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The Nature and Determinants of the Incipient Fertility Transition in Ethiopia: Preconditions for Accelerating the Lagging Rural Decline

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Abstract

We document the trends and nature of the incipient Ethiopian demographic transition since the first census in 1984, and identify the preconditions for accelerating the rural fertility decline. The acceleration now would be needed in order to meet the 2015 National Population Policy (and ICPD+15) target of 4.0 by 2015. The first reliable data source on fertility was the 1990 National Family and Fertility Survey, which is reanalyzed here in order for to make a rigorous trend analysis with the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHSs) of 2000 and 2005. There have been marked under-five mortality declines and urban total fertility declines since 1990, but the rural-urban fertility gap has widened to nearly 4 children. However, we expect the lagging rural fertility decline to begin to accelerate, due to a combination of both demand and supply factors: perceived greater survival of children and reduced desire for additional children; delayed age at first marriage, increased girl's secondary education, rising youth aspirations, increased urban contact, and rapidly increasing access the maternal health and family planning services. These social development factors are also being mediated in a rural context by population pressure on the land and environment, greater labor mobility and chronic food insecurity, and should serve as a depressant to the initiation and timing of childbearing. Thus, the national target of reducing the total fertility rate to 4.0 by the year 2015 may be within reach if greater priority and commitment are given to meeting youth life course aspirations and to raising the quality of secondary school education and of reproductive health services.