

Views and Ideas

The section *views and ideas* is intended for short contributions, within the scope of the journal, which are not research papers or fullbodied review articles. This may be brief reports on current trends, ideas for research topics, critical notes, discussions of published works (other than book reviews), background information to understanding problems in the relationship between agriculture and environment, etc. Submission of manuscripts by readers of the journal is welcomed. The editors of this section are F. de Soet, A.H. Dorresteyn and A.A. Manten.

WORLD POPULATION CONFERENCE: A PERSPECTIVE

Representatives of nearly all World Governments assembled during the last 2 weeks of August, 1974, in Bucharest, Rumania, to resolve the problem of population, and its attendant effects on widespread hunger, deteriorating environment and cycle of poverty and misery in the Third World. Despite the preliminary planning, a heated debate emerged as several countries behaved from reasons of national pride and ideology rather than concern for the world's poor and the hungry.

The conference resulted in the usual U.N. split between developed countries, Communist Nations (centrally planned economies in the jargon of the United Nations) and developing Nations. The main concern of the Western countries was on curbing population, Communist Nations on political changes and redistribution of resources, and the developing countries on social and economic development.

Most developing countries rejected the suggestion that they had a population problem. The problem, as they viewed it, was not of population but a need for development to feed, clothe, house and educate their people. A conflict emerged among developing nations as some, mainly Asian countries, argued population growth is exacting heavy economic and social tolls, but urged developed nations to curb overconsumption.

China denounced the population policies that she herself is known to strictly practice at home. Huang Shu-tse, Deputy Minister of Health for China, dismissed population control as an imperialist plot. He unilaterally declared that "the large population of the Third World is an important condition for the fight against imperialism". Poverty and misery in the world were the result of exploitation by the superpowers, the U.S.S.R. and the United States. China denied that she had shortages of food and resources. Man is first a "produced and then a consumer". As Marxists, the Chinese profess to believe that human beings are the most precious form of capital and the idea of overpopulation is virtually self-contradictory. A pair of hands is regarded as a

guarantee of subsistence for more than one person: "The creative power of people is unlimited".

There are many countries which feel under pressure to breed competitively for military, cultural, and other considerations. North Korea is trying to catch up South Korea. Its speech was an attack on the policies of the government south of its border, and had very little to do with population. Brazil has a strong pronatalist policy, based on the government's belief that such a growth and attendant development will establish the country's position as a world power and confirm its dominance in Latin America, an attitude which is already having uneasy repercussions in neighbouring countries. The prospect of more than 200 million Brazilians by the end of this century poses a threat to the Argentines. If Argentina's population continues to grow at the present rate of 1.56%/year, its population will only be some 35 million by the year 2000. Argentina, the undisputed leader of Latin America until 1950, could become a mere appendage of its rival. They also fear that as the world population rises, overcrowded nations will begin to lust after the vast empty spaces of their country, which is nearly as big as India, but has a population of only 25 million. The late President Peron's stated target was 50 million Argentines by the end of the century.

Some sub-national groups also feel under pressure to breed competitively. In Rhodesia and South Africa, the whites, threatened by the high coloured birth rates, are striving to increase their own numbers. Black militants in the United States promote large families and denounce even models of family planning for their group. French Canadians are encouraging larger families because they feel they are an ethnic minority, and they will lose their "special" identity unless their number increases significantly.

Many countries at the conference maintained they needed increased human resources for development. Most East European countries offer economic incentives for more children in order to prevent an impending labour shortage. Various delegations from Latin America, Africa and East Europe argued that uncontrolled birth rates in the underdeveloped world could be countered by aid, capital investments and technology provided by the rich nations to the poor. The developing countries were keen to point out the overconsumption of developed countries and the exploitation of the resources of developing countries. They called for the establishment of a new international economic order, which will provide them with the just share of the economic cake, and rejected birth control advanced by the Western countries "to keep poor people in smaller numbers". A new international economic order, which was first suggested at the Sixth U.N. General Assembly, should establish a correct ratio between prices of manufactured goods and raw materials, thus favouring the economic development of poor countries.

The consensus solution from Bucharest was to improve social and economic development. Fertility would then naturally decline as evidenced by the historical examples of industrializing Europe. The world was left to hope families would stop having many children when they had reached a decent

standard of living. Birth control was more or less dismissed. Despite the U.N. projections (Table I) that the developing world will add 90% of the increase in population to the year 2000, many developing nations were unwilling to accept responsibility for overpopulation and consequent hunger. Affluent nations were depicted as having major obligations to accelerate their socio-economic development through direct financial and technical assistance, which will eventually contribute to population stabilization.

TABLE I

Estimated growth of world population in different regions (source — United Nations)

Region	Population in millions		% increase
	1972	2000 (estimated)	
Africa	364	834	129
Latin America	300	625	108
Asia	2 154	3 757	74
Oceania	20	33	65
Russia	248	321	29
North America	233	296	27
Europe	469	540	15

An examination of the arguments reveals there is a remarkably close correlation between the levels of national economic development and current rates of population growth. Almost all countries with per capita annual incomes above the \$600—800 range show population increases of 0—1.5% a year, while in the less developed countries, population is generally growing at 2—4% per annum. The present world distribution of birth rates is so closely related to development status that the birthrate itself can be used to categorize a country as developing or developed. With few exceptions, developing countries have birthrates above 30 per thousand, while developed countries have birthrates well below 30 per thousand. (The 1973 population of the 25 most populated countries of the world, and years necessary for the doubling of the population at the present growth rate, are shown in Table II). The developed countries have accomplished the classic demographic transition to low death rates and low birth rates. Then the question may be legitimately asked as to why the poorer nations cannot simply follow their example by concentrating on development which will contribute to a levelling off of the population growth of its own accord?

The European experience, for many reasons, is not an advisable model for the developing countries to adopt. Mortality declines in the developing countries have been more dramatic and related to the importation of medical technology and implementation of health measures rather than economic development. In Europe, these techniques to prolong life were developed gradually and

TABLE II

The population of the 25 most populated countries of the world, and the doubling time assuming the 1972 rate of increase (source — U.S. Census Bureau)

Rank	Country	Population 1973	Doubling time (years)
1	China	792 677 000	41
2	India	596 000 000	32
3	U.S.S.R.	248 626 000	77
4	United States	209 123 000	116
5	Indonesia	128 121 000	26
6	Japan	106 663 000	53
7	Brazil	101 582 000	25
8	Bangladesh	75 382 000	26
9	Pakistan	64 461 000	24
10	Federal Republic of Germany	61 806 000	*
11	Nigeria	58 148 000	29
12	United Kingdom	55 956 000	231
13	Mexico	54 963 000	20
14	Italy	54 642 000	116
15	France	51 921 000	116
16	The Philippines	41 288 000	22
17	Thailand	39 075 000	25
18	Turkey	37 737 000	27
19	Egypt	34 705 000	32
20	Spain	34 675 000	63
21	Korea	33 435 000	35
22	Poland	33 202 000	77
23	Iran	32 778 000	22
24	Burma	29 213 000	30
25	Ethiopia	26 947 000	27

*No increase in 1972.

mortality rates declined slowly. Industrializing Europe was characterized by a pattern of late marriages and non-marriages, while developing countries, almost universally, are characterized by early marriages. Some developing countries are currently experiencing growth rates approaching 3.5%, almost twice as great as the highest experienced during Europe's most rapid growth. The population growth of the last four decades in developing countries is without historical precedent. Therefore, developing countries cannot afford the time lag between economic development and actual fertility reduction.

In addition, rapid population growth is in itself a serious impediment to the economic and social progress these countries are attempting to attain. It results in higher demands for government budgets for basic facilities such as health care, houses, education, transportation and other services. Since past experience in developing countries show that it is difficult to expand food production to match the increasing needs, rapid population growth imposes new burdens on the

balance of payments problems. With large families, land tends to be further fractionized, usually resulting in lower productivity. In large families, little income is saved for investment capital. High fertility rates create a disproportionately young population. With half their populations under the age of 15, many countries today have a low fraction of the total population engaged in productive capacities. For most countries, reduction in the population growth rates emerges as a major action necessary to effect social and economic development.

No one will disagree that socio-economic development could and should play a major part to reduce the population explosion. In many societies, such as Egypt, Indonesia or India, children are still the only insurance against starvation in old age. High infant mortality makes it necessary to have several children to insure the survival of at least one or two sons. Under such circumstances, improved health services to decrease infant mortality eventually results in lower birth rates. In addition, since the developing countries have a predominantly agricultural base, children are distinct assets so far as field work is concerned. There is therefore, a strong economic incentive in having large families.

In India, the first developing country to introduce family planning in a major way, the clinical approach alone has not solved the problem. Currently, India adds about a million a month to its population. In addition to the socio-economic factors discussed, Indian culture values fertility and has a tradition of early marriage. In any society, as long as women's economic and social status depends largely upon the number of children they bear, fertility rates will be high. Women will have to receive equal education and wider employment opportunities.

Nations, in addition to providing family planning services, will have to effect improvement in health, nutrition, income, social justice, old age security, basic education, and the status of women. The establishment of an appropriate lower age limit for marriage would also be desirable. As John D. Rockefeller III, stated at Bucharest, "population policy must be placed solidly in the context of general economic and social development".

Overconsumption in developed countries must be curtailed. It has been estimated that an average person in the United States consumes in one year natural resources equal to an Indian's lifetime basic requirements. Similar statistics are also valid for Canada and several other Western nations.

For the first time in human history, there are serious questions, whether global capacity for supplying food, fresh water, energy and other essential raw materials for an ever-increasing population, demanding ever-higher standards of living, or the capacity of the biosphere to absorb waste products at an unprecedented rate, may be approaching ultimate limits within the coming generations. Millions already die routinely of starvation in the Third World. For these unfortunate people, doomsday is not only here but may already have passed. Food reserves available for emergencies are now down to

only 27 days of world consumption. In the Third World, the population increase has approximately absorbed, and in some cases exceeded, the agricultural gains achieved by the Green Revolution in the Sixties. For example, Mexico now has started to import rather than export food. The benefits that accrued to Mexico due to the Green Revolution have already been wiped out by a 3.4% rate of population growth. The high-yield grains that made the increased production of the Green Revolution possible are heavily dependent on generous use of fertilizer now scarce and costly. An impending pesticide shortage will add to the increasing scarcity of food.

Some have argued that the provision of food to the malnourished nations of the world, who cannot, or will not take substantial measures to control their own reproductive rate is inhuman, immoral and irresponsible, because it creates a vicious cycle that compounds and perpetuates human suffering.

Dr Norman Borloug, Nobel Peace Laureate has warned that the Green Revolution has only delayed the world food crisis by 30 years. "If the world population continues to increase at the same rate we will destroy the species." The developed world is presently growing by 1% a year, which means its population will double in approx. 70 years. In contrast, the developing world, growing at 2.4%, will double every 29 years. According to projections prepared by the United Nations, more than 90% of the increase in population to be anticipated by 2000 will be contributed by the less developed nations, even though a large reduction in fertility in these countries is expected in the next 25 years. Even if all people limited their families to two children from now on, the growing number of people reaching reproductive age would result in continuing population increase. It would take approx. 70 years for the population to stabilize. Barring unforeseen catastrophies, world population is now destined to reach 6.5 to 7×10^9 people by the year 2000, with the inevitability of more to come.

Confronted by these grave realities, the diplomats at Bucharest continued to reject any urgent international action. The American proposal at Bucharest that overpopulated countries implement policies to reduce families to an average of two children by 1985 was resoundingly rejected. No deadlines, said the diplomats; they interfere with national sovereignty. Redistribute wealth, resources and technology to usher in an era of new international economic order without simultaneously curtailing the addition of undernourished millions. Carried by the rhetoric, no serious discussion evolved as to where the investment capital is going to come from which will facilitate the development process of the less developed countries. The developed countries have far to go to meet even the suggested aid contributions of the Pearson Committee. High energy prices and rampant inflation in developed countries are significantly contributing to the development of isolationism syndrome. Much of the limited aids that are being currently available are not reaching the people for whom it is intended due to corruption and inefficiency. Under these circumstances, there does not seem to be much hope for the world to expect development to reduce population growth in the foreseeable future.

If the concensus was so unrealistic, what was the purpose of the conference? The delegates did gain an awareness of each others problems and sincerity of respective beliefs. 10 years ago, the United Nations would not acknowledge the existence of a population problem, but at least it does today. The Conferences' final Plan of Action affirmed that it is the duty of all governments to provide all citizens who desire it with birth control information and contraceptives, The fact that family planning facilities currently available are inadequate is substantiated by the number of abortions. According to the surveys of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, one out of every three pregnancies terminates in abortion.

The conference is over, but the problem remains with us. With the growing interdependence in food production, availability of energy and raw materials, the future of mankind is a single one. Our resources, which are not only finite but shrinking on per capita basis, must support 80 million people more each year. The decision for a couple to have a child is no longer a personal decision, but one with global implications at present and in the future. If man does not act to limit his numbers, nature will do it for him, in a manner that may not be best for mankind.

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AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES IN BRITAIN

When in time past nomadic tribes transformed themselves into settled people, typical agrarian landscapes took over from the wilderness of lands that had previously existed. Agrarian landscapes are by no means stable. Changes in the methods of crop cultivation and livestock husbandry have taken place throughout the history of settled populations with a resultant effect on the appearance of rural land.