Infant Mortality and Fertility

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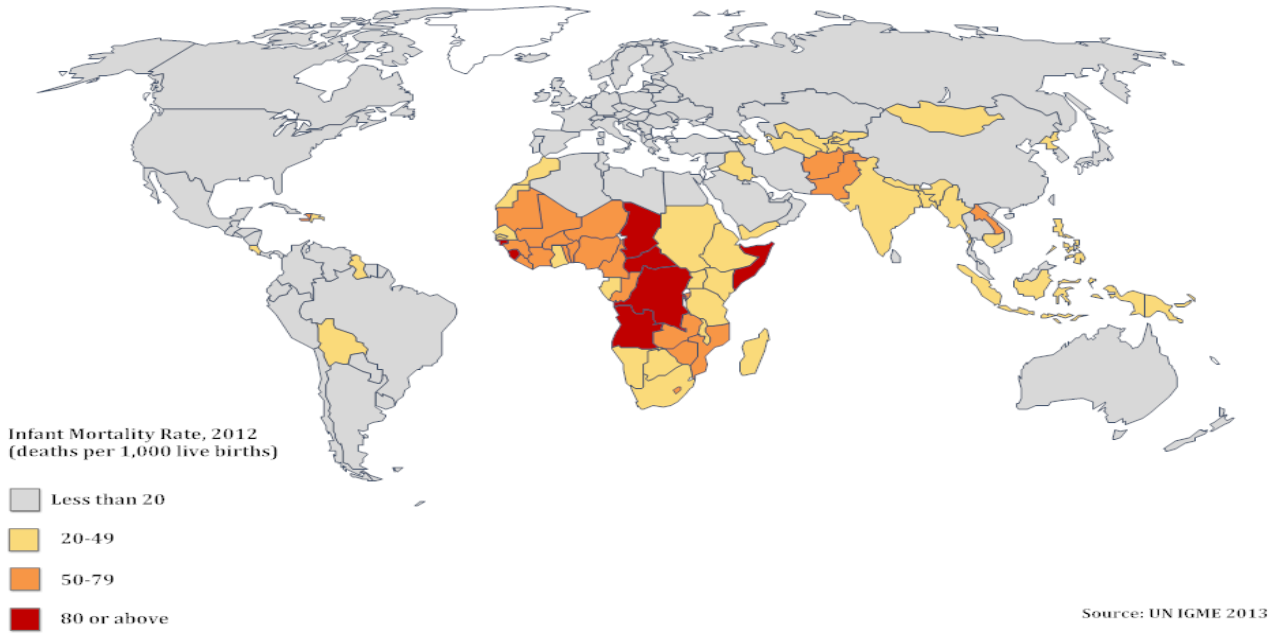
Infant (and child) mortality is connected with fertility in two ways. Reductions in child mortality used to be regarded as a key trigger for the fertility transition (it reduces the ' demand' for children by improving the chances of survival to adulthood), and although this is no longer seen as a hard-and-fast causal link, there are analyses that strongly suggest that continuing high rates of infant and child mortality are significant barriers to fertility decline in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Bongaarts 2008). Causation also runs in the other direction, as reductions in fertility contribute to falls in infant mortality by enabling parents to devote more time and resources to their children.

The latest estimates of infant mortality from the UN Interagency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (*UN IGME*) show that Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest level of child mortality, with an infant mortality rate of 64 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2012 (Fig.1). Nearly half of all infant deaths round the world occur in Sub-Saharan Africa. There were 2.1 million deaths in the region in 2012.

Fig. 1. Infant mortality rate, 2012 (deaths per 1,000 live births)



Infant mortality has declined in all regions since 1960, however progress in Sub-Saharan Africa has been slower than elsewhere (Fig.2). In Southern Asia - the region with the second highest infant mortality rate - a 65 percent decline occurred over a period of 50 years. Even larger reductions in infant mortality were achieved in Northern Africa – a 78 percent decline.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, infant mortality rates declined from 156 per 1,000 live births in the 1960s to 79 in 2005-2010. As infant mortality rates have fallen more sharply elsewhere, the disparity between Sub-Saharan Africa and rest of the world has grown.

Fig. 2. Infant mortality by region and % decline

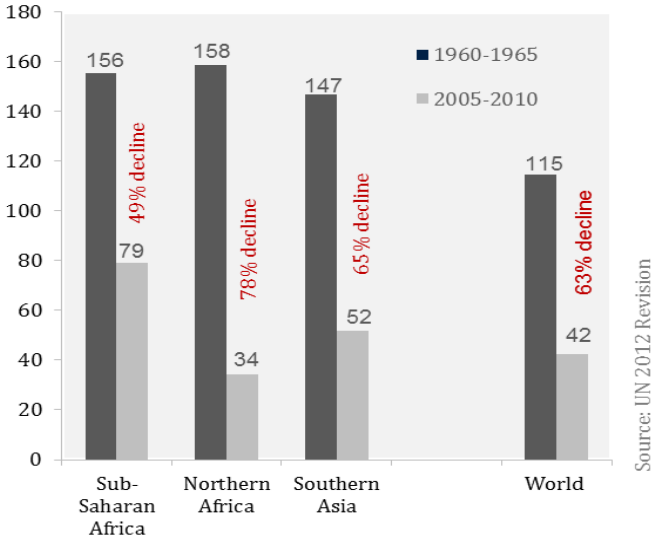
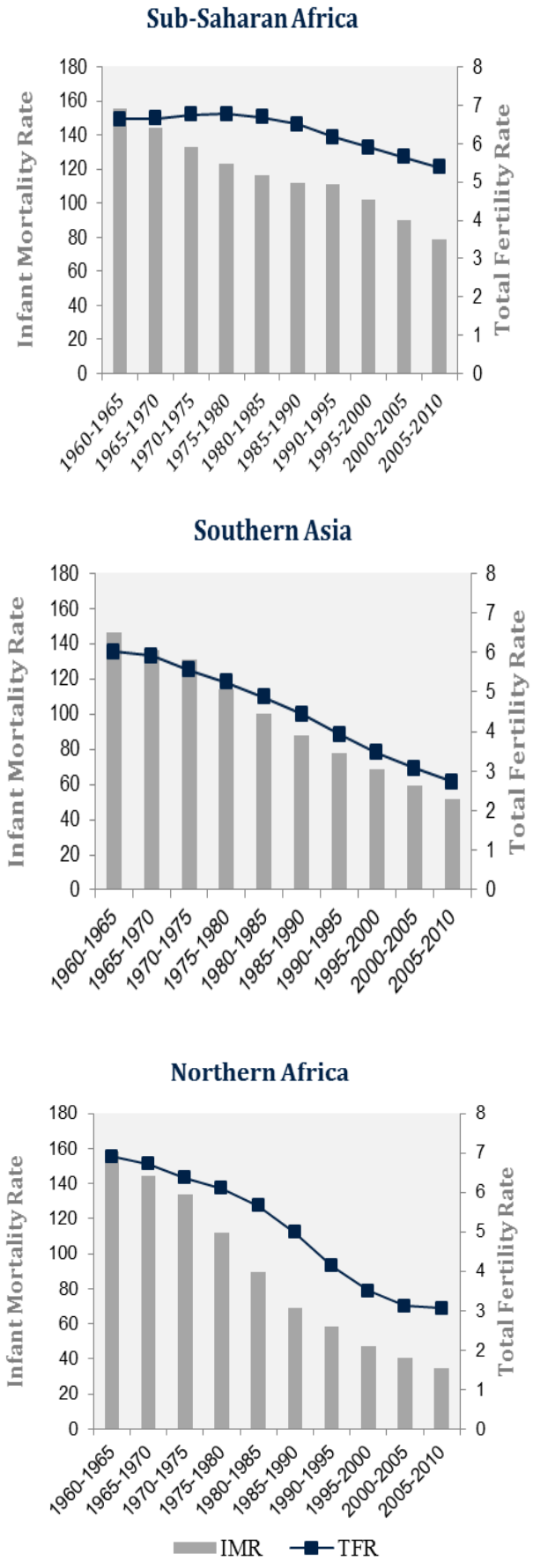


Fig. 3. Infant mortality and total fertility rates, 1960-2010

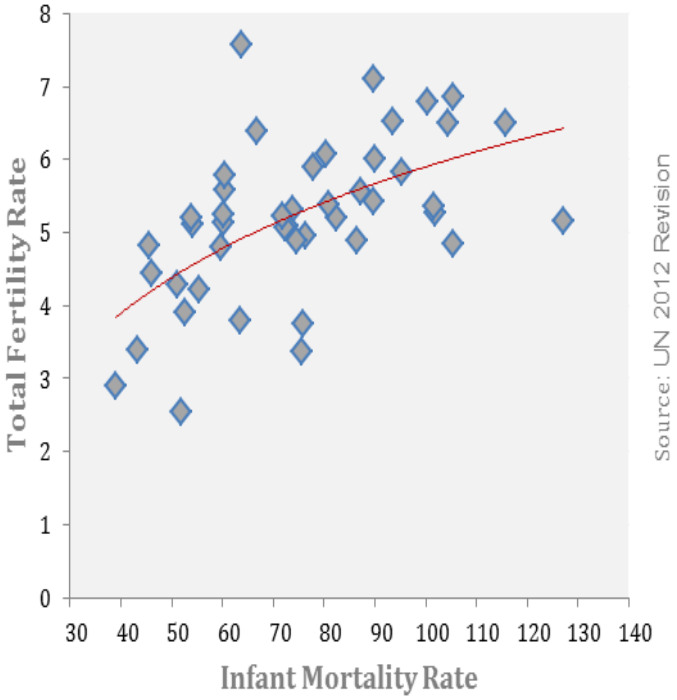


Source: UN 2012 Revision

The fall in Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in Sub-Saharan Africa since the 1960s has been relatively small, and the region now has the highest fertility in the world, with 5.4 children per woman. In Northern Africa and Southern Asia – where the reductions in infant mortality have been larger – TFR declined faster and now stand at about 3 births per woman (Fig.3).

Declines in infant mortality rate in Sub-Saharan Africa started to slow down during the 1980s and 1990s, and it is plausible to suppose that the stall contributed to a slower fertility decline in the region (Malmberg, 2007). There is certainly a close cross-sectional correlation between infant mortality and fertility in the region (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Correlation between infant mortality and fertility, Sub-Saharan Africa, 2005-2010



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Malmberg, B (2007) Demography and the Development Potential of Sub-Saharan Africa. *Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University.* Stockholm.

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