

TOPIC 8

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROBLEMS

Scope

It is impossible to generalize about problems of population on the continental or international levels. The wide divergence in population density and growth, and in the level of resources available within a country, preclude a common attitude toward demographic increase. In addition adequate demographic data is not available. Reliable demographic data and analysis are required as a basis for planning in all developing countries.

Guidelines

Most population studies focus on the subjects of natality, mortality, migration, and resultant growth, which is then related to production and consumption. The environment, both the physical and cultural setting, influences elements of population growth, yet there have been few studies in which the effect of the environment on population is considered. Such consideration should be part of any study, plan, or policy on population.

In addition to growth, environmental factors are often responsible for the distribution and density of population. These factors cause some areas to remain unsettled while others are overpopulated. In the overpopulated areas, environmental degradation results when the capacity of the land to support the human and animal population is exceeded.

The natural productivity of marginal lands in the tropics and subtropics often exceeds the yields presently obtained from using these lands for cultivation or animal husbandry. An adequate survey of arable lands and the natural productivity of the various biomes for all the developing world are required. A program should be instituted to encourage the settlement of those fertile areas now unoccupied or sparsely occupied for social, historical, or traditional reasons.

The present technology used to cultivate various areas is inadequate, often nearly primitive, and does not reflect the potential productive capacity of the land. More advanced technology would provide substantially increased yields which could support an increased number of people.

Since population densities in developing areas vary considerably, some countries consider growth to be an asset to development. These countries are generally in their initial stages of development and settlement. Adequate population density is a prerequisite for developing natural resources and endowments, but those countries which have reached a more advanced

developmental stage regard population growth as a hindrance to raising living standards and developing the economy.

Individual countries must undertake further research to discover whether population growth can be a hindrance or an asset to development. In this task, low density areas should take note of man's role as a producer as well as his role as consumer since an equilibrium between these two functions has always been an important goal of development.

Developing countries need to explore and evaluate their natural resources. They should also be encouraged to diversify their economic resources and supplement them with some measure of industrialization. Malnutrition, inadequate health and sanitary facilities, and illiteracy, as well as certain social factors, are the real causes of poverty and backwardness. The developing countries should be helped to increase the life expectancy of their population and the productivity of their manpower. Modern technology is needed to increase the skills of the population. These measures go hand in hand with increasing the capability of the land to sustain a better-fed, better-equipped, and more productive population.

Research

Research is needed in the following areas in order to deal effectively with demographic problems.

- (1) Detailed and comprehensive demographic studies for Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania.
- (2) Surveys of arable land and evaluation of that land's capability of sustaining the needs of the population.
- (3) Methods of raising the productivity of manpower in developing countries by better education, training, and health and sanitation services.
- (4) With full respect for the sovereignty of the various countries and in accordance with the wishes of their people, information on the problems of population should be exchanged internationally.
- (5) Studies of population patterns and dynamics in relation to patterns and rates of development.
- (6) Studies of social and cultural traditions in harmony with population and demographic policies.