

## Awards program gets young scientists involved

*Michelle Hibler, information officer with the IDRC's Publications Division, recently visited several Southeast Asian countries. The following articles deal with two pressing problems in the region – population and housing.*

With an expansive gesture Dr Kernial Sandhu synthesizes the Southeast Asia Population Research Award Program, of which he is chairman. "It's a way of spreading the good word around," he says, a spread that is both geographical and disciplinary.

Traditionally led by the medical profession, population research has tended to emphasize fertility control. Dr Sandhu sees this as one of the main reasons why population programs in Southeast Asia have not shown results in proportion to the money invested in them. And this imbalance, he explains, is one of the fundamental points of SEAPRAP, which seeks to involve young social scientists in the study of broader population issues.

The program also aims at correcting another imbalance – the dependance of Southeast Asia on population research undertaken by and in developed countries.

Bristling with coloured pins a wall map summarizes the first two years' achievements: 23 grants awarded to young researchers in five countries. There is a pattern to the pins. The reds studding Indonesia and the Philippines indicate a concentration of research on the psychological, social and economic factors affecting the national family planning programs. In Thailand, blues and greens show a greater interest in migration and urbanization issues and in the various factors affecting and affected by population growth.

Most of the research proposals are policy oriented, ranging in concern from the impact of rapid population growth on landlessness and rural poverty in Thailand to the influence of local leaders' attitudes on family planning services in Malaysia.

Meeting in Singapore in October to review the program's progress and plan its future, members of the SEAPRAP committee approved a further seven awards and formulated a publications policy that will encourage local publication, in the researcher's own language, of the research results.

Below, three awardees share some thoughts on their projects.



**'It does get a  
little complicated  
at times . . .'**

*Fong Kwok Yuen is Assistant Secretary in the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. When complete his research project – a micro-model of demographic-economic behaviour – will be the first such analysis in Malaysia.*

"The Second Malaysia Plan has among its objectives to raise income levels and increase employment for all Malaysians. It therefore becomes important for programs and policies, including population policies, to be related to these equity objectives.

"Essentially what we are trying to do is look at the household from the point of view of both production and consumption. Take the housewife for example. She could offer her services in the market, or she has the alternative of spending her time at home taking care of the children and producing what services could be required by the household. We think this kind of decision is a crucial factor in helping her to decide how many children she will have.

"Using data for 27,000 families, taken from the 1970 Post-Enumeration Survey, we are trying to look not only at the number of children she will have, but we are trying to relate that to whether she will use contraceptives. This in turn will be related to the educational variables, where the person lives, her income and her husband's income, and so forth.

"In Malaysia there is an explicit target to come at a two percent growth rate by 1985. We try to see if this target is feasible, and if it is not feasible, what are the problem areas. Is it a matter of acceptance? Or the types of services that we supply? Or is it a matter of non-family planning variables?

"The study is actually descriptive, it looks at the data to see what relationships can be discerned – but it can also have its uses in policy-making. If, for example, it is known that, by and large, the households with a large number of children are the poor households, then this might be construed as the need to supply better or cheaper family planning services.

"Or, as is the case now, you see income being inversely related to the number of children in the household. But the relationship, when it becomes more fully entangled, could very well show that, when you allow for education, income and the number of children are actually positively related and what is affecting it is education in the end.

"And so, if this is found to be true, it's kind of senseless to say that all you have to do is to take care of the people – give them higher levels of income – and the population problem will take care of itself.

"It might seem pretty simple to go ahead with a project like this, but actually when you look at the multiplicity of relationships that could exist – trying to find the chicken-and-egg sort of relationship – it does get a little complicated at times."



**'You can't go door to door and say: buy this . . . '**

*Mrs Pavala Gopinathan, a social worker, has worked with the Tamil-speaking community in Singapore for five years. Her study of 'Intervention intensity and family planning behaviour' was prompted by the apparent inability of the family planning program to reach this group of families.*

"If I had my way I would do what I can for all 80 families that I am studying, but I have to turn my back on one group because what I am trying to prove is what happens to families when you intervene and what happens when you don't at all.

"I have three groups. The families that have intensive intervention, they have help from me in all the smallest areas because I realize that getting them to organize their days wouldn't make it so difficult to think about going to the family planning clinic. In every area I would sort of be on their backs telling them what to do, taking them by the hand. In the medium intervention what I do with the women is I say 'Too bad. Now what can you do?' And I tell her where she can go for help, but I don't go with her.

"The third group, I leave them alone. I don't even tell them to think about their problems.

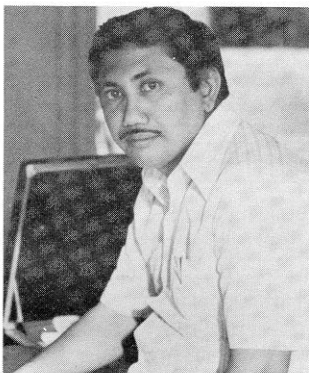
"I feel family planning is a very personal matter. You can't go door to door and say 'Buy this'. So they buy it, just like they would buy a box of soap – to get rid of you – then they chuck it. And all the statistics say they're acceptors.

"When you talk about acceptance, about the two children, who are the two children families? It's not these low income people. You find it's very difficult to reach these people. The disincentive measures have no effect on them because they don't look at it as something that's supposed to help them. Some of them believe that children is the only thing they have control over. It's very subjective reactions than can only be dealt with at the personal level. And that's what I'm trying to prove. And I am going to make my point because I can see results even now: families that I help respond, families that I don't help just carry on as before.

"What they need is someone to explain to them. But no one goes out to explain unless they go to the clinic or the nurse is doing her rounds, but even then, half the time she doesn't speak Tamil. And she doesn't know how to approach these people. The doctor can't, he deals with it solely as a medical problem and it's a social problem, a personal one.

"Even with me it's not easy. I build up a relationship with them over a long period – I call it a relationship from the door to the kitchen. By the time I reach the kitchen I'm ready to talk to them about family planning because I have shown them that I care about more than just limiting their family. And this is another thing I want: to create in social workers an awareness about family planning.

"Maybe not every family in Singapore can get what I'm trying to do, but if only they were given more help I could quite safely say that 100 percent of my families would be acceptors."



**'The ideal number of children was five or six . . . '**

*An economist, Drs. Agus Salim is director of demographic research at the Universitas Syiah Kuala in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. He is presently compiling the results of the fertility and KP (demographer's jargon for knowledge and practice) family planning survey he conducted in three isolated Aceh villages.*

"The family planning program in Aceh started in April 1974 but most of the people do not know about it. I want to show to the people here about our fertility and KP of family planning, so I chose the three village types in the district of Aceh Utara – a farming village, a fishing village and a mixed village.

"I used 10 interviewers, all female students. We started in June to go to Lho' Seumawe which is a mixed village. At first the people were scared of us, but after we asked the head of the village to accompany us to interview, they accepted us. We asked questions about fertility, mar-

riage and divorce, family planning, mortality and about variables such as food consumption, occupation, contact with others. In all we took 15 days in the field.

"In the fishing village most of the people did not agree with the program, and in fact, 100 percent of them never used contraception.

"According to the villagers, it is contrary to the Islamic religion. The data shows it is because of bad communications: they never read the newspaper or magazine, and because of the low social condition they have no radio so they did not know the information. When we asked them 'what about the future?', 26 percent answered that they will use contraception now that they had heard about it from us.

"In the farming village 50-50 had heard about the program and 50-50 too, agreed. In the mixed village about 72 percent had heard.

"We found a paradox in the field: even if they agreed with the program, the ideal number of children was more than five or six. I don't know why, but maybe they still do not understand about the meaning of the program.

"Some of the people in Aceh think that a family planning program is not necessary yet because the population is only two million and the annual growth rate is only 2.1 percent. I think we have to start from now to make the rate of growth still lower.

"Because of the development of education some of the young people come to the city from the countryside and after they finish their studies, the demand for them is little. Unemployment is a problem at this time. So how will it be in the future if the rate of growth of the population does not lessen or stay at two percent?"