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Annex: Age Structure of Populations in Selected Regions of the  
World - 1969



## The problem

The population of the world is over 3,900 million now. It is growing at a rate of more than two people per second, that is at over 2% per year. By the year 2000 - within 23 years and within the lifetime of many of us - the population of the world could have increased by over 2,500 million - equivalent to about 250 cities the size of Tokyo in Japan. It may have doubled within 35 years. Population growth by itself would be unimportant if the available resources of the world were adequately distributed and sufficient. They are not. Their availability and sufficiency differ between developed and less developed countries who are, in many cases, particularly poorly supplied with food and other essential resources.

Less developed countries - as defined by the United Nations - accounted for 63 per cent of the world population in 1930. Those countries grew more quickly than the developed countries. Seventy-eight per cent of the world's population growth between 1930 and 1950, 80 per cent between 1950 and 1970, took place in less developed countries. As much as 88 per cent may occur there between 1970 and 1990.

One commentator Vittachi has written:

"to cope with the population increase, India needs to build 1000 new school rooms every day from now on for the next 20 years, one thousand new hospital wards every day from now on for the next 20 years, and ten thousand houses every day from now on for the next 20 years."

Figure 1 shows long range population projections prepared by the United Nations. Smooth transitions from the present growth rate to zero growth are assumed. 'Medium' assumptions made in the 1970 projections about the rate of decline in fertility levels imply that the populations of all developed countries will reach a peak only towards the end of the next century. Taking other assumptions about the fertility levels' rate of decline - represented by the 'high' and 'low' curves in the figure - suggests that the stable populations of less developed countries may be between 8 billion and 14 billion - that is between twice and 3½ times the total world population now. With 'constant' increase (see figure 1) the population of developing countries would reach 6 billion by about 2000 - 1½ times total current world population.

Fig. 1

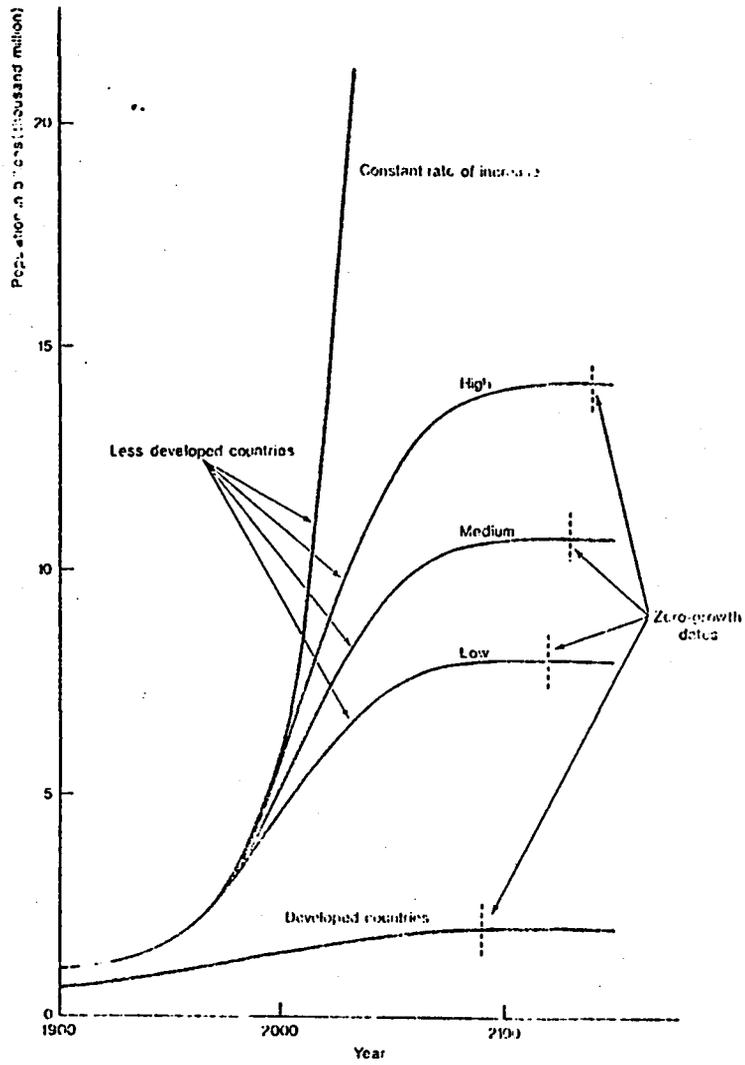


FIGURE 1

But as a UK Cabinet Office discussion paper "Future World Trends" suggests:

"Continued rapid population growth in the immediate future is inevitable. Even if fertility rates were to be reduced to replacement level now, the existing age structure of the world's population would ensure continuing growth for another two generations. It is this fact which accounts for the long-term sensitivity of total population to stabilisation date."

Not only are there differences in growth rates, patterns of fertility and age structures between the less developed and developed countries, differences also exist between different parts of the developed and less developed worlds<sup>1</sup>. Important differences also exist in cultural, religious and social attitudes towards families and family life. But most commentators agree that world population is growing too fast in view of the difficulty of exploiting and distributing the world's available resources. As Mesarovic and Pestel warn<sup>2</sup>:

"Whether or not to embark on organic growth is a question of mankind's very survival and delays in acknowledging this are life-and-death issues. Nowhere else can this be seen so clearly as in the dilemma involved in population growth."

#### Demographic policy: past experience

'The population problem' differs in size, form and order between regions of the world - and indeed between individual countries. Policies should therefore take account of these differences.

Are there any lessons from the past? Advances in medical sciences and their application worldwide - one example of the transfer of technology, and a contributory factor in the startling increases in population growth (through reducing mortality rates at all ages) - have had some unexpected effects, such as increasing the demand by women for work, by reducing the relative age span in which women have been bound to the family.

Secondly, policy making in almost all countries of the world has had rather limited time horizons. Population policies embarked on vigorously now may only begin to have effect in 20 or more years time.

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<sup>1</sup>See Annex 1 which shows the 1969 age structure of populations in selected regions of the world.

<sup>2</sup>"Mankind at the Turning Point: The Second Report to the Club of Rome"

Thirdly, population policies are ineffective if unaccompanied by complementary development and social policies.

Fourthly, the debate has become unnecessarily contentious; it is a sensitive issue because it enters the domain of the individual's "private life" and because it appears to be a particular problem of the less developed world, some of whose representatives have argued that economic development is the only solution. It is not realised widely enough that the developed world is about to have a similarly serious population problem caused by the ageing structure of populations.

Fifthly, some countries in a critical stage of economic development have recommended increasing population growth rates to take account of the increasing demand for labour in the future, without recognising that in all cases current growth rates will more than provide for this extra demand.

"High population growth rates", as a World Bank Staff Reports states<sup>1</sup>, "impose a cost on society by slowing down the growth per capita income and especially by impeding efforts to improve income distribution. There is a conflict between raising the living standards of the existing population, particularly those of the poorest 40 per cent, and accommodating new entrants to the population."

Sixthly, the problem is only likely to be resolved successfully by changing personal and social attitudes towards fertility - which is dependent in part on improving living conditions, the availability of food, water, communications, increased literacy, increased employment. The way this is done is likely to be critical - as the results in the recent election in India have shown.

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<sup>1</sup>"Population Policies and Economic Development" (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore) 1974

## Demographic policy: the future

The World Population Plan of Action adopted at the 1974 Bucharest Conference under the auspices of the United Nations not only focused world attention on the seriousness of the issue, but also brought about broad measures of agreement on steps to be taken. The Plan recognised the right of couples freely and responsibly to determine the number and spacing of their children, and to have information, education and means to do so. Recognition that a smooth transition to zero population growth could only be achieved by a sustained effort "to promote and win acceptance for the goal of small family sizes and to make available to the populations of the developing countries the services which will allow them to achieve their goals<sup>1</sup>.

Determinants of fertility as the World Bank report suggests included age and incidence of marriage, desired family size and social norms on family size. Family planning programmes have had some success in affecting the last two, but only long term and sustained efforts to inform and educate may change the first two with any noticeable effect on population growth. But what is needed is continued pressure on the countries of the world to pursue programmes, to change the style of programmes which are meeting public opposition, but to continue. Family planning information should be more widely available, and funding of such programmes should be increased. Careful and regular monitoring of such programmes should be made and the results publicised and widely circulated. Technical aids in monitoring should be improved - such as improved and inexpensive population estimation techniques. And cooperative world wide efforts and exchanges of information through the United Nations should be promoted.

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<sup>1</sup>UK Cabinet Office "Future World Trends"



Age Structure of Populations in Selected Regions of the World - 1969

Chart 3

AGE STRUCTURE OF POPULATION IN SELECTED REGIONS

