

PREFACE

EMERGING EVIDENCE suggests that fertility in Nepal has begun to decline. This change in fertility represents a major social transformation underway in society; it indicates a transition in the lives of women and their families and suggests the increasing effectiveness of the population and family planning programs in the country. This transition is indicative of gradual changes in values, norms and practices. The pre-established cultural scripts are being transformed and a new culture of contraception and reproductive behavior is evolving. The exact magnitude and timing of the fertility transition remain uncertain. Furthermore, the context and relative importance of factors contributing to the change have not been fully examined.

During the 20-year period, 1976-1996, four comparative national fertility surveys were conducted. In addition, censuses and various other surveys provide further information for gaining insights on the fertility transition. The national surveys together with more in-depth anthropological, social and economic studies provide excellent materials to review changes in fertility and to understand the context and dynamics of the changes now underway in the country. These materials also form the basis for stock-taking and understanding the advances made in research, data collection and analysis of fertility change in Nepal. Finally, this collective attention to fertility change could serve as a catalyst and an impetus for further research focusing on changes in reproductive behavior.

Against this background, an international conference "Fertility Transition in Nepal: Changing Context and Dynamics" was organized jointly by Tribhuvan University's Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) and Family Health International (FHI) on 25 and 26 November 1997 in Kathmandu. The objectives of the conference were: (1) to assess and evaluate changes in the patterns and levels of fertility in Nepal; (2) to analyze and discuss the changing context and dynamics of the fertility transition; and (3) to draw implications from these changes.

The conference focused on three main areas—levels and trends of fertility, methodologies for analyzing fertility changes, and factors contributing to fertility change. The participants of the conference were: faculties engaged in teaching and/or conducting research on population at their respective institutions, researchers from private sector leading research organizations, journalists representing leading newspapers, and selected senior level officials from relevant ministries and organizations of the Government. Altogether about 70 persons attended the scientific sessions of the conference. The conference assumed a special significance because it was the first time that those interested and knowledgeable about fertility analysis in Nepal had gathered together to collectively review the evidence and discuss the fertility transition underway.

Professor John C. Caldwell gave the keynote address. The other speakers who addressed the inaugural session of the conference included, Professor Kamal K. Joshi, Vice-chancellor, Tribhuvan University, Professor Prem K. Khatri, Executive Director, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Dr. Kalyan R. Pandey, Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health, and Dr. Glenn L. Post, Chief, Office of Health and Family Planning, U.S. Agency for International Development Mission/Nepal.

This volume represents selected papers presented at the conference. The papers originally prepared for the conference were revised by the authors in light of comments from conference participants and from subsequent reviewers. John C. Caldwell's paper is based on the keynote address. Robert D. Retherford and Shyam Thapa attempt to assess, using various methodologies, the levels and trends of fertility over the years. Tom Fricke and Dilli R. Dahal utilize the "micro demographic research approach" to explore the beginning of the fertility transition of one ethnic group. By adapting a similar methodology, Debendra Karki (who was unable to present the paper at the conference) examines the changing sociocultural and economic context triggering fertility control in a village in Eastern Nepal. Ram Hari Aryal looks at the fertility transition in a sample of women in the capital city, Kathmandu. Devendra Shrestha examines changes in the first birth interval for a community near Tribhuvan University. Based on data from national surveys, Laxmi Bilas Acharya analyzes socioeconomic and demographic factors associated with fertility changes at two points in time. Bhim Subedi explores the regional patterns of fertility differentials. In two separate papers, S. Philip Morgan, Bhanu B. Niraula, Shara G. Neidell, Dovan Lawati, and Sharon

Stash examine the context and influence of women's autonomy on reproductive behavior. John Cleland tries to delineate the factors that trigger fertility transition across societies.

One of the expected outputs of the conference was updated reference materials for use in teaching and research. This special issue of *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* is aimed at meeting this objective. We hope the readers will find the volume useful in teaching and in furthering their own research regarding the social transformations being brought about by the onset of what might be referred to as a quiet reproductive revolution in Nepal.

Dilli R. Dahal and Shyam Thapa representing CNAS and FHI respectively, served as coordinators of the conference. They thank many colleagues, Dr. Ram Hari Aryal in particular, for their assistance during the various stages of the conference. The participants deserve special thanks for their interest and time. Thanks are also due to Dharma R. Shakya and Bijayswor Shrestha for layout and word-processing. We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the United States Agency for International Development for the conference and towards the production of this volume. Finally, we thank the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Professor Prem K. Khatri in particular, for their cooperation and collaboration in organizing the conference and inviting us to serve as guest editors of this volume.

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The Editors