

MALE CONFERENCE REPORT:

***THE ROLE OF MEN IN SUSTAINING
QUALITY LIFE FOR ALL. A DRIVING
FORCE FOR NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT***

July 2017, Accra, Ghana



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1.0 Introduction

The National Population Council (NPC) was established in 1992 and given legal backing under the National Population Council Act, 1994, Act 485, as the highest advisory body to the Government of Ghana on all population and related issues through advocacy and effective coordination of the implementation of all population policies and programmes. The establishment of the National Population Council was also in response to Article 37(4) of the 1992 Constitution which states that: *The State shall maintain a population policy consistent with the aspirations and development needs and objectives of Ghana.*

In 1994, the Government of Ghana adopted its second National Population Policy with the objective among others *to provide the population with the necessary information and education on the value of a small family size specifically, and sexual and reproductive health in general (Section 4.3.5).* This is in line with efforts by Government to improve and sustain the quality of life of the people of Ghana. This noble vision requires the commitment of all sections of the country's population especially men who are often the decision makers on family size and partners use of contraceptives.

As part of efforts to ensure the implementation of the National Population Policy, the National Population Council held its maiden Male conference under the theme ***'The role of men in sustaining quality of life for all. A driving force for national development'*** on 26th July, 2017 at the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, Accra. The objective of the conference was as follows:

- Create a platform for partners to share knowledge and experiences on the role of men in promoting and sustaining family welfare for national development,
- Advocate for the provision of resources to enhance the role of men in family welfare and family planning,
- Generate information and data to feed into policy and programmes on male involvement.

Participants at the meeting included representatives from academia, research institutions, traditional leaders, metropolitan, municipal and districts assemblies, ministries, departments and agencies, stakeholders in the area of adolescent reproductive health and family planning programming in Ghana. About hundred and fifty (150) people participated in the conference.

1.1 Opening:

Nana Kobina Nketsia V, Paramount Chief of Essikado Traditional Area in the Western Region of Ghana was the chairman for the conference. In his opening remarks, he re-echoed the assertion that people perish due to the absence of a vision and that vision stimulates planning which drives development in two ways. Mal-development is characterised by high birth rate, poverty and an unclean environment, while development ensures improvement in the life of the citizenry. Government has provided the frame work for advocating small family size as stipulated in the National Population Policy, Revised Edition 1994. In his view, the size here is undefined making it a subject of relativity, more importantly, it requires the commitment of all especially men.

Though males constitute 48 per cent of Ghana’s total population, they play dominant roles at all levels. Therefore the need to focus on men to drive the agenda to improve the quality of life for all forward is relevant and timely. He entreated all especially men to be ambassadors of family planning at all levels.



Nana Kobina Nketsia V, Omanhen (Paramount Chief) of Essikado Traditional Area in the Western Region of Ghana (arrowed), who was chairman for the conference with resource persons at the high table.

1.2 Welcome Address:

Dr. Leticia Adelaide Appiah, Executive Director of the NPC delivered the welcome address. She began her welcome address with an apt Chinese quote: **“To plan for 20 years, plant trees; to plan for a century plant people”**. She said the development of the human resource base is key to ensuring a reduction in poverty, maternal mortality, teenage pregnancy, early birth and marriage and child trafficking which will eventually contribute to national development. She indicated that though women dominate in terms of their proportion of the population size, men are highly placed. She further stated that our inability to harness the full potential of the people underpins the theme for this conference (**“the role of men in sustaining quality of life for all. A driving force for national development”**).

She added that the role of men in ensuring quality of life is much broader than contraception and therefore cannot be under estimated. Men have a role to play in influencing family planning and

reducing gender disparities among others. Men dominate in decision-making at all levels including access to contraception, family planning and reproductive health. This is also evident where out of a total of two hundred and seventy-five (275) members in the 7th Parliament of Ghana men constitute eighty-seven per cent (87%) compared to the women who constitute only thirteen per cent (13%). She therefore expressed the hope that by the end of the conference consensus would have been built on how to maximise the utilisation of limited resources for Family Planning programming in the country by strengthening the role of men.



Dr. Leticia Adelaide Appiah, Executive Director, NPC delivering the welcome address.

2.0 Keynote Address

Prof. Agyeman Badu Akosa, Commissioner at the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), delivered the keynote address on the theme “**The Role of Men in Sustaining Quality of Life for All: A driving force for national development**”. Prof. Akosa commended the National Population Council for organising the Male Conference and reiterated the dominant role played by men in decision making and encouraging them to drive the agenda to improve the quality of life of their families. He informed the participants that the core message of family planning should be to encourage parents to have the number of children they can take care of. He stated that in Ghana, culture plays a role in the lives of the people, thus, the role of a man in the Ghanaian setting is that of leadership and influence and for that matter the male conference re-enforces the role of men in our society, making their contributions to the quality of life and development of the nation crucial.



Stakeholder interaction at the Conference.

He further encouraged stakeholders present to allow the **phrase “Nobody should be left behind when it comes to securing quality of life”** to permeate all discussions of sustainable development, adding that gender equality is not only a woman’s concern but the responsibility of all, therefore attention should be paid to how men are factored into achieving gender equality. He recommended that family planning policies should address gender and how men play an important role in bridging the gender gap especially with regard to family planning. He stressed that since male partner’s approval is important for increased contraceptive use, men have a greater influence on women’s utilization of health products and systems.

Furthermore, he indicated that even though CSOs & NGOs have organised male involvement programmes in the past, gaps still remain gaps, especially with regard to misconceptions and myths which have affected Ghana’s family planning agenda. In conclusion, he urged the NPC to work closely with queen mothers in the communities to ensure that young people are well educated so that they can contribute their quota to national development. He also called on men to be involved in family planning and women empowerment issues for the country to reap the demographic dividend.

3.0 Presentations

Three presentations on three key topics were made at the conference. The presentations were made by Mr. Ebo Whyte, a renowned playwright and motivational speaker of Roverman Productions, Dr. Abu Manu, Lecturer at the School of Public Health, University of Ghana and Mr. Ustaz Ahmed Seidu, of the Muslim Family Counselling Services. All the three presentations emphasised the need to actively involve men in fertility management. Gender

equality in the past has been contextualised to be women's issues. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD 1994) and other International agreements recognise the role of men and have recommended that more attention be paid to involving men. Male involvement in family planning is very crucial as it improves maternal health and prevents unplanned pregnancies, making family planning programming relevant for national development.

However, Mr. Ebo Whyte, was of the view that those who believe we live in a man's world and that male dominance be upheld at all times are not facing the reality. He stated that though the picture is painted that men dominate in all activities including the home and the chief's palace in reality it is the women who dominate. He explained that there are three important women-led roles in life, birth, marriage and death. In addition, there are three things women demand from men, sperms, readiness to sacrifice in times of war or crisis and the spirit of man. Women do respect the spirit of men as certain rituals demand men. It is the cleverness of women at play that makes men think they are in the front line. A well-known Akan proverb was cited to elaborate the above "rituals that requires alcohol cannot be substituted for water". However, Men were urged to be in charge of their homes to give meaning to the term "Man" which was redefined to mean Majesty, Able and Noble. and urged men to be in charge of their homes.

From the Islamic perspective, Mr. Ustaz Ahmed Seidu indicated that an attempt to justify family planning in the modern context stems from the background that a man should give birth to a reasonable number of children and that spacing pregnancy promotes the health and life span of mother and baby. Allah will not change the condition of people, unless they decide to do so. Islamic scholars recommend that birth control is necessary if one cannot care for many children. Furthermore mothers are to breastfeed for two (2) years.

According to him, two Islamic perspectives run contrary to family planning. Firstly, the use of contraception as a form of infanticide and secondly, family planning as a deliberate attempt by the west to reduce muslim populations. The presenter made it clear that Islam does not hinder nor support high fertility. Islamic teachings advocate for adequate preparation for the birth of a child, improving quality of life, promoting crime free society and increasing life span and beauty. Family planning is acceptable in Islam and two Quranic chapters dedicated to women demonstrates this.

From the academic perspectives, Dr Abu Manu indicated that men need to create an enabling environment at home for adolescents to freely ask questions bothering them, nurture their children, spend time with them and provide and protect them. He added that adolescents need such safe and supportive environment, information and skills as well as health and counselling services for a smooth transition to adulthood. Investing in adolescents and young people will help the country reap the demographic dividend.

4.0 Discussions

Following the presentations, the floor was opened for discussions and below were the outcomes of the discussions:

- ❖ It was established that men who face challenges such as joblessness and ill health still have a lot to offer their families because their involvement in the family is not only about providing money. Such men must understand that their presence at home makes them valuable assets to the families. Men who are irresponsible are not fit to be called men.
- ❖ Men with authority do not necessarily mean they are authoritative. Men have certain strengths that need to be harnessed for decision making and they are better off if they respect and take inputs from women into consideration.
- ❖ The male conference will be organised in the local languages for easy comprehension by the general public.
- ❖ Religious and traditional leaders should be involved in the implementation of family planning programmes in country. NPC to hold a forum for religious and traditional leaders
- ❖ National Population Council would hold follow up sessions to discuss issues emanating from the Male Conference.
- ❖ Men need to understand the essence of family planning and not just pay lip service. There is the need to redefine and get back to basics with regard to family planning policy and implementation in the country.
- ❖ It is important to inculcate the ideals of family planning into young people at all levels.
- ❖ The UNFPA programmes for religious leaders in the country must be sustained.
- ❖ Include male involvement in family welfare in school curricula to help inform and build the capacity of young people.
- ❖ There is the need to educate grandparents on the essence of family planning and its effect on family welfare.

5.0 Conclusion:

In his closing remarks the chairman reiterated the fact that our culture has been a receiving one and there is the need to chart a path for ourselves which reflect the culture, traditions and values of Ghana. Language in which messages is conveyed is a challenge. Education has to be a form of socialization which inculcates into the general public the ideals of the involvement of males in family welfare. There is the need to rethink and re-strategise to involve males in policy making and implementation of family planning programmes. Therefore, there is the need for consensus building in terms of planning, programming and the way of life of the people of Ghana.

6.0 Recommendations / Observation

It is recommended that the under listed be considered for the next conference.

1. **Re-launch FP logo:**

HIV and AIDS has received much attention and publicity not only because of its ability to kill people but also the “**Red Ribbon tag**”. Same cannot be said of FP. NPC can introduce or re-launch the FP logo or tag to attract possible funding and generate debate across all sectors.

2. **Blogging:**

NPC should consider blogging the programme. Blogging is a way of transmitting your programme live on the internet via a designated website. Its spread is wide and less

expensive compared to other transmission media. It is also a way of getting people outside the conference room to contribute while the programme is underway.

3. Media as partners / live transmission

Forging linkage with the media as partners in the future is important so that such programmes will receive much publicity and possible live transmission than post broadcast. Efforts should therefore be made to court the media to participate in such programmes to achieve the needed publicity.

4. Link up with local manufactures of health/ FP products:

NPC should engage with local manufacturers of health – FP products as partners. Advertising their chain of products would enhance organisation / industry relationship, an element missing in many instances. NPC stands to benefit from collaborating with Ghana Health Service to undertake surveys on the products of manufacturers and provide appropriate recommendations to meet customer specification and design.

5. Regional managers dialogue to precede conference:

Introduce annual / mid-year review/ dialogue with major stakeholders ahead of the conference. Region specific issues may be tackled at such dialogue sessions.

6. Rotation across Regions:

While engaging stakeholders and nation as a whole, regional diversity may also be considered by rotating the conference across the regions Ghana. This will break the dominance of NPC operating at the Headquarters.



Students from Accra Girls Senior High School listening to presentations made at the conference with rapt attention