Population Growth

The Demographic Transition:
Demographic transition is as a shift from a stable population with high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates. The transition phase consists of four stages.

Stage I: high birth rate (48 per 1000) and high death rate (46 per 1000)
Stage II: high birth rate, but declining death rate due to improved medical technology
Stage III: declining birth rate due to introduction of contraceptive technology, less rapidly declining death rate
Stage IV: low birth rate (12 per 1000) and low death rate (10 per 1000)

The stages of demographic transition are not of equal length, nor do countries pass through the transition phase with same speed. In fact, several countries have taken advantage of already developed medical technology to reduce the transition period.

In the ME & NA, both fertility rate and infant mortality rates have fallen slowly, but still several times higher than those of the industrial nations. Meanwhile, death rates have declined considerably. As a result many countries (e.g., Iran, Egypt) experience population explosion. Fertility rate has remained high because of several factors:

- Economic: children are viewed as capital goods to help with the family labor force
- Social: children will provide security for the aged parents
- Cultural: children are viewed as gifts from God; they add to the number of people following the religion (e.g., Islam, Judaism)
- Political: children will enable politicians and military leaders to gain power and win conflict

The relationship between fertility and infant mortality is positive: (i) the more children are born, the more children die and (ii) the more children die, the more (replacement) children are born. So, key factors to reducing the fertility are:

- Invest in public health to reduce infant mortality and the demand for "replacement" children
• Improve female education and labor force participation
• Family planning: educate the poor about the population problem and provide contraception at minimal cost
• Increase employment and income
• Improve income distribution: increase income share of the poorest 40% of the population

However, people may resist family planning because of

• Lack of education and understanding of the population problem
• Ideology: overpopulation is a capitalist problem
• Religious belief: contraception and/or abortion are not permitted
• Military: a large and young population is desirable to win wars