 journal articles based on PopPov research, 17 (25 percent) are published in economics journals; this is low for a program that sought to rebuild the field of economic demography and for which the majority of those funded are economists. The same percentage of articles based on PopPov research appears in demographic or FP and RH journals. Although this makes sense because the projects address the intersection of demographic and RH issues and economic ones, it is largely “preaching to the converted” because readers of these journals already appreciate the importance of demographic factors.

Just over one-quarter of the papers are published in medical or health-related journals, and just less than one-quarter are published in other types of journals, mainly those of other social sciences.

When asked about the most-important research contributions of the PopPov initiative, some survey respondents and key informants mentioned research on economic effects of fertility, particularly research on the demographic dividend and simulation effects of fertility on economic growth; research on natural experiments of the impact of shifts in FP access; and research using randomized controls. However, many survey respondents and key informants showed a lack of awareness of PopPov's research contributions.

Consistently with the CGD recommendation, more than 100 of the papers prepared for PopPov have used panel data. Eight respondents reported that they used data from RCTs or experiments. Sixteen projects reported doing original data collection (quantitative, qualitative, or both). However, the analytic method used most often is ordinary least squares regression, a method that the CGD working-group report implicitly criticized as not being good for inferring causality. The next-most-used method is instrumental variables, which is one of the methods recommended by the CGD working group.

### **Evaluation Question 3. How and to What Extent Did PopPov Investments Yield Policy-Relevant and Influential Research?**

One of PopPov's aims was to generate research findings that would increase attention from economic policymakers about the value of lowering the rate of population growth and investing in FP. Although there are notable exceptions, it seems that relatively few researchers assigned a high priority to translating their research into policy messages or presenting their findings at forums likely to be attended by policymakers (and many of the research projects did not address questions related to the value of lowering the rate of population growth or investing in FP). It is difficult to judge the actual policy impact of these activities, but we found that many who could potentially use PopPov findings in their policy, communication, or advocacy work have little, if any, awareness of PopPov and the research it has supported. In general, the research projects funded by the European partners have made

more effort than those supported by the U.S.-based partners to involve local collaborators in the research and to involve stakeholders in the process, thereby increasing the visibility and potential policy impact of the findings, although the research funded by the Europeans was less likely to address the high-priority PopPov questions.

## **Recommendations About Particular Aspects of PopPov**

The Hewlett Foundation will have to make decisions about the future of PopPov based on the foundation's current objectives and available resources. After reflection, the foundation may wish to shift focus to either more-deliberate field-building work or to more policy-oriented activities. We feel that much of the PopPov initiative has added value and can be improved, but, to some extent, the field-building and policy aims are separable. Whether the foundation chooses to pursue a comprehensive agenda in the future or a more focused one, there are changes to consider based on experience to date. We conclude with our recommendations about the PopPov initiative in general, the research program, the fellowship program, increasing research capacity in SSA, the conferences, and other dissemination activities.

### **PopPov**

The PopPov initiative has reenergized the field of economic demography as applied to the study of the interrelations between population and development in developing countries, generated a considerable body of research on these issues, and supported a new generation of researchers working on them. PopPov has generally been well run and flexible. It has had periodic evaluations done of aspects of the initiative and tried to be responsive to their suggestions. It has tried new things—e.g., a poster session at the annual conference, stakeholder meetings, opening the fellowship program to doctoral students at institutions in SSA, the grant program for alumnus fellows—all of which have enhanced the program. The initiative has supported a dedicated core of reputable researchers through competitive grant-making with serious peer review and emphasis on excellence in research; it has connections to credible



research and communication organizations, such as the World Bank, PRB, CGD, and partner organizations in Europe. (Compared with that supported by U.S. partners, research supported by the European partners has tended to use less sophisticated analytic methods and has been less focused on PopPov research questions, but more of it has been on SSA, and more of it has involved local researchers and stakeholders.)

However, there are inherent tensions among the aims that PopPov has sought to achieve: research rigor, field-building (at all levels of seniority), policy relevance, applicability to SSA, capacity-building in SSA, and increasing attention to population and development issues in Europe. The current initiative has given higher priority to some of these objectives (particularly, research rigor, training of doctoral fellows, and increasing attention in Europe), often at the expense of others. There are other sources of funding (e.g., National Institutes of Health [NIH] and National Science Foundation) for sophisticated, cutting-edge research and the collection of large-scale, high-quality data; this per se is not Hewlett's comparative advantage. The foundation should look for niches for which little funding is currently available (e.g., for training researchers from developing countries). Decisions about involvement of partner organizations should then be made consistently with the initiative's objectives. Having a dedicated group of experts advising the initiative who are paid for their time and who will give the initiative the necessary attention should increase the likelihood that activities are conducted consistently with program goals and should improve the coordination among aspects of the initiative and potentially competing goals.

We feel that PopPov merits continuation but should consider some changes:

- Explicitly state and prioritize objectives of a future version of PopPov and then design strategies to achieve these objectives.
- Focus on activities and goals that are the foundation's comparative advantage.
- Establish a standing steering or advisory committee for PopPov. The steering or advisory committee should include people with expertise and experience relevant to the initiative's goals (e.g.,

experts who are knowledgeable about policy issues, about identifying and communicating to target audiences, and about research issues and capacity-building in developing countries); researchers of relevant disciplines should also be represented.

### **The Research Program**

PopPov has produced a considerable body of research. However, less than half of the research is on the questions of the effects of demographic factors on economic outcomes that initially motivated the development of the initiative. It is perhaps time to focus more on the specific questions asked, translating the research results into credible policy recommendations, and communicating those recommendations to key targeted policymakers. Accordingly, if the research program is continued, we recommend the following:

- Be more directive about the topics to be addressed (and take that directiveness seriously during the review process). We recommend that a new working group, which includes policymakers, be convened to frame researchable questions that are of greatest interest to policymakers and program managers. Among the topics they might consider are the following, suggested by key informants (including policymakers) with whom we spoke:
  - the social and economic benefits of public investments in RH (e.g., whether FP is a public good)
  - which FP and RH interventions work and why
  - contraceptive discontinuation
  - equity issues
  - the payoffs to investments in FP and RH versus those to investments in other areas (e.g., malaria, rural roads).
- Rather than suggesting the use of specific types of data or methods or focusing on a particular discipline, encourage applicants to propose the types of data and methods that are most appropriate for their research questions.
- Consider awarding some larger grants that could cover the high costs of useful experiments and collection of panel data, even if doing so requires reducing the total number of grants.

- Consider making some grants for longer periods of time if this allows for the achievement of research goals (e.g., enabling time for data collection).

In order to enhance its policy relevance, PopPov should do the following:

- Include more reviewers of research proposals with policy and program experience.
- Give more weight to policy relevance in making decisions about projects that will be funded.
- Continue the stakeholder meetings that are held for teams invited to submit full proposals. These have helped increase buy-in from relevant parties within the countries being studied.
- Consider having a daylong workshop with groups of fellows and junior researchers in which they come up with potential approaches to a problem designed with the help of policymakers. This may result in ideas for potential research projects.

In order to build research capacity in SSA and research on SSA, PopPov should do the following:<sup>7</sup>

- Give priority to proposed projects that include a training component (e.g., a pre- or postdoctoral fellow or junior researcher from SSA), although doing this may imply larger grants so that the training can be incorporated in a substantive way.
- Assess the extent to which research on PopPov questions on countries not in SSA, whether or not supported by PopPov, has had useful policy implications for SSA or could be useful in encouraging new policy-relevant research in and on SSA.

### **Fellowships and Field-Building**

The fellowship program has succeeded in supporting new, well-trained researchers who have produced a body of rigorous research.

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<sup>7</sup> There is more on this topic under “Increasing Research Capacity in Africa” on page 18.

The program has filled a noteworthy void, particularly for students who are studying at institutions that do not have training grants from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development or who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents.<sup>8</sup> We recommend that the fellowship program be continued but with some changes:

- Consider giving priority to applicants for doctoral fellowships from SSA and others from developing countries who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents.
- Support *postdoctoral* fellowships, ideally tied to PopPov research projects, for applicants from SSA and others from developing countries who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents.
- Include a former PopPov fellow on the selection committee.
- Include training on policy communication as part of the PopPov fellowships. For example, the IIE fellows could participate in an abbreviated version of PRB's Policy Communication Fellows program (which is currently available only to researchers from particular developing countries that are supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID]).
- Reinstate the session the day before the annual PopPov conference at which fellows can share their work with, and get feedback from, one another and some senior researchers. All the fellows who participated in this found it be very worthwhile and have missed it at recent conferences.
- To enable alumnus fellows to continue to do research on PopPov topics, continue and expand the program of research grants for those alumni.

If field-building continues to be a goal, the *field* should be clearly defined, perhaps in a way that emphasizes topics more than a specific discipline or set of research methods. In order to bring new researchers into the field, the Hewlett Foundation should consider the model of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health and Society Scholars

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<sup>8</sup> Only U.S. citizens and permanent residents are eligible for NIH training grants.

program, which seeks to grow the field of public health research. In addition, the Hewlett Foundation should see whether there are useful lessons from the efforts of the National Institute on Aging to build the field of behavioral and social research on aging.

### **Increasing Research Capacity in Africa**

About two-thirds of PopPov research projects are on SSA, and a number of these (especially those funded by the European partners) include African collaborators. Sixty percent of all papers prepared for PopPov are on SSA (on countries in both the Anglophone and Francophone parts of the region). A program of research that focuses on SSA should also give priority to building the capacity of researchers in that region to conduct research on that region. By now, it has become clear that the starting situation of the African cohort is, on average, far behind that of students elsewhere and that substantial investment in training, mentorship, and supervision will be necessary to bring African fellows up to speed. We believe that postdoctoral training would be a good way to increase research capacity in SSA. Postdoctoral fellowships can enable a recent Ph.D. to fill gaps in his or her training and can provide the “seasoning” that enables him or her to develop capabilities for formulating interesting research questions, obtaining funding, preparing publishable papers, drawing out policy relevance, and communicating with policymakers that very few students learn in graduate school or sufficiently absorb from short workshops or training courses. To further increase research capacity in SSA, we recommend the following:

- Be more proactive in trying to attract high-quality fellowship and research applications from African students and scholars.
- Have a limited number of special slots for African fellows who would spend some time being trained in the United States or Canada or by researchers from those countries and would receive continued mentorship on their return to Africa.
- Support carefully mentored *postdoctoral* fellowships for African scholars. Try to incorporate the postdocs into PopPov research projects to enable mentoring to occur naturally or include funding for mentors’ time so that they can work closely with the post-

docs. Previous doctoral fellows from SSA or junior researchers from SSA who have worked on PopPov projects might be ideal candidates for further investment.

- Improve coordination among the Hewlett Foundation's various initiatives to build capacity in SSA. For example, representatives of each of the African population-training institutions that the foundation supports could meet in conjunction with a PopPov conference, particularly the ones held in Africa, to compare and coordinate efforts and brainstorm about common issues, and they could bring some of their staff or students to the conference.
- Investigate whether there are particular patterns of collaboration with African researchers and students (in other fields also) that are clear best practices for producing well-trained and productive social scientists, and use these as a model for future capacity-building efforts.

### **Annual PopPov Conferences**

Although the majority of researchers had a very positive impression of the conferences (and particularly valued the networking opportunities), there were aspects that respondents criticized, such as timing, the uneven quality of the research being presented, the fact that many of the papers at recent conferences were not on the PopPov research questions, the disciplinary mix (much of the research is by economists, but many attendees are not economists), lack of attention to policy issues (and to making the presentations appropriate for policymakers), the absence of Africans on the podium in earlier years, and the fact that there is a mix of papers on work in progress (on which presenters receive useful feedback) and others that are closer to completion. The focus, particularly in later years, seems to have been to expose the researchers (and nonresearcher attendees) to the cutting edge of research in the field, but this has come at the expense of fellows (who seemed to receive less face time in later years) and of researchers with less finalized projects who nevertheless could have benefited from feedback of those who have faced similar challenges in their own research. We recommend the following regarding the annual conference:

- Continue the PopPov conferences at least until 2016 so that there is time for findings to emerge from the last round of research (which was funded in 2012) and last round of fellows (funded for 2013 through 2015).
- Have the conferences focus more (than the recent ones have) on findings and less on methodology.
- Make the conferences more focused topic-wise, and try to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts, e.g., by having more syntheses and drawing out lessons learned.
- Continue to have non-PopPov research presented at the conferences if it is directly pertinent to the conference's topical focus.
- Continue and possibly expand the poster sessions. These provide a good opportunity for researchers to get feedback on research in its early stages.
- Have longer breaks between sessions to enable more networking.
- Structure the conferences in a way that makes it clear what each part of the conference is about and whom it is targeting. This could help remedy the problem of having multiple goals at the conferences (presentation of completed research versus getting feedback on work in progress, presenting research methodology and findings to other researchers versus disseminating relevant results to policymakers and advocates).<sup>9</sup>
- Alternatively, consider having a separate meeting with policymakers in which researchers make presentations about PopPov and other research with policy-relevant findings, with presentations appropriate for a nontechnical audience.
- Consider publishing conference proceedings (including a summary of discussants' comments and audience discussion) and doing so in a way that it is widely accessible to the population and development communities.
- Have some discussants from outside the network, including development economists who have not worked on population issues and people with policy, program, and advocacy experience, to get some fresh perspectives.

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<sup>9</sup> For specific suggestions, see DaVanzo et al., 2014, Section V.2.6.

- Invite more top-level academics from African universities and researchers at African population institutions that are supported by the Hewlett Foundation.
- Continue to invite Hewlett/PRB fellows to future conferences if they are still working in the field. (Perhaps have a competition for travel grants, for which applicants would explain how attendance would be beneficial to their career development.) These Hewlett/PRB fellows should be considered as possible session chairs or discussants.
- Consider holding a conference in the United States. This would make it easier for people at such organizations as USAID and the World Bank to attend and should make more likely the participation of U.S. development economists and demographers who are not part of the network.
- Consider holding the annual conference some time other than late January.
- Explore the possibility of piggybacking a PopPov conference onto a meeting of the World Economic Forum or a conference of the National Transfer Accounts (NTA) project or at least having some formal links with these forums. The World Economic Forum is attended by the types of people PopPov strives to reach. NTA addresses issues very similar to those in one of the key PopPov research questions.

### **Other Dissemination Activities**

Many researchers and advocates in the population and development field have little, if any, awareness of PopPov. The PopPov website ([poppov.org](http://poppov.org)) currently focuses on researchers in the network; it is difficult to find some important material (e.g., briefs), and some of the material on it is not up to date. The briefs prepared for PopPov are more appropriate for researchers than for policymakers. To increase awareness of the PopPov program and to improve dissemination of its research findings, we recommend the following:

- Mention PopPov more prominently on the PRB website, which is much more widely visited than the PopPov site.



- Consider working with a firm experienced in strategic communication about population and development issues to identify audiences and outreach opportunities. PRB reaches a certain audience but does not necessarily reach all audiences that would benefit from knowing about PopPov research.
- Increase outreach to the economic development community, e.g., by getting postings about PopPov research and activities on blogs by economists on development issues.
- Revamp the PopPov website to make it up to date and more appropriate for potentially interested parties (including nonresearchers) who are not involved in the network, including policymakers and the media. The goal should be that the PopPov website is where policymakers, researchers, and other interested parties want to go to learn the latest scientifically sound findings about the relationships of population dynamics and RH with economic development, poverty, and inequality.
- Make the briefs more appropriate for policy audiences; it would help to call them “policy briefs” rather than “research briefs.” Also, have the key people who conducted the research actively participate in the preparation of policy briefs about that research and list them as coauthors of the briefs (because one of the goals of PopPov was to involve well-known, senior researchers or developing-country researchers whose names would open doors).
- As appropriate, translate briefs into other languages (e.g., into French for dissemination to researchers, policymakers, and donors in Francophone Africa and in France).
- Be more proactive about the dissemination of the briefs, e.g., by having display copies at relevant conferences and events.
- Look for opportunities to present PopPov research at conferences, such as Women Deliver, that are attended by policymakers, advocates, and the press.
- Be more proactive in letting people know about the network, its research and findings, and the opportunities for people who are not part of the network to present at the annual conferences (if the conferences are continued).

PopPov has made considerable contributions that deserve attention from a much wider group of researchers, advocates, and policymakers than it is currently reaching. Careful syntheses of what has been learned from technically sound existing research (both that funded by PopPov and that not done for PopPov), with particular attention to findings with policy implications and written in a way that is accessible to policymakers, would be a useful contribution that PopPov could support. If appropriately written, such pieces could have the potential to reach audiences that are not swayed by materials from advocacy groups that are associated with a particular point of view.

Since 2005, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, with collaboration and co-funding from research councils in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, and Norway and from the World Bank, has invested in a portfolio of social science research on the relationship between population dynamics and micro- and macroeconomic outcomes. It is known as the Population and Poverty Research Initiative (PopPov), and its geographic focus is on sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The starting premises that led to the development of PopPov were that evidence showing that population dynamics could affect economic outcomes might increase the interest of ministers of finance in funding population policies and that they might be most convinced by rigorous research done by respected economists. The core aim of the program has been to build or rebuild and advance the field of economic demography, orienting the work toward research that would be relevant for policy and would increase recognition by economic policymakers of the value of lowering the rate of population growth and investing in family planning. The program also aimed to strengthen the capacity of researchers in SSA. PopPov tried to achieve these aims through four main components: (1) grants to support research on PopPov core topics of interest, (2) fellowships to support graduate students preparing their doctoral dissertations, (3) conferences and workshops to support the development of networking opportunities, and (4) other dissemination activities. This report provides results of a RAND Corporation evaluation of PopPov.



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