

Developmental Idealism and Cultural Models of the Family in Malawi

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Abstract This paper examines the extent to which developmental idealism has been disseminated in Malawi. Developmental idealism is a set of beliefs and values about development and the relationships between development and family structures and behavior. Developmental idealism states that attributes of societies and families defined as modern are better than attributes defined as traditional, that modern societies help produce modern families, that modern families facilitate the achievement of modern societies, and that the future will bring family change in the direction of modernity. Previous research has demonstrated that knowledge of developmental idealism is widespread in many places around the world, but provides little systematic data about it in sub-Saharan Africa or how knowledge of it is associated with certain demographic characteristics in that region. In this paper, we address this issue by examining whether ordinary people in two settings in Malawi, a sub-Saharan African country, have received and understood messages that are intended to associate development with certain types of family forms and family behaviors. We then examine associations between demographic characteristics and developmental idealism to investigate possible mechanisms linking global discourse about development to the grassroots. We analyze data collected in face-to-face surveys from two samples of Malawian men in 2009 and 2010, one rural, the other in a low-to-medium income neighborhood of a city. Our analysis of these survey data shows considerable evidence that many developmental idealism beliefs have been spread in that country and that education has positive effects on beliefs in the

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association between development and family attributes. We also find higher levels of developmental idealism awareness in the urban sample than we do in the rural sample, but once dissimilarities in education and wealth between the two samples are controlled, awareness levels no longer differed between urban and rural respondents. We explore how these beliefs intersect with longstanding local values and beliefs in Malawi.

Keywords Developmental idealism · Globalization · Africa · Family · Gender · Fertility

Introduction

Aspirations for development are powerful behavioral motivators among many people in low-income communities worldwide. Development is associated with societal attributes such as wealth, urban living, education, health, and rapid communication and transportation. These mirror the goals of social policies and development plans adopted by many governments and nongovernmental organizations. In many low-income countries, development plans also encourage changes to families as an integral part of development. Family attributes that are commonly associated with development are mature ages at marriage, low fertility, gender equality, and greater autonomy for youth. These family attributes are often defined by development discourse as modern and good. The belief that all societies can, will, and should progress toward these family forms that are historically most common in Western countries has been labeled “developmental idealism” (Thornton 2001, 2005). This study examines whether this discourse linking development with changing family forms has been disseminated to and understood by Malawians.

Ideas about societal development have been promoted energetically by organizations with a global reach, such as the UN and the Rockefeller Foundation, by dozens of national governments, and by thousands of local non-governmental organizations. Paradigmatic are the efforts to persuade millions around the world to regulate their fertility using chemical or physical contraceptives. Organizations have disseminated the view that small families are more developed and facilitate the achievement of a higher standard of living (Watkins 2000). For example, posters encouraging fertility control often picture two families, one with many children in ragged clothes, a defeated-looking father, and an exhausted-looking mother, and the other family with a well-dressed and satisfied-looking father and mother with two or three smiling well-dressed children and a tricycle.

International campaigns have also advocated changes in other aspects of family life, such as equality between men and women, using rhetoric that associates the changes with development (e.g. the United Nation’s Women in Development activities); the status of women has become a litmus test for membership in the global club of modern democratic states (Towns 2010). International organizations have also advocated the elimination of child marriage, polygamy, and female circumcision (Boyle 2002; Peterson 1991; Hodgson and Watkins 1997; Barrett and

Frank 1999; Luke and Watkins 2002; Chimbwete et al. 2005; Christoffersen-Deb 2005).

In Malawi, the government, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations have implemented campaigns to eliminate aspects of families that they disparage as “bad culture” and to replace them with Western family ideals. UNICEF, for example, paid for months of bright red banners with large black letters on the front pages of the two major newspapers that said “STOP Early Marriages: Every girl has a right to complete her education” and “STOP Harmful Cultural Practices.” Additional banners in the series admonished Malawians to stop other violations of the U.N.’s human rights agenda: sexual abuse, child labor, sexual exploitation, and the “grabbing” of a widow’s household property by the relatives of the deceased husband. In school, students in Life Skills classes are taught that basic human rights are violated by “harmful cultural practices” such as widow inheritance, wife-swapping, and sexual cleansing (Malawi Institute of Education 2002a, b, 2004, 2008a, b).

Although ideas about development are promoted by global actors with prestige and resources, their reception at the grassroots can be a different matter. Such ideas can be perceived as foreign, irrelevant, and/or unacceptable, and therefore may be rejected.

Scholars have documented the global spread of ideas about development among policy makers and other elites (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Boli and Thomas 1999; Barrett et al. 2010). We have little knowledge, however, of the extent to which the ideas linking development with changing family forms and practices have been effectively disseminated among non-elites. Our research is designed to address this lack of information on the spread of ideas about development at the grassroots level.

Our aim is to examine whether ordinary people have at least received and understood messages that are intended to associate development with certain types of family forms and practices. We analyze data collected in face-to-face surveys from two samples of Malawian men ages 18–40 in 2009 and 2010, one rural, the other in a low-to-medium income neighborhood of a city, to document the extent to which individuals in Malawi are familiar with ideas about development and family life. We also examine associations between demographic characteristics and developmental thinking in order to investigate possible mechanisms linking global discourse with people at the grassroots. Our research is, to our knowledge, the first to establish the extent to which people in a sub-Saharan country associate development with certain family attributes, and the first to explore the demographic characteristics of individuals most likely to report such understanding.

We examine two sets of beliefs concerning development and family attributes. The first concerns people’s perceptions of the association between certain family attributes and development. Such perceptions would influence people’s reports on the prevalence of certain family attributes in places perceived as developed rather than traditional, and lead them to identify causal linkages between development and changing family forms. A second belief concerns expectations about future family change: whether the prevalence of family attributes associated with development will increase in the future.

In this paper, we do not consider the extent to which people value, prefer, or desire family attributes characterized as “developed.” Although we do not investigate this evaluative element, we recognize its importance because it is possible, and even likely, that many people *understand* the linkage of development with increasing prevalence of certain family attributes, and at the same time, *disapprove* of those family attributes. In other words, assessing beliefs about the linkage between development and certain family attributes is distinct from assessing whether those family attributes are valued.

In this study, we focus on whether individuals report an understanding of linkages between development and certain family attributes because it is important to first establish whether people at the grassroots are receiving and accurately interpreting the developmental idealism messages about development and family attributes and process. Our data were designed to examine the extent to which individuals associate certain family attributes with development and believe that those family forms are becoming more prevalent with development. This is the logical first step in assessing the potential influence of developmental thinking. We do not address empirically whether Malawians like or dislike the family attributes in question. The extent to which individuals adopt developmental thinking as a guide for behavior is a valuable next stage of this research agenda, but it is outside the scope of this project. We first need to know whether the belief dimension of developmental idealism is understood; future research should examine the evaluative component.

Our research is important because ideational factors are increasingly seen as important elements affecting family structures and behavior (Lesthaeghe 1983; Cleland and Wilson 1987; van de Kaa 1987; Chesnais 1992; Johnson-Hanks et al. 2011; Mason 1997; Lesthaeghe and Neels 2002; Pearce 2002; Cunningham 2008; Yount and Rashad 2008). Furthermore, Thornton (2001, 2005) identified people’s ideas about development and their association with family characteristics as particularly important ideational factors influencing family changes. As such, there is a need for research on the dissemination of ideas linking development and family attributes among people at the grassroots.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

We approach our research questions through the developmental idealism framework proposed by Thornton (2001, 2005). Developmental idealism is a cultural model that, like other cultural models (Geertz 1973; Fricke 1997; Thornton et al. 2001), provides individuals with tools to understand the world around them and to determine how to live in the world. Cultural models furnish insights into how the world works, define what is good and to be sought after, provide guidance for actions, and specify methods to achieve goals.

Developmental idealism grows out of the modernization or development framework, a cultural model that has dominated much social science and public discourse for centuries (Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1969). The development model specifies that all societies progress through the same stages from traditional to

developed, but at different speeds, so that at any time point societies are located at different developmental stages. The model identified northwest Europe and its overseas populations as modern or developed and defined other countries as traditional or less developed.

The developmental idealism model consists of two packages of ideas we refer to as developmental idealism beliefs (DI Beliefs), and developmental idealism values (DI Values). As the labels imply, DI Beliefs measure an individual's understanding of the link between "modern" family behavior and development, while ideas associated with DI Values evaluate "modern" family behaviors and outcomes. DI Beliefs consist of four main components: (1) that societal development and modern family attributes are positively correlated; (2) that modern family attributes facilitate the achievement of a developed society; (3) that societal development brings the attributes of modern families; and (4) that modern family attributes will become more common in the future. In order to keep our research focused and manageable, we limit our empirical research to how people view the association between development and several aspects of family life and people's expectations of future family change (DI Beliefs). For further conceptual clarity, we limit the scope of the family attributes in our empirical analyses of DI Beliefs to five: age at marriage, marital arrangements, family size, gender equality, and respect for elders. Our empirical research focuses on the connections that Malawians make between these dimensions of family life and development.

Many mechanisms have globalized developmental idealism and its worldviews, beliefs, and values (Thornton 2005). Among the oldest of these mechanisms are colonialism, the work of Christian missionaries, schools and universities, and, more recently, the globalization of commerce and the media. Particularly important actors in recent decades have been international governmental and nongovernmental organizations with prestige and enormous resources that can be provided to (or withheld from) low-income countries (Luke and Watkins 2002; Watkins et al. 2012; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Barnett and Finnemore 2004). In a series of influential studies, John Meyer and his colleagues have shown strong associations between a country's interaction with the international community and the adoption of policies and programs advocated by these organizations (Meyer 1987, 2010; Boli and Thomas 1999). Writing about population conferences, Deborah Barrett and colleagues noted that the conferences "allowed government officials from various countries to learn the latest models developed by scientific experts and to be impressed by the large numbers of other countries that had also expressed an interest in population policy by sending their own delegations. Conference attendance was both an indicator of a government's interest in adoption and a spur to adoption" (Barrett et al. 2010, p. 1192; Barrett and Frank 1999).

Within countries, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have taken on the task of translating the beliefs and values of developmental idealism into policy and disseminating them to the general population. Further diffusion, as well as evaluation, occurs in informal local social networks (Montgomery and Casterline 1996; Casterline and Sinding 2000; Watkins 2000; Kohler et al. 2001).

Developmental idealism, of course, does not spread in a vacuum, but in a world where people have their own well-engrained and long-standing beliefs and values about the world, desired goals, and means for achieving their objectives. Developmental idealism often competes with these long-standing beliefs and values. Thus, developmental idealism may not be quickly adopted: rather, it is often resisted and modified, or even rejected (Cleland and 2001; Luke and Watkins 2002). Nevertheless, in many instances contact with developmental idealism has led to changes in family beliefs and values (Thornton 2005; Kavas and Thornton 2013; Jayakody et al. 2008).

Our discussion of the developmental model is not motivated by a belief that it is a useful framework for understanding social change; we acknowledge that modernization models have been heavily criticized (for example, see Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1969; Tilly 1984; Wallerstein 1991; Chakrabarty 2000). Rather, we emphasize the modernization model because it provides the basis for developmental idealism's power. We also do not study developmental idealism because we believe that its values and beliefs are good or bad, or true or false, but because we believe the spread of these ideas can encourage change. In other words, regardless of whether the cultural model linking development and family change has any factual basis or value, it is important to study the extent to which the model has reached the grassroots because it has the potential to influence family attributes.

Family Life in Malawi

Reactions to developmental idealism depend upon historical family structures and relationships. Evidence concerning Malawian family structures in the past is, however, relatively limited, and characterizing family systems in Malawi is difficult because of the ethnic diversity in the country. Nevertheless, as we discuss below, many of the dimensions of family life defined by developmental idealism as traditional are perceived by Malawians to be longstanding.

Age at Marriage

Marriage has long been a central feature of the life course, with nearly all women and men marrying at least once. Historically, Malawian women married within a few months of reaching puberty (Phiri 1983). Recently, there is evidence of increasing marriage age: among women who are currently ages 40–44, 20 % were married by the age of 15, but among women who are currently ages 15–19, only 4 % were married by age 15 (NSO and ICF Macro 2011). Estimates based on survey data show that the average age at marriage for women is 18 and for men varies across regions from 21 to 24 (Bracher et al. 2003, p. 213).

Marriage Arrangements

Unlike many other places in the world, where marriages were historically arranged by the older generation with little input from the potential spouses, in Malawi there

appears to be no tradition of arranged marriages. An early chronicler of family patterns in Malawi, the missionary Johnson (1922), who lived in the North, wrote that while approval by relatives was important, marriages were not arranged by parents and required only the consent of the bride and groom. The anthropologist Barnes (1951), who did fieldwork in southern Malawi in the late 1940s, repeated Johnson's earlier assertion that marriages were not arranged.

Fertility

Malawians have generally greatly valued children and fertility levels have been relatively high. Although historical data on fertility rates in Malawi are not available, estimates from 1984 suggest that the total fertility rate (TFR) then was 7.6 (National Statistics Office (NSO) [Malawi] and Macro International 1994, p. 19). Fertility has since declined somewhat: the TFR in 2010 was 5.7 for the country as a whole, 4.0 for urban areas and 6.1 for rural areas (National Statistical Office and ICF Macro 2011).

Gender Equality

The division of household labor is, unsurprisingly, based on gender. Women have long provided domestic labor, while men have been responsible for seeking resources outside the home; since the introduction of a cash economy, men have been responsible for providing goods that must be purchased in the market (Power 1995). Men are viewed as the head of the household—even in matrilineal ethnic groups—and are expected to exercise authority over the women in their lives (Kaler 2003; Izugbara and Undie 2008). Recent campaigns to increase gender equality have been met with considerable resistance, especially among men, as they have been elsewhere in southern Africa (Ribohn 2002; Walker 2005; Dworkin et al. 2012).

Developmental Idealism Spread and Resistance in Malawi

The dissemination of developmental idealism in Malawi has been strongly promoted and strongly resisted. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, both British officials and Christian missionaries promoted key features of developmental idealism in what was then the protectorate of Nyasaland. Christianity has spread so extensively that today about 85 % of all Malawians identify as Christian (NSO and ICF Macro 2011). In addition to their teachings from the pulpit, Christian missionaries played a major role in bringing schools to Malawi (Schafer 2006), which were a source of western ideas promulgated in English at impressionable ages.

As African countries gained their independence, primarily in the 1960s, international organizations explicitly promoting development began to work extensively in Africa. These efforts initially brought both infrastructure thought to be the basis of economic development—roads, dams, bridges—and the discourse of

development. However, development organizations came to Malawi later than in many other African countries because President Banda, Malawi's first and long-time president after independence, wanted to protect Malawi from what he saw as the corrupting influences of the modern world. Banda allowed a few development projects, such as a 1971 World Bank agriculture project, and he accepted the assistance of the World Health Organization (WHO) to prepare a national health plan to establish and improve infrastructure for health services and training. In general, however, he considered foreign cultures pernicious and sought to preserve Malawi's traditions from cultural imperialism: "It was not only politically that we were enslaved, colonized. We were also enslaved and colonized culturally" (Quoted in Forster 1994, p. 89).

Promoting a dress code that forbade women to show any flesh, or undergarments, above the knee, Banda said:

In the West now there exists a permissive society. Do you know what I call it? Depraved society—that's all it is. Women going unspeakably in public like that, and then in New York on the stage doing unspeakable things, and they call it art... Call it art! You call that civilisation? You call that Christianity?... No, to me, if that is civilisation, if that is Christianity, then keep it in Europe, keep it in America. (Quoted in Kambili 2002, p. 85)

It is interesting to note that in 2002, well after the dress code was repealed, a Population Services International (PSI) billboard promoting condoms showed a western-looking couple, with the top part of the woman's thigh exposed. This provoked outrage and the quick removal of the billboard, suggesting that although Banda himself is no longer there, he casts a long shadow of resistance to external influences (interview with PSI staff member).

Since the resignation of Banda in 1993 and the institution of multi-party elections in 1994, international nongovernmental organizations have been major disseminators of developmental idealism, as well as the discourses of other international ideologies such as human rights and environmental sustainability. Messages from international elites are passed to Malawian elites who work for governmental and non-governmental organizations in the cities and districts. A study by Hannan (2013) demonstrated how world culture spreads beyond elite urban networks to the dusty capital of a rural district. He located 19 small organizations, established and funded by "small scale altruists" from the West, and interviewed a member of the staff of each organization. He found that all of the organizations drew on a strikingly homogeneous set of principles based on the global development discourse.

The work of the international family planning movement is particularly relevant to this study. President Banda opposed family limitation: he wanted the Malawian population to become larger, not smaller, and he expelled the United States Peace Corps when he learned that volunteers were promoting contraception to reduce fertility (Chimbwete et al. 2005). All of this changed following Banda's resignation. Malawi adopted a population policy in 1994, immediately after multi-party elections. By 1999, the discourse linking fertility and family to development was being disseminated widely in Malawi. Population and family planning posters appeared stressing the joys of small families and the difficulties of large families. By

2005 contraception was free and almost universally available at health facilities (Solo et al. 2005). Today, it is unlikely that there are any Malawians of child-bearing age who do not know that the government wants them to have fewer children. Health facility staffs scold women for having yet another baby when they come in for antenatal care and cheerfully promote family planning at regular “Healthy Talks” on the days that antenatal care is provided (Watkins et al. 2014).

The international response to HIV/AIDS is another recent source of developmental idealism messages. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Malawi has suffered from the AIDS epidemic, and continues to be one of the most heavily affected countries in the world. Campaigns to limit the spread of HIV have emphasized scientific knowledge from the international community and have based prevention messages on an idealized image of Western family forms (Hirsch et al. 2009). Recent efforts to stem the spread of HIV have emphasized the importance of equality within sexual relationships, which has been associated with marriage at mature ages, individual spouse choice, and gender equality (Pulerwitz et al. 2006; Higgins et al. 2010; Esacove 2010). Donor funding for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment has also supported the continued expansion of both international and local NGOs in Malawi, which act as networks for the dissemination of developmental idealism (Swidler and Watkins 2009; Robinson 2011; Watkins and Swidler 2013).

Hypotheses About the Spread of Developmental Idealism in Malawi

As we have discussed, there have been both forces for the dissemination of developmental idealism and forces resisting it. Despite the opposing forces, our hypothesis is that developmental idealism has spread widely in Malawi. We expect that large fractions of Malawians understand the relationship between development and modern family attributes in ways that are consistent with developmental idealism. We also expect that a majority of Malawians will predict future changes in the family in the direction of developmental idealism.

Although we expect that there has been extensive dissemination of developmental idealism throughout Malawi, we also expect that this dissemination varies by education, wealth, rural–urban residence, and age. Our research will provide the first examination in a sub-Saharan African setting of how these four basic factors of social differentiation affect knowledge and understanding of DI Beliefs. We recognize that other social factors could affect beliefs and expectations about developmental idealism, but these are the ones for which we have empirical data. We cannot, for example, test hypotheses about the effects of gender because our data come only from men.

We hypothesize that education is one of the most powerful influences on ordinary people’s DI Beliefs. This expectation is based on the view that the schooling experience provides information and knowledge about the world. Schools and textbooks are perceived as authoritative sources of information, much of which is generated and disseminated internationally. Moreover, as noted above, schools in Malawi teach “life skills” courses that are based on a curriculum that directly teaches some aspects of developmental idealism, including promoting family

planning and discouraging “harmful cultural practices.” In addition, schools provide students with intellectual skills that permit them to continue to access global cultural models over their lifetimes.

We also expect that people with higher levels of wealth will have greater understanding of DI Beliefs. Money provides access to people of diverse backgrounds and world views, as well as access to information on global views of development and the family through newspapers, television, radio, and the Internet. In addition, wealth is associated with occupation, and higher-level occupations are likely to provide more access to global information and knowledge.

One of the most important attributes of urban living, as compared to rural residence, is the access that it provides to communication and transportation facilities. It places people in a better position to access various sources of media. It also provides a broader and more diverse network of informal communication contacts that facilitate the spread of ideas, including those concerning development.

Predicting the overall influence of age on people’s views of development and its association with family attributes is complex. This is because age observed at one point in time represents both a person’s place in the life course and the time that people experience childhood. One hypothesis is that the process of aging gives more opportunities to obtain knowledge about the concept of development. This would result in a positive effect of age on people’s theoretical understanding of the ideas of developmental idealism. At the same time, we expect that socialization has recently changed in Malawi, with rapidly expanding sources of information about the world. We hypothesize that the effects of this new socialization system are likely to be particularly strong for those young people who were socialized more recently. We do not have expectations concerning the relative power of these two hypothesized effects of age, making it difficult to make an overall prediction for the association of age with knowledge of developmental idealism.

Data and Methods

Research Sites and Samples

The data used for this study come from two surveys of young men that were designed primarily to study male circumcision and sexual behavior. This study purpose dictated that the sample be limited to males. It also determined the research sites and sampling strategy. The study’s principal investigators agreed to include our questions as part of their data collection.

One of the surveys was conducted in a rural area in the Southern region, and the other in working/lower-class neighborhoods in Lilongwe, Malawi’s capital city. The rural study site was selected because it has an ethnically and religiously diverse population. The living conditions in the urban study site are similar to those faced by many urban dwellers.

Urban and rural living conditions in Malawi are distinct. For example, according to the 2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (NSO and ICF Macro 2011), approximately 35 % of urban households have electricity and 19 % have improved

sanitation facilities. In comparison, only 4 % of rural households have electricity and 6 % have improved sanitation facilities. The median educational attainment in urban areas is 7.5 years for women and men, compared to 4.3 years for women and 5.6 years for men in rural areas (NSO and ICF Macro 2011). Having a sample from both types of locations allows investigation of the understanding of DI Beliefs among people living in these different environments.

Questions asking about DI Beliefs were included at the beginning of the surveys. In both the urban and rural sites, all surveys were administered as face-to-face surveys and were conducted in Chichewa, one of the dominant languages in the southern region of Malawi.

The urban data were collected in 2010. The urban study site was the catchment area of a health clinic, which included two administrative zones of the city of Lilongwe. The catchment area is divided into census enumeration areas. Using Google maps, the research team further sub-divided the enumeration areas into blocks and randomly selected two blocks from each enumeration area. The survey team completed a census of all households in the selected blocks and surveyed one eligible man per household. All men ages 18–35 were considered eligible for participation. Almost 2,300 men were surveyed about male circumcision and 1,286 of them were randomly selected to answer the developmental idealism questions.

The rural study participants were surveyed twice: the first data collection took place in 2008 and the second in 2009. The developmental idealism questions were included on the follow-up survey. Participants were selected using a two-stage sampling strategy. First, 70 villages from the target area were randomly selected into the sample. A census of people living in these villages identified men ages 18–40. In each village, all eligible and available men, up to a maximum of 20 Christians and 20 Muslims, were selected to participate. Few sampled men refused to participate, but some were difficult to locate to complete a survey. The first surveys were completed with just under 70 % of sampled participants, a total of 1,236 men.

Approximately 77 % of the men surveyed at baseline were successfully re-contacted and interviewed for the second survey, resulting in a sample of 955 men who responded to the developmental idealism questions. Most non-participation was due to respondents who could not be located, rather than to individuals refusing to participate. A comparison of demographic characteristics of the men who were included in the second survey with those who could not be located revealed substantial similarity of these groups, providing reassurance that attrition did not seriously affect the representativeness of the follow-up sample. We cannot rule out the possibility that those who were not followed had different views about developmental idealism than those who were followed, but the high follow-up response rate and the similarity of demographic characteristics suggest that such differences would be small.

In each location, the samples are representative of small geographic areas, and the results cannot be generalized to all of Malawi. Nonetheless, this is an important first study to examine the dissemination of developmental idealism in sub-Saharan Africa at the grassroots level. And, although the samples are not representative of

the country as a whole, the populations in the two study locations are similar in important ways to national averages for urban and rural populations.

Measures

We use data from four series of DI Belief questions about development and family change. Within each series, respondents were asked about women's age of marriage, arranged marriage, fertility, gender equality, and respect for elders. The survey interviewer did not define development or give examples of developed and not developed countries; respondents used their own conceptions of development to answer the questions. Series topic introductions and exact wording of the questions can be found in Supplementary Material. It is important to note that none of these questions ask about values, preferences, aspirations, or behavior. Instead, they focus on either beliefs concerning the connections between development and family attributes, or expectations about the future.

The first series asked respondents to identify whether certain family forms were more commonly found in not developed or developed countries. The next series of questions asked respondents to say whether there is a causal relationship between development and family change by asking how an increase in Malawian development might increase or decrease certain family attributes. A third series asked about the opposite causal pathway; that is, whether family changes will bring development. The fourth series asked respondents to report their expectations for family change in Malawi over the next twenty years.

For the purpose of examining the relationships between demographic characteristics and DI Beliefs, we constructed an additive DI Belief scale that assigns one point for each of the DI Belief questions for which the respondent provided the answer that was consistent with developmental idealism. Two questions (effects of fewer women marrying before age 18 and fewer arranged marriages on development) were not worded comparably across the urban and rural samples and an inadvertent skip pattern in the rural questionnaire led to a large proportion of missing answers pertaining to expectations for future family size; we therefore have omitted these three items from both the urban and rural scales and from the analyses. This results in a scale ranging from 0 to 17 possible points.

Only respondents who answered all 17 questions were given scale scores; those with item missing data are omitted from analyses using the DI Beliefs scale. We omitted from the scale 69 respondents from the rural sample and 31 respondents from the urban sample because of missing data. The questions that most commonly resulted in missing responses were those asking about expectations for family characteristics in the future, which were the last questions in the DI section of the questionnaire. Respondents who were omitted because of missing data were, on average, less well educated and poorer than those who responded to all of the DI questions. Assuming that some of the non-response was because the respondents opted to skip questions that they did not know how to answer or because they were fatigued, omitting the respondents with missing data likely attenuates the strength of our results.

The analysis of social differentiation and knowledge of developmental idealism examines the variation in DI Beliefs by level of education, wealth quintile, and age group. The education variable is coded into four categories based on number of years of schooling: 0–4, 5–8, 9–11, and 12 or more years of school. We used household expenditures in the month prior to the survey as a proxy measure of wealth. Because many of the men in our samples have incomes that vary substantially month-to-month, expenditures on basic goods—clothes, medical care, food, and transportation—are a more reliable way to capture general level of well-being. We created wealth estimates by summing expenditures on basic items, top coding the distribution at the 99th percentile, and converting so that each unit was the equivalent of \$10 U.S. dollars. We then divided the resulting distribution of the combined urban and rural samples into quartiles.¹ Age is also included as a categorical variable, divided between four age groups: age 25 and younger, ages 26–30, ages 31–35, and age 36 and older. The distribution of each of these variables in the urban and rural samples is shown in Table 2.

Multivariate Analyses

The multivariate analyses are based on OLS regression with robust standard errors. We first examined associations between demographic characteristics and DI Beliefs in the urban and rural samples separately (Table 2). Subsequently, we tested whether differences between average DI Beliefs scores in the urban and rural samples could be explained by differences in the demographic characteristics of the two samples (Table 3). The results of these analyses are discussed in the following section.

Results

The responses to our four series of questions pertaining to the connections between development and family attributes are summarized in Table 1. For each family attribute, (calculated separately for the urban and rural samples) we show the percentage who answered in the direction consistent with the tenets of developmental idealism, and for each attribute, we indicate whether magnitude differences between urban/rural responses are statistically significant. The distribution of the additive DI Beliefs scale scores is shown in Fig. 1. The mean scale score for the urban sample was 12.7, and for the rural sample it was slightly lower at 12.1. This difference is statistically significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level.

¹ Because the wealth quartile cutoff points are determined based on the distribution of expenditures across both samples, there is an uneven distribution of respondents across wealth quartiles within the urban and rural samples. Specifically, the rural respondents are grouped mostly in the two poorest quartiles (and there are no rural respondents in the richest quartile) and the urban respondents are grouped mostly in the top two quartiles. While this is not ideal for examining the associations between wealth and DI Beliefs within each of the samples, it is the only way to code wealth so that we can do a comparable analysis of the relationship of wealth with DI Beliefs in both the urban and rural samples.

Table 1 Percentage frequency of responses that accord with developmental idealism

	DI response	Urban	Rural	Sig. different?
Panel A: Association between development and family attributes				
Women marrying before age 18	“Not developed” countries	93	94	
Arranged marriage	“Not developed” countries	78	75	
Parents having many children	“Not developed” countries	95	92	**
Gender equality	“Developed” countries	67	63	
Giving respect to elders	“Not developed” countries	82	72	***
Panel B: Effects of development on family attributes				
Women marrying before age 18	Decrease	68	81	***
Arranged marriage	Decrease	79	79	
Parents having many children	Decrease	85	82	
Gender equality	Increase	78	73	*
Giving respect to elders	Decrease	70	57	***
Panel C: Effects of family change on development				
Fewer women marrying before age 18	Make Malawi richer	84	41	NC
Fewer arranged marriages	Make Malawi richer	88	56	NC
Parents having fewer children	Make Malawi richer	96	92	***
More gender equality	Make Malawi richer	86	89	*
More respect for elders	Make Malawi poorer	14	10	**
Panel D: Expectations about the future of families				
Women’s age at marriage	Increase	48	41	**
Arranged marriage	Decrease	86	73	***
Parents having many children	Decrease	67	–	NC
Gender equality	Increase	80	74	***
Giving respect to elders	Decrease	70	61	***

NC Not comparable because of wording differences between the urban and rural questionnaires. See text for explanation of the differences. The three non-comparable questions are omitted from the DI Beliefs scale. Chi square tests were used to test for significant differences between the urban and rural samples

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$

Associations Between Development and Family Attributes

We begin by examining respondent reports of the association between development and various family forms. Panel A of Table 1 shows that 93 % of urban respondents and 94 % of rural respondents report that women marry before the age of 18 more often in not developed countries than in developed countries. Also, 95 % of urban and 92 % of rural respondents reported that parents in “not developed” countries have more children. These findings are consistent with our expectations regarding the spread of DI messages about development and family size through numerous mechanisms, including family planning programs. Although, as we noted earlier, fertility remains relatively high, even as it is declining.

Approximately three-quarters of urban and rural respondents said that arranged marriage and respect for elders are more common in “not developed” countries and

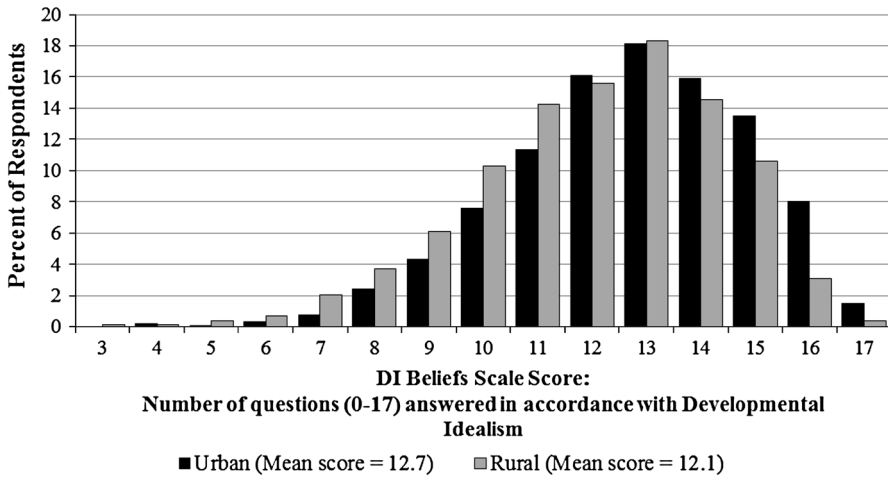


Fig. 1 Distribution of DI Beliefs scale scores

nearly two-thirds said that gender equality is more common in “developed” countries. These results indicate a high degree of familiarity with developmental idealism’s association between development on the one hand, and certain family forms on the other hand.

Causal Relationships Between Development and Family Attributes

Panel B of Table 1 shows results of the questions about the causal influence of development on family attributes. A great majority of respondents from both the urban and rural samples provided answers consistent with the developmental idealism model, saying that if Malawi becomes richer, fewer women will marry before the age of 18, fewer marriages will be arranged by parents, parents will have fewer children, there will be more gender equality, and respect for elders will decrease. More than 70 % of both samples provided the developmental idealism responses about the effects of development on arranged marriage, fertility, and gender equality. Reported understanding of the ideas that development will decrease the number of women marrying before age 18 and respect for elders are shared by 57–81 %. These results are consistent with the expectation that the ideas of development as a cause of family change have been widely disseminated among both rural and urban men participating in our study.

As reported in Panel C of Table 1, with a few exceptions, respondents also reported the opposite causal relationship. More than 80 % said that Malawi will become a richer country if fewer women marry before the age of 18, fewer people have arranged marriages, parents have fewer children, and there is more gender equality. These results support the expectation that beliefs about family change causing development are widely understood among our respondents.

Unfortunately, there were wording differences between the Panel C urban and rural questions about the effects of changes in age at marriage and arranged marriage on development, which we did not discover until after the data were collected. A later experiment suggests that these wording differences affected the results. We were alerted to a potential problem when an unusually large difference appeared between urban and rural answers to those questions; eighty-four percent of urban dwellers versus 41 % of the rural sample said that Malawi would become richer if early marriage decreased, and 88 % of the urban sample versus 55 % of rural respondents said Malawi would become richer if arranged marriages decreased. While differences between urban and rural dwellers were expected, these sharp contrasts seemed out of place, particularly since for the other questions in this series, the distributions of rural and urban answers were quite similar.

Upon further investigation, we discovered that these two questions had slightly different wordings in the urban and rural questionnaires. We then conducted a small survey experiment with 70 urban respondents who had participated in the main survey to examine whether this difference was due to question wording disparities or because of a real rural–urban difference in views of the effects of early and arranged marriages on Malawi’s wealth. This subsample was randomly assigned one version of the question set or the other; one-half were asked the version appearing in the original urban questionnaire, and the other half were administered the question set originally appearing in the rural version. Our experiment showed that for both questions, there was a statistically significant difference between distributions of responses to the two versions (data not shown in tables). With the question wording from the original urban questionnaire, 59 % said that Malawi will become richer if fewer women marry before age 18 and nearly 70 % said that Malawi will become richer if there are fewer arranged marriages. In response to the question as originally worded on the rural questionnaire, only one-third said that these two changes would result in Malawi becoming richer. This is an indication that the difference between the urban and rural responses to the questions about early and arranged marriages presented in Panel C of Table 1 is probably the result of differences in question wording, and does not reflect real rural–urban differences.

Note the distribution of responses to the question about the causal effect of an increase in respect for elders. In Panel B of Table 1, we saw that a majority of respondents said that people will give less respect to elders if Malawi becomes richer. In Panel C of Table 1, we see that respondents did not say that they expected the opposite causal pathway; only 10–14 % reported that increasing respect for elders will make Malawi poorer. So, while respondents may report seeing decreased respect for elders as a result of development, they do not report that showing less respect for elders will cause development.

Expectations for the Future of Malawian Families

Panel D of Table 1 presents respondents’ reports of expectations about the future of family change in Malawi. Developmental idealism posits that Malawians will expect their families to look more like the families of the U.S. and Western Europe in the future. With one exception, Malawians’ responses meet this expectation. Most

respondents said that gender equality will increase and arranged marriage, fertility, and respect for elders will decrease in the next 20 years. However, respondents are split on whether women's ages at marriage will increase or decrease in the future. Nonetheless, the expectation that most respondents believe that family change is moving away from traditionality and toward family forms associated with "developed" countries is generally supported by the data.

Influences on Developmental Idealism Beliefs

We now turn our attention to Table 2 and the influence of education, wealth, and age on developmental idealism beliefs concerning the association between development and family attributes. Recall that our dependent variable is a scale with a possible range of 0–17 consisting of the individual variables presented in Table 1 (excluding the non-comparable variables previously discussed). Table 2 presents the multivariate effects of education, wealth, and age on this scale for the urban and rural samples separately.

The most notable finding is that education has positive effects on beliefs in the association between development and family attributes. In particular, men in both the urban and rural samples who completed secondary school or higher score

Table 2 OLS regression of DI Beliefs (scale score 0–17) on demographic characteristics separate models for urban and rural samples

	Urban			Rural		
	Coefficient	Robust std. error	<i>n</i>	Coefficient	Robust std. error	<i>n</i>
0–4 Years of school	0.32	0.37	33	–0.07	0.18	299
<i>Ref group: 5–8 years of school</i>			169			379
9–11 Years of school	0.32	0.21	320	0.48*	0.22	125
12 or more years of school	1.22***	0.19	710	0.77**	0.26	72
<i>Ref group: poorest quartile</i>			90			428
2nd Wealth quartile	0.01	0.25	173	0.24	0.16	344
3rd Wealth quartile	0.06	0.24	424	0.65*	0.25	103
Richest wealth quartile	0.03	0.24	545	–	–	0
<i>Ref group: Age 25 and younger</i>			565			144
Ages 26–30	–0.12	0.15	359	0.25	0.24	287
Ages 31–35	0.03	0.17	258	0.42	0.23	231
Ages 36 and older	0.05	0.33	50	0.25	0.25	213
Constant	11.93***	0.26		11.54***	0.21	
<i>n</i>	1,232			875		

Models estimated using OLS regression. There are no respondents in the rural sample who fall into the richest quartile

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$

approximately 1 point higher on the DI Beliefs scale than those who had attended no more than 5–8 years of school. These data are, thus, consistent with the understanding that schools and educational attainment are important mechanisms for the transmission of beliefs associating development and certain family attributes.

The results for wealth are mixed. Among the urban men there are no statistically significant relationships between wealth and endorsement of developmental idealism beliefs. However, as hypothesized, there is a positive relationship between wealth and DI Beliefs among the rural men. The wealthiest men in the rural sample (who fall into the third wealth quartile) scored higher on the DI Beliefs scale than those in the poorest quartile, even controlling for education and age. This suggests that among rural men wealth provides access to ideas about developmental idealism.

We earlier presented two hypotheses about the effects of age on developmental idealism beliefs. One hypothesis suggests a positive effect that is the result of people gaining more knowledge of developmental models as they grow older. The second hypothesis predicted a negative effect of age that is produced by young people growing up during periods of dramatic social change and increased access to international messages associated with developmental idealism. The data in Table 2, however, reveal that age has no statistically significant relationship with DI Beliefs among either urban or rural men. Two alternative explanations could produce this result: neither effect of age is operating; nor both effects are operating, but in the opposite direction and canceling each other out. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to distinguish between these two possibilities.

Rural–Urban Differences

Table 3 presents multivariate regressions testing for differences in DI Beliefs between the urban and rural samples. Overall, as predicted, Model 1 shows that there is greater knowledge of DI Beliefs in the urban sample than the rural sample. However, the demographic composition of the urban and rural samples is quite different. Model 2 indicates that once we controlled for dissimilarities in education and wealth between the two samples, DI Beliefs no longer differed between urban and rural respondents. This means that the greater DI Beliefs knowledge among urban respondents is largely due to their greater access to education than their rural counterparts.

Conclusion

Our research was motivated by the hypothesis that developmental idealism has been spread worldwide. Developmental idealism is a cultural model suggesting, among other things, that modern families are both causes and effects of modern societies and that social change leading to increased prevalence of modern family forms and practices will be ubiquitous. We began our research with the expectation that these ideas have been widely disseminated in Malawi and that knowledge of the developmental cultural model is positively related to education, wealth, and urban residence.

Table 3 OLS regression of DI Beliefs (scale score 0–17) on demographic characteristics urban and rural samples combined

DI Beliefs scale score (0–17)	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coefficient	Robust std. error	Coefficient	Robust std. error
Urban	0.66***	0.10	–0.06	0.16
0–4 Years of school			–0.02	0.16
<i>Ref group: 5–8 years of school</i>				
9–11 Years of school			0.35*	0.15
12 or more years of school			1.13***	0.14
<i>Ref group: poorest quartile</i>				
2nd Wealth quartile			0.21	0.14
3rd Wealth quartile			0.34*	0.16
Richest wealth quartile			0.23	0.18
<i>Ref group: Age 25 and younger</i>				
Ages 26–30			–0.02	0.13
Ages 31–35			0.15	0.14
Ages 36 and older			0.05	0.18
Constant	12.08***	0.08	11.77***	0.15
<i>n</i>	2,107		2,107	

Models estimated using OLS regression

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$

Our data strongly support the expectation that the elements of developmental idealism studied here have been widely disseminated in our two research settings. With few exceptions, the vast majority of men in both settings report that there is an association between development and family attributes seen as modern, that development is a causal influence producing modern family change, and that modern family changes will make Malawi richer. Also, with few exceptions, the great majority report expectations that family change will be in the direction that developmental idealism defines as modern.

The largest exception is respect for the elders. Although the majority understands that in the developmental idealism framework respect for elders is associated with development, is caused by development, and will decline in the future, a majority also report that an increase in respect will increase Malawi's wealth. That is, they understand development to be a cause of declining respect for elders, but report that an increase in respect will increase wealth. This pattern of results is different from the results for number of children, gender equality, and arranged marriage. This may be affected by the fact that respect for elders has been a strong historical value in Malawi and there have been no efforts to decrease it or to argue that decreasing it would foster development. These data also indicate the sophistication of Malawian men in distinguishing between the two causal directions of development causing family change and family change causing development.

A second exception concerns expectations concerning future changes in female ages at marriage. Contrary to the developmental idealism hypothesis, the majority of respondents do not expect future increases in women's ages at marriage. Also, note that while the great majority of respondents endorse developmental idealism beliefs for most of our specific items, in most instances there is a non-trivial minority who do not endorse developmental idealism beliefs. These observations suggest that the messages of developmental idealism have not been disseminated uniformly or that some people reject those beliefs.

Unfortunately, our data do not tell us *when* the ideas of developmental idealism became widespread in Malawi. Developmental idealism may have been disseminated shortly before our surveys, but that seems unlikely. As we discussed earlier, access to Western ideas has been widespread in Malawi for a long time. Christian missionaries and British officials promoted aspects of developmental idealism, and even during the years between independence and multi-party elections, a period when outside influence was resisted, some development discourse reached Malawi. During the past two decades development programs and the dissemination of developmental idealism ideas have been vigorous. This suggests that awareness and understanding of developmental idealism has been expanding in Malawi for at least two decades and probably much longer.

The data also support our hypothesis that education facilitates the dissemination and understanding of beliefs about relationships between development and family life. The data, however, provide only weak and inconsistent support for the hypotheses that wealth and urban residence facilitate understanding of these beliefs. It is not surprising that, among the factors we examined, education is the strongest disseminator of developmental idealism because it is explicitly designed to spread information and ideas. We suggest that future research examine additional influences that were beyond the scope of our project such as gender, media exposure, and contact with development programs.

We recognize that answers to developmental idealism questions in a survey, like answers to all survey questions, can be influenced by the presence of the survey interviewers. It is possible that respondents understand that developmental idealism is widely endorsed among Malawian and international elites and believe that the interviewers also endorse it. Such understandings may produce a social desirability bias, motivating respondents to give the "correct" developmental answer to the interviewers so that they will appear to be modern. To the extent that these motivations are operating, our data may over-estimate actual endorsement of developmental idealism beliefs.

We do not know the extent to which answers to our questions are affected by presentation of self to the survey interviewers. However, our findings are important even if the reported support for developmental idealism beliefs is entirely a result of respondents knowing the ideas of developmental idealism and endorsing them because they want to be perceived as modern. The responses then would suggest that at least the respondents know the developmental idealism messages and recognize that they are considered to be socially desirable by others. Although we accept the possibility of social desirability effects among some respondents, we also believe that developmental idealism is both widely known and believed by many.

It is also important to note that our empirical data on respondents' views of the relationship between development and family life focused on the national or country level. That is, we asked people how they perceived the distribution of family attributes across developed and not developed countries, their perceptions of the effects of development on family change in Malawi, and their perceptions of the effects of family change on development in Malawi. Our questions about the future also asked about expectations for the country of Malawi in twenty years. We do not know from these questions how people would have answered similar questions about family life and development at the community, family, or individual levels. It is possible that people's perceptions of their own futures and the futures of their families and communities might be quite different from their perceptions of the country's future. Similarly, people might see the association between their own well-being and their family decisions to be quite different from the associations they see at the national level. Nevertheless, we believe that the associations and expectations that people have at the national level are important and are likely to have some relationship to more local perceptions.

Finally, we emphasize again that the data that we have presented in this paper deal with only two dimensions of developmental idealism: first, perceptions of the association between development and family life; and, second, perceptions of future family change. They do not indicate whether people like or dislike the attributes of family life they associate with development or whether they would like or dislike future increases in those attributes. It is possible that people understand that certain family attributes are associated with development, yet still prefer the family forms historically existing in the population.

Although our data are about beliefs and expectations, the results may have implications for values and preferences. As people associate developments with family attributes defined as modern and expect that society is moving toward modern family attributes, they may increase their support for these family attributes, and there could be changes in family behavior. Of course, at the same time, competing values inherited from Malawi's past and the forces exerted by social and economic structures would also be affecting the same behaviors. More research will be needed to understand how the beliefs and expectations examined in this paper relate to values and behavior.

Our research was motivated by country-wide interests, but the surveys that added our questions to them required an exclusive focus on men and excluded women. We expect that because women, in general, have less education than men and are less likely to work outside the home, they would have less exposure to developmental idealism beliefs; however, we expect that education and other exposure would affect their beliefs much as it does men's. Another limitation is that we only have data for men in one rural region and men in one urban area. This restricts our ability to generalize even to Malawi's national population of men. Nonetheless, we now know more about the response by ordinary people to developmental idealism than had been known before. We end by advocating more research on the extent to which developmental idealism has reached the grassroots in other countries in Africa, and elsewhere.

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