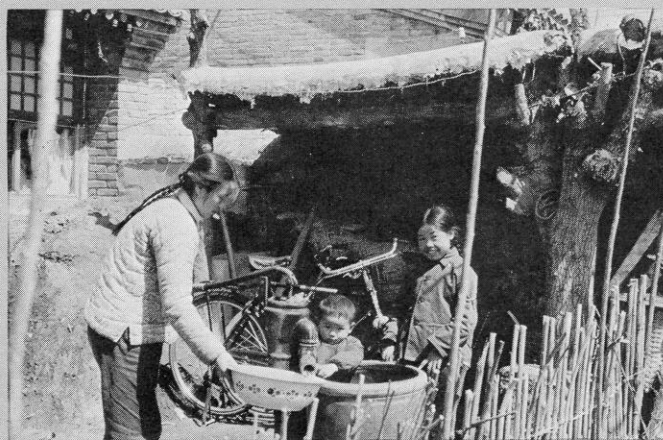


China - a matter of motivation



From the chaotic, underdeveloped and poor nation it was 27 years ago, China has emerged as a nation which can be proud of its achievements. Its birth planning program is one of these.

The IPPF, in its search for successful family welfare planning programs, has organized two tours of China in the recent past to study the Chinese experience at close quarters.

Contraceptives are now readily available in China at no cost, and the pill is dispensed without prescription. In the event of a contraceptive failure, a woman has convenient and safe abortion services at her disposal. The availability of such services depends to a large extent on the "barefoot doctor." This cadre of medical personnel perform yeoman service, especially in the rural sector. They are not only the distributors of conventional contraceptives but also the motivators for sterilization and the insertors of IUDs. This is just one aspect of their work, as they attend to other curative and preventive health care as well.

The Chinese do not practise population control in the strict sense of the word. Family planning is encouraged to enable men and women to work hard and contribute more to the National Development Program. Therefore every man and woman is "educated and motivated" to practise family planning and to have only two children.

The social benefits in old age, such as the guarantee of 70 percent of an individual's salary as pension, together with the assurance of food, clothing, housing, medical care and even a funeral, reduces the need for a big family. The minimum age for marriage in China is 18 for girls and 21 for boys, but the motivation to late marriage has brought the average age of marriage to 24 for women and 27 for men. The norm of a two child family is widely accepted and practised.

The implementation of policies in urban and rural China is decentralized via a series of organizational units. In

the countryside, the basic unit is the production team. Several teams are organized into a production brigade and several of these into a commune with anywhere from 10,000 to 60,000 members.

Population programs (as any other program) are implemented by means of consultation at all three levels. Suggested targets are transmitted to the base, where the production teams are free to draft their own local programs to meet them. Periodically, the leadership at all three levels must stand up at meetings to explain policy measures to the masses and also solicit their opinion.

Every year, the members of each production team, together with the cadres, discuss and decide upon how many babies should be born in the next five years and who is to bear them. Priority is given to newly-married couples, and those whose youngest child is closest to five years old. Adjustments are made throughout the year to accommodate unplanned pregnancies, temporarily separated couples, etc. It is the people at this level who are in the best position to make such decisions.

The state bears all costs relating to birth control and pays compensation for work-time or earnings lost when operations are undergone. For example, a tubal ligation entitles a patient to up to 28 days of recovery time with full pay and an induced abortion up to 30 days. Such payments are not in any way to be compared with the material incentives offered in other countries; they merely compensate for wages lost during hospitalization and recuperation.

Local educational and motivational work is carried out by committees on planned birth, and includes "political evening schools", film and slide shows, broadcasts, exhibitions and "cultural shows". They also arrange for medical personnel to explain contraceptive methods at local public meetings. The committees use all the institutionalized small groups to full advantage, and

since virtually everyone above school age belongs to some small group, no great organizational effort is needed to get the message across.

Another aspect of the Chinese program to change traditional values and practices is the effective use of propaganda. A good example is the campaign to "Criticize Confucius". Confucian beliefs support preference for male children ("A man without sons has no posterity"), large families ("A large family is a happy family") and the subjugation of women. Now the thoughts of Mao Tse-tung have replaced those of Confucius, and in workshops there are posters showing a woman holding a monkey wrench and captioned, "Times have changed. Men, women, the same".

How much of this could be achieved without the decentralized administrative apparatus — the revolutionary committee — which the Chinese have established at every level, is questionable. Every individual belongs to groups both where he lives and where he works, and these groups set goals for themselves and take responsibility for meeting these goals. The Chinese have thus eliminated a complex bureaucracy where decisions are handed down from above to be implemented below. Such bureaucracies plague many developing countries and discourage individuals from accepting responsibility. In China, however, responsibility and authority are delegated to the lowest possible level. Continual self-criticism and self-improvement have become a way of life and the general feeling is that, although they have come a long way, they still have a long way to go. □

This account of population policy in China was prepared for IDRC Reports by the Indian Ocean Regional Office of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. It is based on recent reports in IORO-IPPF's monthly magazine Future, which is supported by an IDRC grant.