

## CHAPTER 2

### POPULATION STRUCTURE - AN OVERVIEW

#### 2.1 Importance of Population Structure

Sex and age are the basic biological characteristics of a population. They are different from other characteristics acquired by individuals during their life time. Sex and age composition of a population affects its demographic, social, economic and political structure as it influences among others, birth and death rates, internal and international migration, human resources and the gross national product. Shifts in the population age structure have had far reaching consequences on a country's work force, economic prospects, public and personal budgets, security risks, cultural organizations and family structures.

Information on sex-age structure is needed by the Government in planning for educational and health services and in the implementation of other welfare measures for its citizens. Industry, trade and commerce sectors also make use of the sex-age distribution of the population. The number of marriages in a monogamous society depends partly on whether there are as many men as women at marriageable ages. A growing disparity between the numbers of males and females in the population has been considered as not desirable from the point of view of family and social stability.

The linkages between population sex-age structure and Government policies may be illustrated by some examples. As is well known education is a major determinant of fertility, mortality and migration levels. In modern times many countries in the developing world like Cambodia have policies to develop human resources and economy by promoting school enrolment and improving the educational attainment of those who enroll. For successful implementation of these policies projections of school-age population at all administrative levels are made from the information on sex-age distribution of the population obtained from the census. On that basis the required numbers of educational institutions in the various parts of the country, buildings, teachers and other infrastructure facilities are planned.

The labour force projections based on the sex-age structure are indispensable for estimating entrants into the labour force and planning for their absorption. The number of voters by constituencies is derived by sex-age structure. In the fields of family and social welfare, reproductive health, organising social services involving mothers and children, the aged and other social groups, the sex age distribution acts as an important tool. For making gender-friendly policies these data are very important. In the private sector, these data are very necessary in organizing promotional campaigns. Population welfare is determined and shaped by the needs of present and future population. A population's needs and its potentials are strongly shaped by its demographic composition-i.e., by age-structural transitions. The main issue ultimately boils down to resource allocation, especially the allocation of national resources between different age-specific sub-groups in a population.

Utilising the information drawn from the census, population data are usually classified by sex and age. Sex-wise and age-wise data are presented and cross classified in respect of marital status, fertility, mortality, migration, literacy, educational levels, economic characteristics, disability and other characteristics of the population.

Sex and age are considered very important as indicators of social status in a society. Traditionally each individual was ascribed a particular status in society. The expected role of an individual in the family and society is governed by sex and age. As these are culture-based they vary from society to society. Even within a society these norms undergo changes. The traditional attitudes towards women are however changing in modern times when efforts are made by most of the societies to achieve gender equity and equality though with different levels of achievement.

Before the commencement of the demographic transition in Europe in the eighteenth century, the age structures of the populations of the various countries of the world were more or less similar. They had a large population of children and a very small proportion of the elderly due to high fertility and mortality levels. As a consequence of the demographic transition, the age structures of populations in the European countries underwent changes. They became increasingly older. Similar transformations in age structures are taking place gradually though on a lower scale in the developing countries like Cambodia.

## **2.2 Factors influencing Population Structure**

Births, deaths and migration do not apply equally to people of all ages and both sexes. On the contrary, they tend to be concentrated among for instance, the old, the very young or women in the reproductive age group. As a result, the numbers of births, deaths and migration of a population at any point of time are determined not only by its overall size and the fertility, mortality and migration levels but also by its sex and age structure. The sex and age composition is also entirely determined by and provides a record of past fertility and mortality and migration. For instance mortality caused by war results in reduced numbers of young male adults in a population and this will be reflected, say five or six decades later by a relatively smaller elderly male population. The sex and age composition is thus determined by, and is a major determinant of the factors of population growth. An analysis of sex and age structure, therefore, constitutes an integral part of the study of population of a country. Population census is the main source of data for population by sex and age.