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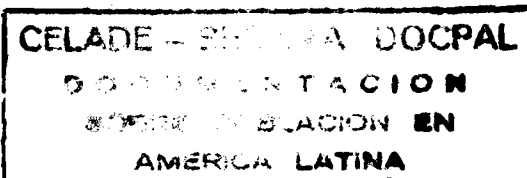
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POPULATION POLICIES: PAST AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES*

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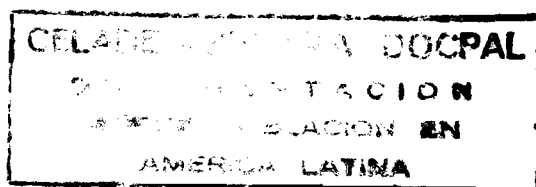
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1. The purpose of these reflections

At first glance, it would seem totally unnecessary to define "population policies." However, the least attempt to achieve a consensus about the meaning of the term would soon show that it covers a variety of concepts in the public sector expressed in positions, legislation and specific actions supposedly designed to modify population dynamics.

Long before the 1974 World Population Conference in Bucharest, the event that brought governments to recognize the usefulness of acting on demographic issues, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean had already enacted laws or taken other measures to regulate aspects of the population question, such as stimulating population growth and immigration, restricting emigration and opposing contraceptives, among others (Eldridge, 1954).

Conferences held in the region in 1965 and 1967 also recommended that the countries adopt "population policies", a term whose definition anticipated the focus later adopted in the World Population Plan of Action, approved in Bucharest. By that time, family planning programmes —mainly private, but obviously tolerated by the government— were already functioning in most of the countries of the region. Even though they were legitimated as maternal and child health care, they affected the fertility levels of the populations where they existed.

In one session of the 1970 Latin American Regional Conference on Population, 25 papers on population policies were examined, along with the document distributed by the organizer of the session and a summary of the papers prepared by the rapporteur. Despite the fact that at the time the Dominican Republic and three English-speaking Caribbean countries were trying to reduce fertility rates, the organizer, referring to the region as a whole, pointed out that "...up to now, no country has attempted to apply at the national level a combination of instruments that would comprise a population policy" (El Colegio de México, 1972, p. 262). Even though the session was not designed to arrive at recommendations in this regard, the discussion revealed a lack of basic agreement about how the Latin American countries and their governments should proceed with respect to this hitherto controversial field.

From 1974 onward, there has been a plethora of laws and programmes in the region expressly designed to modify population dynamics to bring them into harmony with economic and social development. From that time, also, the term "population policy" began to be applied to the most varied situations and actions,¹ a fact which in 1992, 18 years after the adoption of the World Population Plan of Action, creates tremendous confusion in this field.

There is a real need, therefore, to ask what is the authentic meaning that should be given to the concept of "population policy". That is the purpose of these reflections.

It is generally accepted in political science that the formulation of a public policy involves defining one or several goals to be pursued, determining a period of time in which they should be achieved, and identifying the instruments with which to attain them, at least partially. Goals are normally expressed in quantitative terms; time periods set deadlines for the partial or total achievement of the goals, and together with the specification of the instruments to be used, they are expressed in laws or simply administrative regulations which ultimately guide the actions of the public officials who execute or oversee the implementation of a specific policy. These officials work in different departments of public administration.²

Taking these characteristics into account, we propose here to define what is meant by "population policy". The term should be singular because it refers to one of the State's policies, with a variety of goals concerning demographic variables.³ These demographic goals could refer, for example, to statistics on the i) size of the total population of the country and/or its urban component, or broken down to geographical levels (states, provinces, etc.); ii) the annual growth rate of the population. This would also imply defining the annual birth rate (or the actual number of births) and the annual mortality rate (or the actual number of deaths in the different age groups). Demographic goals could also refer to modifying the trends in certain population variables, such as domestic or international migration.

Of course, it is understood that any population policy target would be set in accordance with the global behaviour of the demographic variable in question as an aggregate result of the individual behaviour of the persons who, at least in theory, determine the composition and level of this variable. In other words, the decisions that would be taken with respect to population policy and that basically seek to raise the level and quality of life of the population would never be unilaterally imposed by the State, but rather by consensus among the various social groups. Fundamental human rights would be respected at all times, including, in particular, the reproductive rights of women and the rights of the child. At the same time, perhaps because of the broad existing consensus in the region, it would not be necessary to insist that all or any of the measures taken in the context of population policy will be the result of the exclusive exercise of sovereign national will, without the interference of Governments or outside institutions. The ultimate objective would be to eliminate social inequity, which in most of the countries of the region is clearly reflected in the differences observed in the demographic indicators of the various social groups.

To make it easier to fulfill the objectives or targets which are to be pursued, programmes and projects —as tools— should be developed and executed by sectoral agencies of government that are not explicitly responsible for "managing" population policy. Some examples of sectors whose programmes and projects should be used as tools for executing "the" demographic policy are agrarian development, education, health and social development (or social welfare and related sectors). To a lesser extent, these goals could be pursued with measures and programmes directly carried out by the agency responsible for formulating, coordinating, monitoring, evaluating, in short, managing population policy. In those cases, that agency should receive the collaboration of other sectoral departments. The information and communication programme is one typical form of programme to be directly executed by the executing agency, with the collaboration of the education sector. It would also be this agency's responsibility to establish the mechanisms through which the various social sectors would be able to participate in the definition of the policy of which they would be both subject and object.

If what has been said so far about the characteristics of a population policy is accepted as valid, then it must be agreed that, with the possible exception of Mexico, no Latin American country has a population policy.⁴ And even in the case of Mexico, it is not clear that policy instruments have been effectively specified, although some attempt was made to do so in the so-called "programmatic guidelines" (National Population Council (CONAPO), April 1991).

2. The main demographic changes in Latin America and the Caribbean since the World Population Conference of 1974

The population of Latin America and the Caribbean has changed significantly in the 20 years since the Bucharest conference. The population growth trends that began to take shape in some countries in the 1960-1965 quinquennium and in other countries during the 1965-1970 quinquennium intensified in the ensuing years, dramatically changing the population dynamics of those countries and the region as a whole. Indeed, the main components of those dynamics (size and age structure of the population, fertility patterns, mortality and migration, both internal and international) changed so much that the effects of the phenomenon—hitherto unknown in our demographic history—far surpassed the predicted process. Changes in population dynamics took place in very different ways from country to country and, according to what little data are available, both between and within different social groups, thereby introducing elements of social inequity, which population policy must help to eradicate.

Owing in part to a lack of basic statistical information, estimates made in the early 1970s foresaw significantly smaller declines in mortality and fertility rates than those that actually took place. That led to projections of relatively high growth rates and population sizes based on over-estimated rates. To give some idea of how far off the estimates from that period were, in July 1971 CELADE projected the annual demographic growth rate of Latin America for 1995-2000 to be 26.3 per thousand, whereas its most recent estimate has it at 17.6, a difference of 33%. In that same vein, the total population of the 20 countries of the region was projected to reach 641 million by the year 2000, while projections made 20 years later put the figure at 526 million, 115 million less.

These comparisons, besides providing a basis for stating that the demographic transition in Latin America took place more rapidly than demographic analysts could predict with the data and methods available to them at that time, suggest that the changes that occurred radically altered the process that the population of the region would have followed otherwise.

The mortality rate began to decline very early, and fell even faster after World War II. Several factors were at play: a healthier environment, improvements in health care and personal hygiene and generally better living conditions, among others. Government health departments, as part of their responsibilities, defined policies regarding mortality and general health care. Recommendations emanating from conferences of the World Health Organization, such as the International Conference on Primary Health Care held at Alma Ata and the Plan of Action of the programme Health for All by the Year 2000, provided guidelines for those policies. Even with those policies, however, it appears that Latin America will be unable to meet the target of a life expectancy of 74 years by the year 2000, originally set by the World Population Plan of Action; it will, however, reach the target of 70 years, as revised by the 1984 International Conference on Population in Mexico City (recommendation 14). This refers to the average for the region as a whole, but it is estimated that at least nine Latin American countries will not reach a life expectancy of 70 years in the year 2000. Also, we should not lose sight

of the fact that differences in the level of this indicator between geographic areas within countries—largely due to social differences—are even greater.

Without entering into a discussion of what impact deaths of infants, youth and mothers have on the overall mortality index, population policy clearly should include mortality-related targets and programmes for different age and gender groups of the population, to be carried out by diverse State agencies (such as health departments, social security institutions).

Fertility, unlike mortality, generally took more time to react to the new social conditions: broader educational opportunities, greater social participation by women, better general and maternal and child health care, and especially access to family planning counselling and assistance, which is ultimately responsible for lowering the number of children by helping to eliminate unwanted pregnancies.

Once the inertia that prevented fertility from declining significantly in most Latin American countries was broken, the rate began to fall in practically all of them, although at different times and at different velocities. The average number of children per woman in the region fell from five in 1974 to three in 1992, with six countries having even lower averages and two still with five. We should remember that these averages include significant differences between social groups.

The behaviour of these variables produced a sharp drop in the population growth rate, estimated to fall by 25% between 1970-1975 and the current quinquennium (1990-1995).

The age structure of populations also changed significantly, with the below-15 group diminishing proportionally and working-age people, women of child-bearing age and the above-60 group all increasing. All that has important demographic consequences, which would undoubtedly affect the targets that might be set for mortality and fertility. Likewise, those changes in the age structure have an impact on the demand for education, employment, family planning and social security, among others, typical examples of sectors in which population and development can be "integrated".

Another change, which began decades earlier but speeded up noticeably over the last 20 years, was the already rapid growth of cities, fed mostly by migrations from rural and small urban areas. According to the United Nations, the percentage of urban population in the region (Latin America and the Caribbean) was 42% (69 million) in 1950, with huge differences between subregions and countries. By 1975, the figure had climbed to 61%, with the number of urban dwellers almost trebling (to 198 million); it is now projected to surpass 76% by the year 2000 (which would more than double the absolute urban population, to 411 million, in 25 years) (United Nations, 1991).

Urbanization, the term normally used for the agglomeration of inhabitants in cities, is mainly characterized in the larger Latin American countries by a concentration of the urban population in a few cities. In the smaller countries, the urban population is frequently concentrated in only one city, normally the capital of the country.

It is generally agreed that the model or style of development that was predominant in our countries was responsible for the rapidity and characteristics of urbanization in the region.

The cities of Latin America and the Caribbean underwent a transition of their mortality and fertility rates, thereby lowering their natural growth rates, but they could not stem the flow of immigrants from other parts of the country, although recent census data suggest that these movements now seem to be slowing down. Rural dwellers appear to be moving more to agricultural frontier areas.

According to surveys periodically made by the Population Division of the United Nations, practically all the countries of the region are dissatisfied with the way urbanization took place. Despite certain measures taken, trends have yet to change significantly. This negative result should be no surprise, since even if population policy establishes targets for migration flows or settlement patterns, in a country that respects its citizens' freedom of movement they can only be met through indirect means that change the economic and social conditions that people seek to leave behind. This is a typical example of the State having to choose between two alternatives: either create the conditions to facilitate the deconcentration of an already overly concentrated population, or allow market forces free rein, leading to an agglomeration that negatively affects both the inhabitants and the environment.

Rural population, unlike urban population which expanded and continues to grow at a rapid rate both in absolute and relative terms, has lost the dynamism it had in the past. The number of rural inhabitants and their growth rate began to decline in the Caribbean and South America during the 1975-1980 quinquennium. Only in Central America did it continue to grow in absolute terms, but at an increasingly slower rate since the 1960-1965 quinquennium.

The combination of high urban concentration and rural depopulation presents the region with a variety of problems, especially environmental deterioration and the destruction of natural resources.

This brief look indicates that the important changes in the population dynamics of the Latin American and Caribbean countries are basically a response to the economic, social and political changes that have taken place in those societies and, to a lesser extent, to certain isolated programmes (family planning, education about population issues, insertion of women into the workforce, etc.). So-called population policies have contributed relatively less, if at all.

Many demographic problems subsist and some have worsened. Such is the case, for example, of the high level of unemployment and underemployment, an increase of poverty and the deterioration of natural resources. We propose that the region attempt to solve these and other severe problems with an integrated approach in each country to changing production structures with equity, including, to our way of thinking, a "population policy", as defined in the first part of this paper.

3. Progress, stagnation and regression in population policies since the 1974 World Conference in Bucharest

The Population Division of the United Nations works constantly and intensely to evaluate the degree to which the Member States are carrying out the World Population Plan of Action and the state of their population policies in the broad sense of the term. A review of the material on Latin America and the Caribbean compiled by that Division reveals some of the limitations facing the countries of the region:

- Progress has been made in legislating about population issues (size, growth, age structure, mortality and morbidity, fertility and family, international migration, spacial distribution and urbanization and the status of women). Progress has also been made in establishing administrative structures for handling these questions (councils, units, commissions, etc.).

With respect to this point, the most recent (1989) **Review and Appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action** by the United Nations states that "management is still a weak area in many population programmes..." (p. 38).

- Despite the explicit goal of some governments to integrate population-related actions into economic and social planning or directly into socio-economic programmes and projects, such integration has proven to be elusive. This stagnation apparently stems from, among other things, the lack of effective communication between the administrative body responsible for the policy and those in charge of the various sectors (such as employment, education, natural resources). Moreover, since neither the demographic objectives or targets have been clearly defined, the sectors lack guides as to how to direct their actions to help execute population policy. Uncertainty also exists concerning the causal effect between demographic and socio-economic variables.

- In most cases, despite the passage of apparently comprehensive laws and regulations, an integrated approach is lacking that would clearly spell out how to attain the objectives set by those laws or regulations regarding priority changes to be made in demographic variables.

To overcome this limitation, it would no doubt be helpful, among other measures, to have socio-economic programmes and projects include actions on one or more demographic variables.

Among the recommendations for the further implementation of the World Population Plan of Action, adopted by the International Conference on Population held in 1984, recommendation 1 reiterated the principle that was strongly stated in the 1974 conference and incorporated into paragraph 14c of the World Population Plan of Action, namely that population and development are interrelated: population variables influence development variables and are also influenced by them. Both statements, despite the years gone by, are still mere statements of purpose, since no country has achieved the proposed integration. Many obstacles to that integration have been identified. The 1989 **Review and Appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action** refers to this point in the following terms:

"...attempts at integrating population and development have been only partially successful. Not only is there a need for a clearer definition of the concept of integration; institutional development is lacking in the population sector of many developing countries, and a closer interaction between policy makers, planners and demographers is needed in order to identify their particular needs and demands" (p. 17).

Most of the countries of the region have yet to go beyond indicative planning.

- Some regression has taken place since the World Population Plan of Action was adopted. According to the information contained in the summaries published by the United Nations of the status of population policies (United Nations, 1990) in the broad sense of the term, at least three Latin American and one English-speaking Caribbean country that had previously set quantitative targets for population growth and fertility now seem to have eliminated them. At present, only three other Latin American and one other English-speaking Caribbean country have established demographic targets, generally up to the

year 2000, dealing, according to the country, with child and maternal as well as general mortality rates and life expectancy; population growth and size; magnitude of population resettlements and growth rates broken down geographically.

This analysis inevitably leads to the conclusion that the Latin American and Caribbean governments that have expressed in some way their intention to change one or more demographic variables have enunciated germane measures which, even though they are passed into law, are no more than mere rhetorical statements; the variables to be altered have been modified by micro-social behaviour and macro-social changes.

This clearly indicates that those governments should radically change their way of proceeding, if they truly want demographic variables to respond to previously defined strategy and not to a fortuitous coincidence of individual behaviour. That would imply formulating a real "population policy" with the characteristics given above for every public policy. The executive office (secretariat, committee, etc.) of the government agency (council, commission, institute, etc.) responsible for formulating, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating the policy would not be the one responsible at the sectoral level for executing the actions to meet the goals proposed by the policy. It would be the responsibility of the highest authority (such as a minister or secretary) of the respective sector to see to it that those actions are implemented. It is presupposed, of course, that suitable channels would be established for communication and coordination between different government agencies. Also, mechanisms would be set up for consultation with and the participation of groups targeted by the policy.

4. Future challenges

After all the setbacks of the so-called "lost decade", the region has entered a new phase of development, which can be summarized as one of structural change and which presupposes a different way of conceptualizing the conditions in which the economy should operate. According to its proponents, this would include, among other measures, adjustments for stabilization; the liberalization of the domestic market and its pre-eminence as regulator of both domestic and offshore economic activities, with the subsequent diminishment of the role of the State in that sphere, giving priority to the private sector as the principle agent of change, which would logically lead to the privatization of State enterprises; incentives for exports, mostly the so-called non-traditional kind; modification of existing labour relations to raise productivity per worker and lower manpower costs; the modernization of national industry and agriculture to raise their productivity and enhance their competitiveness, encouraging the liberalization of their activities by eliminating quotas and protective tariffs. In short, as the proponents put it, "modernizing" the national economy.

Adjustment measures applied in 1991 led to "moderate" economic progress, in comparison with recent years. In the social sphere, however, inequalities in income distribution remained unchanged and in some cases even worsened, unemployment and underemployment increased, incomes declined and, as an inevitable corollary, the number of poor and indigent in the population grew.

These measures have also had a negative impact on the exploitation of natural resources, hastening their deterioration and destruction. Contributing factors include increased exports, declining living conditions of peasants and rural residents and pressures on rural areas arising from the demands of urban dwellers.

Those social and ecological effects are not caused exclusively by economic factors. Demographic phenomena have also had their influence. Thus, for example, it has been pointed out by several authors that declines in fertility rates benefit, in a first stage, higher-income families, which obviously makes income distribution even more unequal by first lowering the number of children in those families and thereby their family size. That fact calls for the State to adopt measures to correct that transitory negative effect of the early stages of the family planning programmes it promotes. The same situation exists in the case of rural areas where fertility begins to decline at a later stage because of the simultaneous occurrence of two negative circumstances: the slow introduction of economic and social change and the delayed implantation of family planning services.

Lower morbidity and mortality rates are also more beneficial, in a first stage, to social groups with higher standards of living, among those that resort to State services. In the case of workers and students, lower rates would increase their productivity. These families generally improve their well-being. Governments should extend health services to groups with little or no coverage, not just for reasons of social justice but because this would have positive economic effects.

Other situations could perhaps be cited in which the application of public population policies prevents the achievement of equity in the treatment given to different social groups. This fact leads to the conclusion that facing future challenges implies, in part, adopting and implementing a population policy which, unlike in the past, manages to harmonize the objectives of the policy with those of sectoral programmes and projects.

That, of course, is no simple task, and governments will have to study in depth the goals they choose to pursue. A consensus already seems to exist in Latin America and the Caribbean that the population cannot continue to grow indefinitely and that, at a time which will vary according to how advanced each country is in the demographic transition, stabilization will be reached.

The consensus also appears to extend to the desire to achieve a slowdown in both the growth and concentration of the urban population.

In relation to these two aspects, it is worth noting that, according to the seventh 1991 United Nations report on the monitoring of population policies, 1991 (United Nations, 1992):

i) Among the 33 Latin American and Caribbean Governments that replied to the Population Division survey, 17 considered their rates of growth too high in 1990 and reported that they used intervention policies to lower their rates.⁵

ii) These interventions are, without doubt, related to the support given by Governments to policies concerning the effective use of modern contraception methods. Indeed, the 33 Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean which replied to the above-mentioned questionnaires indicated that they do not limit access to these methods, and 29 of them declared that they provide direct support for the use of these methods.⁶

iii) With regard to patterns of spatial distribution of the population, 7 Governments of the region declared that they desire minor changes in these patterns, and 24 indicated that they desired major changes.⁷

As pointed out above, practically all the countries of the region are undergoing —although at different stages— a demographic transition. Everything indicates that the transition will continue and that the fertility rates in several countries will continue to move towards the replacement level. With all the beneficial effects of this development, population growth in absolute numbers will still present the region with tremendous challenges, as would the continued increase in the urban population and its concentration in a few cities.

In no particular order of importance, some of those challenges are:

- The eradication of indigence and poverty by, among other measures, eliminating disparities in the demographic indicators of deprived social groups and improving income distribution at the national level, all of which could help weaken the mechanisms that transmit poverty from one generation to another.

- The generation of remunerated employment for the vast number of those who are already unemployed and underemployed, categories that will continue to grow as new groups reach working age. These new groups are still growing in both absolute and relative terms, because of the population dynamics of the recent past. This challenge should be faced basically with economic means, although in those countries where the demographic transition is more advanced, pressure on the labour market from those entering it for the first time will decline in the medium term, which indicates that it would be helpful to increase the number of countries moving towards an advanced demographic transition.

Obviously, a greater number of persons productively employed would help increase family income, another of the palliatives for relieving poverty.

- The overcoming of illiteracy and broadening the coverage of the educational system, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, and improving its quality. The decline of the fertility rate in Latin America and the Caribbean lowered the percentage and growth rate of the population below 15 years of age, which proportionally lessened the pressure on resources needed for pre-school and primary education. That pressure, however, was transferred to the higher levels of secondary and university education. Support will still be needed for population programmes that make it possible to continue to transfer to older age groups trends already experienced among younger groups. But while that is taking place, programmes to "modernize" the economy in its social aspects will have to continue to give preferential attention to education, with all that implies for improving its quality and its adaptation to a society undergoing structural changes. ECLAC has already identified education and knowledge as the pillar for changing production patterns with equity (ECLAC, UNESCO, 1992). As for demographic transition, it should be kept in mind that education has been identified as a key factor in the decline of fertility and infant mortality. Popular education programmes in some countries have been important elements in modifying reproductive behaviours.

- The organization or modification of social security systems, rendering them capable of meeting the demands made by changing population dynamics, mainly the proportional decline of the number of dependents below 15 years of age, the increase of those 60 and above and longer life expectancy, with the subsequent higher number of retirees and people living on pensions. Where systems include the peasant sector, sweeping changes will be called for in connection with the evolution of the rural population, as described above. New financial demands will also have to be met by the social component of adjustment programmes or by savings generated by better management of social security systems.

- The orientation of population groups which, in their attempt to overcome the limitations they face in finding productive work in the areas where they reside, are moving towards the agricultural frontiers, where they frequently cause considerable ecological damage.

- The search for a solution to improve the living conditions and protect the human rights of large contingents of political (and sometimes economic) refugees and displaced persons migrating in and out of the countries of the region, whose number was estimated at nearly 1.2 million in early 1989 by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees.⁸ The massive return of refugees and displaced persons to their country of origin would undoubtedly alter the demographic behaviour of the areas in which they are resettled.

- The protection of natural resources, in order to achieve sustainable development. Demographic factors have played no small role in the deterioration and destruction of the environment, although it should be mentioned that the main source of aggression against the environment is found in the model or system of economic development, which up to now had considered natural resources as goods which could be used with no cost whatsoever and exploited to the maximum for quick profits.

From a demographic viewpoint, it should be pointed out that high urban concentration in the region—basically due to economic causes—places tremendous ecological tension not only on the urban environment but on the rural as well, as the source of many of the products consumed in the city. In both urban and rural areas, indigence and poverty contribute to the deterioration of the environment. That fact shows the close relationship that exists between social conditions and the need to adopt an integrated approach to improve them.

The region will also have to face other challenges during the last decade of this century and the beginning of the third millennium. Among them are those related to health care, the well-being of indigenous populations, the effective social incorporation of women, international migration and cultural development, all clearly linked with aspects of population dynamics. Our intention here was not to present an exhaustive list but only mention some of the challenges the future will present us with, to highlight how huge a task the region has to face.

5. Important elements needed to face the challenges

These reflections are based on what a well formulated and rigorously implemented national population policy could do to help change production patterns with equity in the countries of the region.

To undertake that task would require complex mobilization which, among other conditions, would include the availability of highly qualified and well-paid personnel; ongoing high-level research that links the demographic, economic, social, institutional and political dimensions; efficient and permanent mechanisms for professional, intellectual and administrative communication, and continuing training for personnel at different levels.

Such action presupposes the availability of adequate technical resources and infrastructure, particularly access to modern data processing.

One of the limitations of population policy in Latin America over the last few years has been the drastic reduction of international funds available for that kind of activity. The decline was particularly noticeable from 1988 onward, when funds provided by international aid for population issues in Latin America and the Caribbean, in current dollars, fell by 15% from US\$109 million to US\$93 million in 1989 and even lower in 1990 (US\$92 million). In constant 1985 dollars, the decline between 1989 and 1990 was around 7% (UNFPA, 1992). During that time, despite the economic crisis that has afflicted them in recent years, the countries of the region have committed proportionally more resources to population-related programmes. The International Forum on Population in the Twenty-First Century pointed out in the Amsterdam Declaration that by the year 2000 the world would have to allocate an additional US\$4.5 billion per year for national and international expenditures for family planning and other key population activities. The Declaration recalled that that was the level of outlays in 1987.

If the recommended increase actually takes place, US\$9 billion per year would be available for population programmes, mainly in developing countries, whose contributions to that fund are estimated at US\$3.5 billion (International Forum on Population in the Twenty-First Century, 1989).

Considering the magnitude of the proposed contribution of the developing countries, inflation, population growth in those countries, deteriorating living conditions of ever more numerous groups living in poverty and indigence, and especially the limited financial resources affecting population programmes over the last five years, it seems nonsensical to propose in practice to reduce the expansion of international funds earmarked for population activities. If equity is really a goal, then the Amsterdam recommendations have to be looked at once again in order to equitably define the amount of external cooperation that Latin America and the Caribbean should receive each year, if they are to genuinely face the challenge involved in inserting into different sectoral programmes and projects those components of population policy that are more directly related to the development proposals of those same sectors.

The world has changed greatly in the last few years, leading to, among other effects, the end of the cold war. Thus funds previously used for military purposes could theoretically now be made available to improve the living conditions of the poorest sectors of society. Activities in the field of population are basic means to achieve that goal.

6. Final thoughts

Section two of this paper briefly summarized the impressive changes that have occurred in the basic components of population dynamics, which quickly moved most of the countries of the region into an unprecedented —and largely unexpected— demographic transition.

Almost simultaneously with these demographic changes in the region, economic and social development stagnated —and in some cases regressed— leading to, among other consequences, a worsening of poverty. However, in the midst of stagnation —and this points to a clear lack of social equity— certain sectors saw their living conditions improve, which led to changes in their demographic behaviour that reinforced their more comfortable social and economic situation. ECLAC stated that "...the figures available show that there is an association between a country's position in the demographic transition and the degree of poverty it experiences" (ECLAC, 1991, p. 67).

The 1990s challenge the region to begin to develop again, while maintaining and intensifying the demographic transition which, among other consequences, had the positive effect of lessening some of the pressure that otherwise would have deteriorated Latin American societies even more.

In the search for ways to recover the dynamism that characterized most of the Latin American economies before the "lost decade", the proposal that has generally attracted most of the attention of government and private agencies and international and professional organizations is the one made by the ECLAC Secretariat to the governments of the Member States in the Commission's twenty-third session (ECLAC, 1990).

In that proposal, ECLAC presents guidelines for some basic policies designed to support the objectives of changing production patterns.

Our point here is that a population policy has to be added to those and other policies that were defined more recently in documents published in 1992 (ECLAC-UNESCO, 1992).

We are not calling for new laws or decrees like those mentioned above, which were mostly merely rhetorical. We are proposing that each government define and clearly adopt a position with respect to how it wants the components of the country's population dynamics to change, and that it adopt actions to implement this position. This could be achieved in part if the actions that are taken at the sectoral level (in public housing, well-being and social security, natural resources, education, health care, rural development and employment, for example) seek to harmonize the specific objectives of the sector with the declared official position on changes to be made in population dynamics.

In the field of population, like many others, the State has the obligation of defining the goals it considers indispensable for providing maximum well-being to a majority of the population, which of course has to be done while strictly respecting widely recognized human rights. The position of ECLAC should be taken as a guideline for State intervention in this field, namely that the State "...must play a role both in promoting a debate among the various strata of society aimed at constructing a basic platform of agreements that will facilitate the development process and in assuming the responsibilities that arise out of that debate, especially those which foster changes in production patterns and greater social equity" (ECLAC, 1990, p. 96).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, perhaps in no other field of social action do the declared perceptions of a good many Governments concerning the rate of demographic growth, level of fertility, life expectancy and patterns of distribution of the population appear to coincide so well with the aspirations expressed by the population itself through surveys, community and social organizations and mass communication in general. The minimum platform of agreement to which ECLAC refers is really quite advanced in the demographic field.

The question now is whether Governments can move from statements of perception to the taking of action.

Notes

¹ See the statements made by the Latin American and Caribbean delegations at the plenary meetings of the 1984 International Conference on Population (CELADE, 1984).

² In order to avoid confusion about introducing new liberalizing trends into public administration—which could make this perspective on "public policy" seem obsolete—it should be recalled that this would be precisely the procedure that a government would follow in introducing a policy designed to liberalize imports in order to make local industry more competitive internationally: i) quantitative goals would be set for lowering protective barriers; ii) dates would be decided on when the barriers would be lowered; iii) duty on imports would be chosen as the instrument with which to achieve these goals and meet deadlines; iv) decrees would be proclaimed defining goals, deadlines and tariffs; v) the policy would be carried out by customs with the required collaboration by other departments of public administration.

³ It is postulated that there is one policy because any change in the behaviour of a demographic variable would, in general, affect the evolution of population dynamics, and these effects should be anticipated. There may, then, be one population policy with a number of different components, depending on the objectives being pursued.

⁴ At the plenary meeting of the 1984 International Conference on Population, the representative of Mexico, referring to his country's population policy, said that "by the end of 1977, national demographic growth targets were set for the remaining years of the twentieth century: 2.5% annually in 1982 and 1.9% in 1988 as intermediate targets, with the ultimate aim of bringing the annual rate down to about 1% by the year 2000...." The first of these targets, according to the representative, had been "slightly" exceeded. Thus, in 1982 an annual growth of 2.4% was recorded, and in 1983, 2.3%. He also underlined the fact that Mexico's population policy "not only includes actions aimed at modifying the behaviour of demographic variables but others as well, which are intended to promote the qualitative development of the population".

⁵ The Latin American Governments that replied that they considered their population growth rates too high and used intervention policies to lower these rates are those of the following countries: Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru. The English-speaking Caribbean countries that gave the same reply are Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago.

⁶ The Governments which do not limit access to the effective use of modern contraceptive methods and provide direct support for their use are the following: in Latin America, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, and in the Caribbean, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. Indirect support is given by Argentina, Bahamas and Belize.

⁷ The Governments which expressed the desire for major change in their patterns of population distribution were: in Latin America, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, and in the Caribbean, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname. The Governments which desired only minor changes in their patterns of population distribution were Brazil and Cuba in Latin America, and Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in the Caribbean.

⁸ United Nations, 1992, p. 194.



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