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Population Policy and National Development

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UDC: 323:312

ABSTRACT: While family planning is now very widely recognised as a basic human right, family planning programs have had limited success. It is time that a much broader approach to population problems is taken. This broader approach will involve each country developing its own population policy in the context of its national goals and its particular problems, and taking into account a wide range of economic, social and environmental factors. Family planning has to be seen as one of several means to the fundamental objective of improving the quality of life. In aiming at that objective, a government must formulate a coherent set of policies which take into account many factors — including education, labor force participation, and migration — that influence population events. Dr. Brown discusses several mechanisms besides family planning programs — tax incentives, for instance, and social legislation — which can influence population events; assesses the work begun in the United States and Latin America to develop population policies; and ends by regretting that so little attention has been paid to these issues in Canada.

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Address to the Western Hemisphere
Regional Council Meeting of the
International Planned Parenthood Federation
at Ottawa, May 7, 1972

POPULATION POLICY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The decade of the 1960's was a period of phenomenal growth of large-scale family planning programs in many countries, either through direct government support, or through large-scale non-governmental efforts of the International Planned Parenthood Federation and its affiliates. At the beginning of that decade only two developing countries had national programs. The pill and the intrauterine device were just being introduced; and family planning was a highly sensitive, often contentious, subject.

By 1972, at least 27 developing countries have official national family planning programs, and many others have large-scale non-governmental activity, usually with some direct or indirect government support. The UN, the World Bank and virtually all the major international development agencies have given highest priority to the world's population problem. Membership of the International Planned Parenthood Federation has spread to 79 countries. Family planning has been widely recognised to be a basic human right, and accepted as such throughout most of the world.

Yet the population problem remains with us, as acute as before. We can no longer be confident that the approaches we trumpeted in the 1960's will provide the solutions in the 1970's and beyond. The limited success of many national family planning programs has clearly shown that a narrow, simplistic approach to the population problem will fail to achieve, by itself, significant fertility declines.

The conventional family planning wisdom was first questioned five years ago by the eminent University of California sociologist, Kingsley Davis,⁽¹⁾ who maintained that family planning programs by themselves were unlikely to reduce population growth rates significantly, as most couples are motivated to have larger families than those necessary for replacement. Voluntary family planning programs, while permitting couples to avoid unwanted pregnancy, would have limited effect in stabilizing population growth rates at low levels. Davis called for a broader approach, including efforts to alter values and incentives through changes in social institutions, and an examination of economic, behavioral and educational factors in family formation.

Only recently, then, has there been a serious effort to examine population on a broad basis as a fundamental element in social and economic development, and an element that can be influenced by many variables in addition to voluntary family planning programs. Such broader concerns form the matrix of factors basic to the formation of population policy.

Population policy, in this discussion, refers to direct or indirect actions by governments to alter population events. Such actions may or may not have the desired impact. In many cases, in fact, policies affecting population change are ill-defined and inconsistent.

It is essential to remember, however, that every country does have a range of laws, administrative programs, public statements, and social services that in effect constitute policies even if their intentions are not explicitly aimed at population issues.

By now, we are familiar with the arguments questioning the ability of family planning programs to reduce fertility rates to zero growth levels. We are also familiar with the arguments for slowing down to zero population growth; I shall not pursue them here. Many of us are familiar with the dire prediction of the results of continued rates of world population growth and resource usage contained in the recently published simulation study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

(1) Davis, K. "Population Policy: Will Current Programs Succeed?", *Science*, Vol. 158, No. 3802, pp. 730-39.

entitled *The Limits to Growth*.⁽²⁾ However, I believe that a realistic approach to the achievement of reduced growth rates depends first on the adoption of intelligent national goals. It is to the national level of decision making that I shall address myself today.

REACTING TO CRISIS

Clearly, population policy cannot be unitary in nature, but rather a whole network of policies developed around politically accepted national growth goals, and constrained by the realities of implementation. Until now, nations have tended to set their population goals in the context of facing a particular and imminent crisis. In the developing countries it has been the crisis of excessive population growth nullifying economic development objectives. In the industrialised countries it has been the crisis of affluence fouling the environment. It is time we examined with greater care the nature of the problem, its causes and consequences. Only by improving the information input into the decision-making process will intelligent and effective policy become a reality.

Implicit in this strategy is that every region, every country, must develop its own population policy, in the context of its own problems, and its own national aspirations.

The range of considerations involved in formulation of population policies is vast. An incomplete listing would include the inter-relationship of population *growth* and *distribution* with the following variables:

1. economic development goals:
 - economic growth rates, at aggregate and per capita levels; industrial development; employment, particularly female employment; food production; regional economic disparities;
2. social development goals:
 - education, primary and beyond; social services and cultural attainment; health services; regional disparity in social services;

⁽²⁾ Meadows, Meadows et al. *The Limits to Growth*, Potomac Assoc., Washington, D.C. 1972.

3. environmental concerns:

- rate of utilisation of non-renewable resources; pollution of the environment.

In most of these areas the relationships are two-way. Government health policies result in decreased mortality, thereby increasing population growth, but also paving the way for greater acceptance of family planning in the future. Greater educational opportunities, especially for women, may result in greater acceptance of family planning; but adequate educational expansion is most difficult to achieve in the face of rapid population growth. Increased participation of women in the labor force undoubtedly results in decreased fertility, but is exceedingly difficult to achieve in agrarian societies, and in countries where overall unemployment is already high.

In all these areas there are difficult policy trade-offs to be made: greater governmental investment in social and health services are probably essential bases for the reduction of population growth rates. On the other hand, this means less capital for economic development, fewer opportunities for increased employment, and less rapid increase of per capita income.

THE FUNDAMENTAL GOAL

How does a government go about examining these extremely complex and difficult issues, with all the underlying political implications, and attempt to make these various trade-offs?

The first step must be in establishing fundamental objectives. Here it is essential for those of us in the family planning field to remember that the fundamental objective is to improve the quality of life of the people. Family planning is a means rather than an end.

But how is this achieved? Again, a series of compromises must be made. For example, some limitation in personal freedom of choice may be necessary to increase the quality of life of the community as a whole. Changes in cultural values and traditions will be necessary in the process of developing new values designed to improve the quality of life.

What population policy-makers must examine, then, are the various *means* to achieve this universal goal of improved quality of life, and the trade-offs among alternative means at hand.

The implementation of universal voluntary family planning programs is clearly the most obvious, most acceptable and perhaps one of the most effective means at hand. It works towards lowering population growth rates, without seriously limiting economic expansion. Of equal significance, family planning has clear and important implications for maternal and child welfare. However, changes are required in traditional cultural behavior patterns, and these changes may well be resisted to some extent in many societies. Government can accept family planning policies on health grounds, without committing themselves to an examination of wider population issues. While this justification for family planning is highly laudable, there is an inherent danger in that governments can be attacked for promoting "population control" in the guise of maternal and child welfare. Complete dependence on this justification for family planning can postpone the inevitable need to face population issues on a broader basis.

LAWS AND OTHER MECHANISMS

What are the other possible means at hand to influence demographic events? They include the following measures:

Expansion of information and education, including direct and indirect efforts to present population concerns to the people, to motivate and to encourage individual or collective action. These need to include a comprehensive plan for population education in schools; widespread public information on family planning techniques and services; and largescale use of educational workers. But, apart from informing individuals about family planning methods and available services, this approach has had limited effect to date. But then it has never been really vigorously applied.

Change in social institutions: Many aspects of social structure have significant effects on population change. These include recognition of the rights of the child and

the rights of women, including greater access to education and to work opportunities, changes in the institution of marriage and of marital roles. Very few attempts have been made to change these institutions as a specific element of population policy, although China is probably a major exception.

Legal mechanisms: Changes in the legal age for marriage and other aspects of marital status, divorce laws, and migration laws, as well as those laws governing the availability of contraception and abortion, are important mechanisms in changing social institutions, but externally rather than internally. Law and population has received increasing attention recently, and several examples of the effect of laws on population events have been demonstrated.

Also under the legal means could be grouped the more coercive measures, including compulsory fertility control. Clearly, such alternatives are presently totally unacceptable as they would diminish the "quality of life" by restricting individual freedom. But a time might come when other obstacles to the goal of improving or even maintaining the quality of life may become so great that this means will have to be considered.

Economic mechanisms: In the past a few countries such as France have attempted to increase fertility through economic incentive or "baby bonuses". The possibility of using various economic incentives instead to decrease fertility has been frequently suggested, but only recently tried, and then on a limited scale. Economic disincentives, through tax regulations or penalties, would be another means, but less acceptable because of their punitive nature. It should be noted that in many countries the prevailing tax structure, welfare system, and other economic policies do in effect have important implications on population, even though they were not established with this in mind.

I have focussed on the fertility aspects in each of these areas, but it should be emphasised that similar means can be applied to the other two elements in population change — mortality and migration. The latter has been the most neglected, and the economic and legal approaches to regulating or modifying internal and international migration are of particular importance.

Many of the possible means to modify population events may have other important effects on society. It is here that governments must examine population factors in the light of overall national objectives, and should take such factors into consideration in decision making. For instance, economic development programs that stimulate female employment might receive higher priority, both on economic and on demographic considerations.

MODELS FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES

Population policy formulation and implementation is clearly a difficult and sensitive process, and one greatly complicated by inadequate knowledge. There have, however, been a few significant efforts by several nations. The Government of Ghana's model population policy is an important step in developing an overall framework. In formulating this policy, the Ghanaians have related their country's population growth to national development, and in this context considered factors of internal and international migration, of education and of manpower needs while working out details of a national family planning program. Tunisia, India, and South Korea are among a few other countries adopting demographic measures other than family planning. Information from China and from Cuba indicates that important lessons are to be learned from their demographic experiences. In both countries, demographic change has been a consequence of both explicit and implicit policies.

In the past few months there have been some interesting developments in the area of population policy formation in the Western Hemisphere. These include the report of the US Commission on Population Growth and the American Future,⁽³⁾ and a proposed regional research project in Latin America.

The report of the US Commission summarises some two years of research. It has attempted to chart the course of American population growth towards the year 2000, to assess the impact of that growth on American society

(3) *Population and the American Future*, Report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future. Signet, New American Library, N.Y. 1972.

and its environment, and to examine appropriate means of implementing recommendations resulting from the research.

Within the constraints of protecting individual freedom while implementing policies, and enhancing the quality of life, a number of far-reaching recommendations were made. These concentrated on the need for enlightened social measures, so that Americans may have easier access to both the information and the means of controlling individual fertility. Included was a particularly controversial recommendation to legalise abortion services as well as to expand contraceptive and sterilisation services. Other recommendations dealt with the desirability of population distribution within the context of the existing American economic structure. At the same time, the study recognised the demographic consequences of alternative population growth goals. One particularly interesting aspect was the oblique approach taken to population growth goals. While population stabilisation was recommended, the level at which stabilisation should take place was intentionally not defined.

Even this exhaustive study is far from complete, and is acknowledged to be only the first step in a continuing review and debate on US population policy. It is not clear, for instance, whether some of the recommendations such as increased labor force participation of women would indeed reduce fertility rates in the United States in the same way as this factor may do so in developing countries. Another interesting implication, which was left unexamined, is the possibility that the present small birth cohort — the age-group of 0-10 years — in the United States will be relatively more affluent than its predecessors, and may therefore prefer larger families.

These points help to illustrate the uncertainties inherent in the formulation of policy recommendations. Nevertheless, an important start has been made by the report. Its objectives and method of approach can serve as a useful guide for other countries. The crucial question remains, however, to what degree will the recommendations be implemented by the US Government. President Nixon has already rejected the recommendation concerning abortion.

LEAD FROM LATIN AMERICA

Another particularly noteworthy development is the movement among leading academic and research institutions in a number of Latin American countries to embark upon a long-term program of population policy research on a regional basis. Several Latin American research institutions are cooperating in projects to define national and regional demographic problems, and the impact of population trends on economic and social development plans. In addition, they are undertaking research into alternative measures to influence population growth directly and indirectly in the direction of national goals and to experiment where possible with the cost and feasibility of the more important policy options. The long-range aim is to assist national decision-makers in the process of dealing with perceived population problems. This ambitious research program will be of great importance to Latin American leaders, as it will spell out the range of options open to them, as well as their implications and consequences. Of equal importance is the regional nature of the program, and the fact that it is entirely under the direction of Latin American researchers.

It would be a pleasure for me to say that concern about population policy issues is as well developed in Canada as in Latin America and the United States. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The Canadian Government has only recently recognised family planning information and services as a basic right for Canadians, and has begun to provide international assistance in population through the United Nations and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. The Government has not, however, begun to examine the broad range of policies affecting Canada's population or the impact of population on overall national goals.

Like every other country, Canada has unique features which require special attention: it is an immense country, with a low population density, yet most of the people live along the southern border, in or close to three large metropolitan areas. Thus population distribution is a key

issue. Canada has low birth and death rates, but unfortunately significant differences exist between communities in fertility and mortality rates. It has traditionally high levels of immigration. While the economic growth rate has been high, so also has been the rate of unemployment. The many problems of rapid urban growth have afflicted our cities. There has been rising concern about the deterioration of the quality of the environment.

An increasing number of scientists and concerned citizens have expressed the need for more clear-cut population policy in Canada, and the need for a stabilisation of population growth at some point. It is hoped that these issues will receive more attention in the near future and that Canada can join with other countries of the Western Hemisphere in developing suitable policy approaches to this crucial issue that confronts mankind.

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