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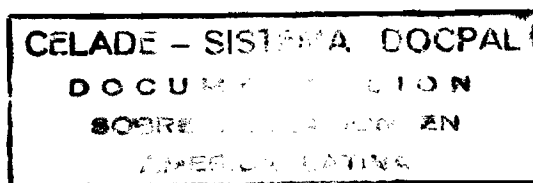
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**POPULATION POLICIES IN LATIN AMERICA:  
FEASIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY \***

\* A preliminary version of this work was prepared by Mr. Guillermo Macció for the Meeting of Government Experts on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, Saint Lucia, 6-9 October 1992.

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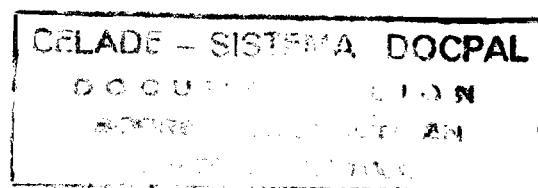
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## INTRODUCTION

For the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the current trend in population policies begins with the Latin American Preparatory Meeting for the World Population Conference which was held in San José, Costa Rica (April 1974) to prepare for the world conference in Bucarest, which also met in 1974. The countries of the region had never before devoted an exclusive agenda to this subject and neither, before Bucarest, had this happened on a world-wide scale.

Since then, this same agenda has been adopted on various occasions in Latin America: to evaluate Bucarest (Mexico, 1975), in the advisory agencies established by ECLAC (The Committee of High-Level Government Experts, CEGAN, Port of Spain, 1975; Quito 1979), the preparatory meeting (Havana, 1983) for the second international meeting held in Mexico in 1984. And with this a cycle of very well-attended meetings closed, which is to be reopened with the new regional forum, preliminary to the International Conference on Population and Development called for 1994.

Comparing this regional itinerary with the actual history of population policies, or approximations thereof, in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, could be instructive and at the same time help to get to the bottom of the actual state of these instruments, the degree of commitment with which Latin American politicians and legislators have effectively put them into practice, to establish the degree to which population questions are considered urgent or even considered at all, how the instruments are inserted into the new configurations ruling the system of international relationships, to determine how much, how, and over what period of time, an effort should be made to meet this urgent need which cannot be ignored, to alleviate the unacceptable inequity affecting a population spread over all the countries of the area and whose rate of impoverishment, in some regions, is higher than the rate of natural demographic increase.

This paper is divided into five sections which approach the subject from different points of view, attempting, in each case, to understand what has happened in the region. At the same time, supporting illustrations or tentative interpretations are sketched and put forward for the purpose of stimulating a more thorough discussion of population programmes and policies, with reference to the real situation presently facing the countries and also to some of the projections which are made for the near future.

It should be noted here and kept in mind throughout this paper: to speak of Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole in matters of population policy —as in other studies— makes such a degree of generalization necessary that it makes almost any analysis or recommendation irrelevant; everyone would be included, but nobody would be able to identify himself. Therefore, extreme situations will be highlighted with the sole purpose of delimiting the range of variation discernible for each specific point. It has been deliberately attempted to underline the factual rather than the theoretical in order to emphasize the lessons of reality rather than those of ideological stance. This paper has no pretension to globality, but rather seeks to study actual situations.

Two decades, from Bucarest to today, is a very long time from the point of view of the political, social and economic transformations through which the populations of Latin America have journeyed, but a very short time from the point of view of demography, in spite of the fact that, for example, various countries have substantially changed their patterns of human reproduction. Therefore, the first section

deals with identifying and comparing the illusion of Bucarest in 1974, the considerably smaller illusion of Mexico in 1984, with what has in fact occurred in the region.

The second section poses questions about the slight progress made in institutionalizing and putting into practice more or less lasting population policies, in spite of the enthusiasm and pioneer efforts of highly-motivated individuals or groups and puts forward some answers. Since it is an obviously debatable subject and open to differences of opinion, the conclusions drawn here are intended to provoke discussion and some introspection in the countries, as well as in the international agencies for technical and financial cooperation.

Why are population policies and the subject of population, itself, almost entirely excluded from the platforms of political parties? Why are they not everyday questions? Why are politicians at the various levels not usually interested in the subject? Why is it confined to academic environments, to international organizations and to some very small groups with very specific interests? These are the questions dealt with in the third section.

It is a generally accepted fact that contemporary society has undergone substantial modification in various respects, including its international relationships. Taken together, it could be said that a new international order should be the principle arena for reiterating some resolutions relevant to population and to overall and specific population policies, discarding approaches which are almost a century old. The above, together with the emergence of a new set of values ruling institutions which are intimately associated with the demographic behaviour of societies, leads to the proposal of some lines of research and eventually of action, which are explained in the fourth section.

The last section is devoted to a series of alternative suggestions or guidelines. Given, at least as a working hypothesis, that the overall policies which have been attempted in the region have had relatively little success, it can be asked if perhaps the moment has arrived to reverse the approach, to start from more modest positions and focus on sectoral programmes satisfying needs and contributing to narrow the practically insupportable breaches and then, once these programmes are consolidated, gradually to arrive at an integration which finally produces an institutionalized and stable global population policy.

## **1. From San Jose and Bucarest to the preparatory meetings for 1994**

The 1974 meetings showed very clearly that the Latin American countries, without exception, independently of ideology and current regime, agreed on three basic and necessary bases for the possible future adoption of a population policy: that such policies must always be understood as inherent and inseparable parts of development plans and strategies and not as something separate and valid in themselves; that the states have unlimited sovereignty; and that the adoption of a policy and the final decision about family formation, size, number and spacing of children are inalienable rights of the married couple. Said schematically: population policies are part of a broader political conception, the unrestricted sovereignty of the states is reasserted and, within the states, the absolute freedom of the individual to decide his demographic behaviour is ratified.

As a result of this atmosphere which revitalized the discussion of demographic questions and gave them a prominent place, several countries passed laws, created population councils and interministerial commissions, and there were advisors and Secretariats. The matter even came to be included in the

political debate accompanying the electoral campaigns of some candidates. In two or three countries, sessions of parliament or meetings of parliamentary committees were held on the subject. Also at this time, development plans and programmes appeared preceded by introductions analyzing population trends with some policy implications.

Certainly, part of this increase can be credited to international financial cooperation and to the priority given it by the governments of some developed countries which allocated multinational and bilateral funds, provided direct publicity and human resources for technical assistance.

In some countries, groups of private individuals and organizations which had been advocating family planning for years and carrying out private or semi-official programmes believed that conditions were favourable for incorporating their programmes in official health or social security programmes. They thought that the moment had arrived to raise them to a higher level, elevating these partial or sectoral programmes to national policies, consecrated by a coherent body of law.

But this euphoria began very soon to evaporate: political instability, wars, the energy and oil crises, the foreign debt, formidable institutional imbalances, among many other factors, accelerated its displacement. Population questions were relegated to second place. The same thing had happened to foreign aid and the cooperation of the leading countries was directed to other ends.

A factor which has been ignored, and is strictly pragmatic, which contributed to the brevity of some national efforts, seems to be that the supporters of population policies did not take into account that, if they were to be successful, they must be conceived and carried out in such a way that their survival was assured beyond the mandate of the government which established them, be it *de facto* or legitimate. Because of the importance of this factor for understanding what happened in the period under study, it will be further discussed below.

It is worth the trouble to stop for a moment at the first of the bases mentioned as a point of agreement among the countries and which was then explicitly included in the World Population Plan of Action, the affirmation that "population policies are a constituent of socio-economic development policies, never substitutes for them" and that "the explicit aim of the World Population Plan of Action is to help co-ordinate population trends and the trends of economic and social development", because these messages contain the original weakness which can partly explain the limited effect of these agreements.

It is important to remember that this Plan, which was laboriously negotiated, article by article, and at times debated word for word, was unanimously approved with only one abstention. The governments understood its 109 articles as something like a statement of the minimum common denominator of their aspirations for the evolution of the human population.

When the Latin American scientific community and others interested in population matters made their great public debut at the Latin American Population Conference (Mexico, 1970), a non-governmental meeting, the question of including population policies and programmes in economic and social development plans and strategies led to extensive, profound, and sometimes passionate debate. On the same side were those who legitimately and simply thought that the only way to solve population problems was through carrying out development plans; this development would go hand in hand with changes in demographic trends which would stave off the threat of excessive demographic growth and those who, much more ideologically, saw the proposals coming out of the developed countries as a new

instrument for domination and the preservation of the international *status quo*, with its so unequal economic, social and power relationships.

Thus, and perhaps not exactly intentionally, the idea that population policies and development plans were inseparable became a weighty instrument for putting off decisions. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that years later, without depreciating its legitimacy, this position was supported by such varied governments and countries and developed into a sort of paradigmatic, almost liturgical, pronouncement, time after time.

Curiously, and paradoxically, as this was happening in the sphere of population, economic and social planning was entering a declining phase. Hardly any plan or programme was translated into action in these years. The accelerated propagation of neo-liberal ideas and the exaltation of the market economy, followed by proposals to reduce the role of the state contributed, in some countries more than in others, to the neglect of the subject and even to the reversal of positions on specific matters. The meetings of government experts called by ECLAC ran into difficulties, among others, in identifying, in not a few countries, national experts who were active and, at the same time, connected with their governments.

Unlike what the organizers expected, the International Conference on Population in Mexico (1984) —no longer world-wide— was an experience, at times surprising, at others disappointing. It is necessary to begin by saying that within the system of the United Nations, itself, little further study of the articles of the World Population Plan of Action had been made, beyond the conventional follow-up of the trends of demographic variables and of the periodic surveys made by the governments of the member countries. As for principles, new contributions and concrete solutions, the result could be described as nothing more than a ratification of what had been agreed at the meeting in Bucarest.

It can be seen, for example, that in instrumental and operational matters, the inclination to negotiate and reach agreements was less fruitful than ten years earlier. There were confrontations, votes on some resolutions and reservations about them. To such a degree that some countries reached the critical point of actually questioning the authority of the Conference to debate and decide on certain questions. To some degree, the result was a meeting at which many expressed their own opinions without listening to the others; a review of the speeches of the heads of delegations confirms this judgment.

In the confrontation, special situations, such as human settlements in territories occupied by military force, the abrupt about-face of a government to a stand against the interruption of pregnancy through abortion and making it a condition of external aid that the receiving countries prohibit this practice which they had been permitting or tolerating, and the demand that the governments of underdeveloped countries assume a greater commitment to carry out effective policies and programmes for reducing the rate of demographic growth contributed to sharpen the outlines of the problems.

But it was the reports prepared by the Secretariat which set the tone by pointing out that the modest objectives proposed in Bucarest for life-expectancy, infant and maternal mortality, had not been reached in the majority of the countries. The figures shown of the new and deeper breaches between rich and poor countries were useful in providing the participants with a more realistic view. Also, the militant presence of private organizations with demands and antagonistic stands showed that the official positions were seriously challenged in such delicate questions as the reproductive rights of women and the rights of illegal immigrants.

Many delegations made it clear that, although international financial aid had been important and was increasing, it must be multiplied six or seven times, to provide the necessary funds for a more rapid transformation of the demographic scene in the underprivileged world.

If the success of a meeting of this type is measured by its effects and the actions it generates, it can be stated unreservedly that these were not very significant in Latin America and the Caribbean. The old statement of the policies as part of the development strategies was still in the introductions, but government action and international cooperation, since Mexico, have been concentrated on another direction, that of specific programmes for meeting priorities emerging in various sectors, and the idea of over-all policies, institutionalized and structured, was gradually relegated to second place. So much so, that since 1984 to date, there have been no further intergovernmental meetings on this subject in the region.

However, the targets set at Bucarest and Mexico, beyond the institutional progress which could be considered a remainder, show two extraordinary absences to which attention should be called. The first has to do with the lack of an ecological statement organized and structured throughout all the proposals, in such a way that the proposed policies allocate to this dimension its real significance and the implications to it of all aspects related to the reproduction, growth and mobility of the human species. The dominating image in the papers, in the statements and speeches of the delegates was of man as an occupier of territory without reference to his environment, of which hardly a fact is given, and which is implicitly uniform and immutable over time. The systems studies which were very much the style in the 1970s, which reproduced, with respectable scientific support, the notion that the planet is finite, and can be expressed and quantified in terms of exploitable goods, were not even mentioned.

Incidental references found in the Mexico documents confirm, for example, that the ecological dimension was not yet even used as an argument in the justifications of the proposals.

The other has to do with the paradigm, itself, of man as occupier of the planet, a conception which is granted or conceded a sort of universal validity and on which the policies are based. It seems to be that for the participants in both conferences this model of the individual is invariable over time, always was so, and will continue so in the future. The entrenched idea of private property, of unrestricted appropriation, of the accumulation of goods and power, of rights, of dominion rather than transitory occupancy of the land, passed unscathed through these exercises. Independent of the predominant political ideologies, of the regimes currently in power, the model of man was not even given minimal consideration; at best he was treated as a statistic. The condition of man, himself, as a being, as an individual, faced with resources which become exhausted and cannot be renewed, faced with species which become irremediably extinct must necessarily have a place on the agenda in the meetings being prepared.

But while this was happening in the arena of agreements and policies, the demographic situation in Latin America and the Caribbean was undergoing profound transformations. In fact, over the quarter century before the 1990s, some countries changed their fecundity profile at a rate never before registered and which will probably never be repeated, passing, for example, from an average of almost seven children per woman to slightly more than three. At the same time, a sustained decrease in general and especially infant mortality occurred.

The result has been a decrease in the natural growth rate for the region as a whole, which not even the boldest projections anticipated; almost all the estimates were overestimates.

This formidable modification of fecundity and mortality levels, because of both its magnitude and its speed, is an exceptional case, without precedent in the evolution of human populations, and its effects on the demographic structure of the countries is already noticeable and will continue over time to have repercussions on the social and economic environment.

The cycle is not at all completed; many countries have hardly begun it. What must be pointed out is that, even in the absence of policies, significant changes have occurred.

Therefore, the mother-child health programmes, vaccination, oral rehydration and all the preventive and curative activities, together with family planning, produced results. It would be more difficult to establish how much to credit each of these transformations. But, at the same time, it has to be underlined that the demand for birth control and the decision to have fewer children appears before the existence of regular programmes for family planning, and this indicates a change in values on the part of the women with respect to the number of children they wish to have and, consequently, their attitude towards reproduction.

The Amsterdam Declaration, the report on the International Forum on Population in the Twenty-First Century, which was called by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the occasion of its 20th anniversary in 1989, ratified the fundamental principles of Bucarest and Mexico, but advanced a little further with respect to quantitative goals, and sending messages to clearly identified recipients. It should be given some consideration both for this reason and also because it took place exactly half-way between the previous international meeting and that scheduled for 1994. Its contents suggest some trends and currents of opinion which will certainly be present on the agenda for the next decade.

In the chapter dealing with goals and objectives, the proposal to give the population projections elaborated by the United Nations some programmatic content is significant. This intention, as well as posing some technical and instrumental difficulties, could lead the countries to adopt a more cautious position on the value they give and the degree of identification or support which they concede to these periodical studies. It could also be interpreted as an elliptic way to make the instruments used for following up demographic tendencies become specific goals. It could be, therefore, the germ of a process which is leading the countries to assume some commitment with the international community for a specific established reproduction level for their women.

Another novelty is that the effects of rapid demographic growth on the environment is made explicit and the effect of these relationships on the developing countries is being studied.

## **2. A consideration of the reasons for the scant progress**

It could be said that three currents fed the revival of interest in population policy and placed it, as has perhaps never before happened, in the front line. First are the precipitating aspects of some problems of inequality between sectors, high fecundity rates among less-favoured groups, unacceptable levels of infant mortality, the prevalence of factors inevitably causing death, urban concentration patterns which are obstacles to development plans, and many other factors which are used to measure the degree of under-development of a country. For this reason, population policies are put forward in Latin America as an instrument for development. The second cause results from the interest of the researchers and the contribution of demography, which in recent decades had accumulated knowledge and information on the demographic situations in the various countries. It was wished to use this research in the service of a

concrete end, to support political decisions to modify the situation. And the third cause, partly motivated by the proposals of the former, was international cooperation, its financial resources, negotiating and convoking power and, above all, its power to influence the allocation of research priorities and to identify problem situations.

But this should not be taken to mean that 1974 was a zero point. Mexico, for example, had conceived and passed its Population Law the previous year. Argentina had a tradition of several decades of legislation, sallies and retreats, particularly with respect to international migrations. And several countries, among them Barbados, Columbia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Jamaica, had or permitted programmes for family planning or for reducing fecundity in the middle of the 1960s.

From this point of view, this section is not so much intended as a comparative review of the laws and decrees passed in the countries of the area, but rather, as an examination of the other side of the question, as an attempt to discover the factors contributing to the scarce, and at times, nil impact the application of these laws has had on the situation which it wanted to change: and also, why so many initiatives have been dropped at the half-way point. And, on the other hand, it is intended to encourage closer contact between the political power —legislative and executive— and population specialists, in an attempt to commit the discipline further, put it at the disposal of governments, so that it can better serve to transform society, in the direction which seems necessary.

This exercise requires the previous grouping of the countries, at least according to whether or not they currently have population policies, whether the matter is given explicit attention by the political leaders and whether there is some implicit agreement about the population and its growth in the context of the respective development processes. Thus it will be possible to identify four different groups, but with some over-lapping and, certainly, subject to disagreement:

- First are those where overall or sectoral population policies are applied, although there is no comprehensive body of regulations which could be described as a Population Law. This would be identified by the manifestation of a political consciousness on the part of those who hold power, demonstrated through preferences given, in their direction of government action to specific sectors, such as, for example, public health, mother-infant care and international migration (Barbados, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, El Salvador, Jamaica, Panama, The Dominican Republic).
- Another group is made up of countries where there is an explicit body of law with its corresponding management and administration agencies and its own budget; that is, where there is a current law which is integrally and effectively applied. It must also have survived various government periods, as an indication of its consolidation. Certainly, this group is very small, possibly a group of one (Mexico).
- The third group consists of those countries which have more or less complete, but not organically conceived, normative laws. Sometimes these norms are only partially applied or their various legal provisions conflict with one another. In spite of the existence of this legal framework, it can be seen that it is not always effectively administered or enforced. This group is, perhaps, the largest and covers most of the population of the region (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, Venezuela).

- Finally, there is a group of countries which has little or no legislation on population questions, where there is no evidence of an explicit political consciousness and where administrative mechanisms for sectoral action are very weak, always with the exception of the control of external migration (Belice, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay).

Beyond this grouping, a review of the actual state of the bodies of law applied in the various countries and of the institutions with partial or sectoral responsibility for population questions, will allow the identification of something that could be called a common denominator of missing elements. The following is an attempt to explicitly define these elements to see whether future legislation can be improved, made more effective and efficient. The question will also be explored of whether it is possible to modify or slow down the course of a society which is ever more dependent, inequable and diverging. And if, perhaps a higher goal, something can be contributed to the modeling of a type of Latin American man who could enter the 21st Century with a more promising set of expectations.

A partial list, not ordered by priority, could, as a preliminary illustration, include the following components:

- The definition of one or various tableaux representing the type of society aimed for;
- The relationships between population and development;
- The ecological framework;
- The geographic dimension;
- Emphasis on reducing inequity;
- The preservation and significance of native cultures.
- Emphasis on salvaging vital statistics.

## 2.1 *A policy for which society?*

This is one of the most complex matters and therefore, perhaps, less studied in the defining of a population policy. Although the question is mentioned in the preambles, declarations of principles and justifications, no more or less explicit description of the setting in which the policy being approved is to operate can be deduced, even less a sketch of the proposed society in the medium term. This aspect, at first sight abstract and speculative, is of practical importance for the medium term, above all in the case of very inert demographic variables. It is surprising, for example, to find the great predilection to arguing by analogy in conceptions of the future development of societies. For many politicians, the aspiration is for their country to resemble, within a few years, what other countries have achieved today, to have the same economic and social indicators, consumption patterns, and foreign trade surpluses, but at a different period in time, without taking into account that this reasoning constricts the desired transformation from the beginning. In strictly demographic matters, some analogies can be useful, others not. Therefore, the idea of looking for shortcuts and picturing tableaux based on one's own characteristics could be fruitful.

It should also be underlined that legislative bodies treat population questions with a certain amount of social, political and ideological asepsis, forgetting that, in the end, they are dealing with interacting individual lives. Without being aware of it, they extrapolate a conception from the present as if nothing in the environment —society, technology, value systems, expectations— were going to change. Perhaps this offers a partial explanation of why some laws are so quickly overtaken by events.

This lack of definition and commitment which has been identified as a weakness of population policies has, at the same time, affected the generation of scientific input, including demographic input, for supporting political decisions. With isolated exceptions, very important studies of fecundity, family planning, migration and urban concentration, mortality in high-risk groups, almost all supported and financed by international, national and multinational cooperation, have gone almost unnoticed by political leaders.

## *2.2 The relationships between population and development*

It was mentioned above how, from a very early date, a significant body of opinion in the region supported the view that it was necessary to view population policies as an inseparable part of development strategies and plans. It was also pointed out that this position sometimes served for postponing decisions, or simply not making them, with the argument that the one was conditioned by the other.

Running parallel, the academic community and specialized agencies made considerable efforts to explain the relationships and interactions between the demographic variables and some components of economic dynamics by models. Although it is no reflection on the merit of these efforts, it is certain that they were not used as tools for political decision-making or for supporting economic measures. At the present time, attention given to this matter seems to have passed its peak without its having been satisfactorily resolved. Why did this happen? Why, after so much had been written and taught at different levels, are these models still not sending clear messages and not been translated into instruments suitable for action? The answers are still to be found.

Even so, however, the first, almost intuitive, reaction to one side of the question is that, for the accumulation and growth to which any society aspires, a low demographic growth rate is better than a high rate. Just as simply and just as strongly, Argentina and Uruguay can be used as examples to support the opposite view. Low rates of demographic growth have persisted for decades in these countries and, nevertheless, they show clear indications of stagnation or unsatisfactory development, accompanied by persistent unrest which occasionally increases.

Thus, managing the natural growth rate, the most synthetic expression of the demographic dynamics of a country, taken as a whole, is not an ideal indicator in such heterogeneous societies as Latin America. Perhaps a better indicator would be the examination of sectors of the economy, together with that population directly related to them, for which it would be necessary to presume the possibility of establishing associated rates of growth, whose significance would change according to the sector being studied. It would also be necessary to focus the analysis over a range of generations, to be able to quantify the effects of the economic evolution on the demographic structure, and vice versa. The absence of statistical information and the limited conceptual development make this alternative unviable.

Now, the idea that a low rate of demographic growth contributes to economic and social development has been oversimplified in common parlance as: “the small family lives better”, a view which has become part of the value system of present-day society. It would be one extreme —on the

micro scale— of the chain of associations which can be established between the economic system and demographic behaviour in a society. It is not intended here to question its validity, but to call attention to the conditions which must be satisfied for this family to live better. Just as the growth rate of a country is not in itself sufficient evidence for favourable or detrimental judgment of its possibilities for development, the growth rate is an equally insufficient reason at the individual level. "To live better" depends on more immediate circumstances than the average ultimate size of a family; and these circumstances are nothing more nor less than the equity or inequity prevailing in any society and are much more relevant than whether a family reaches its definitive size or even whether it has been formed. Recent longitudinal studies of reproductive behaviour show that sterilized daughters of prolific mothers do not necessarily for that reason receive a larger share in the distribution of well-being.

The key could reside in the fact that one is not poor because one has many children, but rather that, if one is poor with many children, there is less probability of ceasing to be poor, given, of course, that the children do not contribute to mitigate the poverty. And this is precisely the valuation that individuals make, in a specific society at a specific moment, with all imaginable degrees of conscientiousness, with respect to family formation and progeny.

### 2.3 *The ecological framework*

The model of man underlying population policies, and in general in all conceptions of Latin American society—whatever the governmental regime—is a paradigm which is becoming exhausted here and everywhere else. It was imported with the conquest and the community which is now known as Latin America was organized around it. Certainly, this is not the place for analyzing its characteristics, except for one. This model starts from the assumption that nature is at the service of man and that he disposes of it, following the criterion of almost unrestricted appropriation. Meanwhile, all nature has been threatened and the ecosystems are damaged; the human species has assaulted them in such a way, that they have lost their capacity of regeneration and renewal. Everyone, all over the world, knows about the dramatic manifestations of the disasters which occur and how future generations are compromised by the mortgages contracted since the 1950s to today and which will have to be paid by the replacement cohorts.

A population policy for the medium term must advocate the renewal of the current model of the individual by changing the terms: man at the service of nature, in order to be able to continue making use of it, establishing, out of necessity, a more harmonious relationship. Not a few of the elements making up this vague thing called the "crisis" result largely from the unilateral rupture of the species of man from its environment.

This ecological dimension, completely absent to date, demands priority inclusion in discussions about the settling and exploiting of empty space. The matter takes on particular relevance for Latin America, because of its special position as an exceptional reserve of biological diversity. It contains two of the three most important fresh water river basins on the planet, a river system which can still be recuperated, and spaces of visibly low demographic density in sub-tropical and temperate zones.

The agreements of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) are therefore a new and inevitable ingredient in any proposal for future action on demographic behaviour. It is anticipated that it will be a long and difficult task because, here as well, it will be necessary to remove analogical schemes or models which were successful in past times. It would, for example, be an aberration to repeat land settlement and human settlement patterns such as were prevalent at the end of the 19th Century and the beginnings of the 20th. And this, which seems so

obvious, is even taking root in political power circles, in the area of public opinion and in industrial decisions where spaces granted by the State have been occupied.

## 2.4 *The geographical dimension*

Perhaps because of the influence of the nature of the legislative process and the magnetism of the idea of the nation as a whole, population policies give the impression that they refer to homogeneous geographical spaces. References to regions and zones which are differentiated according to their greater or lesser aptitude for human settlements or which take into account sometimes very different demographic behaviour are extremely scarce. This has led to the treatment of the country as though it were a single unit, when, in reality, on this continent there are markedly different situations within the individual countries, not only between their large natural regions, but also on a very much smaller scale (river basins, small ecosystems, urban agglomerations, etc).

This type of approach, which could be described as from the top down, has lessened effectiveness and the opportunity for differentiated policies, postponing or pushing aside the regional accent or the application of goals in well-defined dimensions. It could be said that the national averages established by some laws as quantitative goals, are frustrated or give way in the face of the magnitude of the extreme situations that they hide. Therefore, it is proposed to modify the general approximation of the whole and make the definition of national goals and programmes the result of a gradual integration of parts and sectors with their own goals and own plans for small spaces and communities. An analogous position could equally be beneficial for the large cities where the demographic variables and the consequences of their dynamics take on different meanings.

One of the most immediate consequences of the absence of gradual integration at the point of policy implementation, is related to the waste of the management and administrative capacity available in provincial, municipal or departmental agencies, which are under-exploited in all stages in the adoption of a specific programme.

## 2.5 *Emphasis on reducing inequity*

The ECLAC report on sustainable development states that: "towards the end of the 1980s there were close to 183 million poor people in Latin America: 71 million more than in 1970 and 47 million more than in 1980. Of the total number of poor people at the end of the decade, about 88 million were indigent." Remembering that this nation of poor persons is greater than the sum of the populations of Germany, France and Italy will give a clear comparative idea.

Whatever historical series of social indicators is used, health, well-being, water consumption, energy consumption, etc., the accelerating process of inequity taking place in Latin America is apparent. In the under-privileged sectors, the rate of growth of poverty is greater than the rate of demographic growth, a fact which reopens the discussion about the responsibility attributed to the biological reproduction of the poor for the national increase in poverty. How much of this increase is a necessary result of an economic and distribution system which is based on the exclusion of many, has yet to be studied.

The demographic studies on infant and child mortality carried out by CELADE show that the breaches in rates by neighbourhood or social sectors concentrated in the large cities have never been so great as they are today. The greatest inequities occur, therefore, between neighbours in the same city.

Recent studies of water supply and sanitation in metropolitan areas show that as many as 40% of the houses are not connected to the water supply system; these figures reach dramatic heights in the case of sewage connection. Therefore, it would be desirable to carry out a study with ethical and political significance, of the real demographic situation in each country, to bring about a commitment to transformation, without previously laying down conditions related to overall or integrating strategies, whose effect has, almost always, been to postpone solutions or not carry them out. The recent messages of ECLAC about equity provide a suitable framework for immediate action. With this approach, rather than adopting national policies, it can be proved that it is urgent to apply concrete programmes and measures, perhaps separated from the central government and put into the hands of the benefiting community with the power of self-management. Said more directly, perhaps for today's Latin America, it could be a shortcut to begin sectoral or partial programmes concentrated on questions of sanitation infrastructure, educational assistance and basic services with defined time-tables, quantitative goals, budgets and operative agencies to avoid obstacles resulting from quarrels over jurisdiction, in an attempt to finally make it reality that "blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

## 2.6 *Conservation and rescue of native cultures*

The large majority of population censuses available in Latin American make no report on the state and characteristics of the native populations and they are not even included in the vital statistics. Neither the demographers nor the sociologists are interested in studying and understanding them and the legislation on the subject at hand has been based on the fiction of homogeneous cultures of the western type with more or less uniform characteristics. Certainly, there are exceptions, but they are only exceptions.

It is paradoxical, for example, that highly industrialized European countries have taken the initiative and embarked on projects for saving the original languages so that they can be proudly spoken and taught as evidence of regional cultures and autonomies and in Latin America it is not even known how many persons speak ancient languages like Quechua, Aymara, Guarani, Cakchikel and so many others.

The point here is not directed against the old and persistent practice of converting, civilizing, westernizing or incorporating these cultures into modern society, as has been done for centuries and which finally resulted in their extinction and disappearance. The point, to the contrary, is to make two different proposals. On the one hand, to conserve them in their own cultures, lands and natural surrounds, such as they are, to stop the extinction process which continues to the present day. It will be necessary to restore lands, rehabilitate spaces and break the sort of official cultural conspiracy which leaves aside, and sometimes denies, the existence of this surviving heritage. Also, the everyday discrimination, which is expressly forbidden by the constitutions must be attacked. Incidentally, the ecological dimension required by the policies will find a wealth of knowledge in these communities.

On the other hand, if the intention is really to construct a different and more genuine society, it will be necessary to approach them without a spirit of conquest, which can be translated into two words—respect and conservation—to study them and to learn from their own cultures, learning from them customs, science, value systems, their understanding of the universe, their gods and legends. The internal integration of the countries, present in so many speeches and preambles to legislation will begin to make sense to the extent that the exclusions are lessened. When the Quechua, Aymara, Guarani, Mapuche, Caribe and other nations are restored to the full extent of their culture and heritage, many countries will be in a condition to recognize their character as multinational states. Only in this way will that part of the population which has a noble history cease to be looked on as a curiosity or an object of folklore.

## 2.7 *Emphasis on salvaging vital statistics*

The use of the word *salvage* is not an accident. The extent of deterioration of the registers of vital statistics (marriages, births and deaths) has become so great that they require to be rescued. As always, there are several countries which are exempted but, again, they are in the minority.

The disease they suffer from has various symptoms and cannot be attributed to "the cultural level of the population" or to the absence of a willingness on the part of the citizens to provide information, but rather to a progressive bureaucratic and administrative deterioration which takes in the whole chain of intermediate steps, from the initial registry office to the publication of the reports. A recent review of some national statistical systems showed the following main failings:

- The recorders have lost interest in requesting full information because they think nobody uses the data and do not know what their final purpose is;
- The correct statistical report or form is not always filled in. Internal control of all registrations has become deficient;
- The transfer of physical material from the place of origin to the central office passes through innumerable vicissitudes, so that original forms are literally lost;
- The practice has been instituted of numbering and coding only samples of forms with unsuitable designs and without statistical control, which results in data of doubtful quality;
- The certification of cause of death shows signs of deterioration. Again because of inertia and not because of medical complexity. The routine treatment of certain procedures related to codifying and revising the causes, and the accumulation of non-priority and low-paid jobs means these jobs are carried out by junior employees;
- The directors of national statistics feel they have neither the capacity nor the support from the system to take on such a recuperation, and also they do not have the necessary budget.

Certainly, all these deficiencies have existed since time immemorial; the fact is that their magnitude has reached such a point that it considerably compromises the effective use of the information produced.

The reader may consider these aspects removed from the subject at hand, but they are not. That is because, without basic information on the state and trend of the population, it is almost an illusion to think that policies can be adopted which are based on a reliable factual basis, and even more so to propose quantitative goals for growth, births, mortality and spatial distribution. It is an even more illusory to think in terms of population-objectives, high risk sectors, specific age groups, small geographical areas and other necessary breakdowns in more specific programmes.

Certainly, international cooperation is not exonerated from this deterioration process, both because of the progressive and systematic reduction in funds allocated —indicating a lower priority— and because of the persistence of aid modalities which have proved themselves ineffective.

### 3. Population policies without politicians

The genesis of the most recent policies which have been consecrated in a body of law, as well as of others less successful, shows that they did not arise spontaneously, but as responses to popular demand or they were the culmination of commitments and agreements on principle between parties. Neither are they found in electoral platforms; they receive no mention in the demands of trade unions or other basic organizations. Therefore it can be said, without risk of exaggeration, that the population, as a subject of overall, coherent, and lasting political interest and action, is not part of the platforms of the political leaders.

When a legislator or an outstanding figure of a political party raises the question, he does it as an individual, on a private basis, and there is no doubt that it is a question which interests him more as a person than as a member of a party who could commit his group. Therefore, if one sticks to the political message, one very soon comes to the conclusion that the question is low priority, of academic interest. It is also a question easy to have an opinion about and is exposed to being presented and discussed from positions based on ingenuous belief and prejudice, rather than on a minimum of ideological and scientific support. In some environments there also remains a species of autocensure against expressing oneself openly, a reservation, sometimes firmly-rooted, against offending values, dogmas, beliefs and ecclesiastical positions. Thus there is a kind of protective environment which restricts discussion of the matter and which has generated a dualism between what one expresses as an individual and what one proclaims from the tribunal.

Why does this happen? The thesis proposed here is that the political leadership is so compromised with immediate or very short term problems, is also constantly very busy, in the effort to survive in the areas it has won and to keep hold on a decreasing portion of the decision-making power which has passed progressively to other hands, that he is not in a situation to pay attention to the medium term questions or to consider possible situations which could occur after 10 or 15 years. Consequently, demographic subjects do not appear on the menu of matters to be seen to.

Two characteristics of more recent national efforts support the explanation of this omission which is put forward here. One is the way in which they become part of the State structure and, the other, what could be called the conflict of the times.

#### 3.1 *Insistence on the creation of bureaucratic superstructures*

Without exception, both current policies and projects which have died out at the half-way mark are the result of the sustained effort, sometimes pioneer, of small groups of persons who, coming into power, or positions close to it, have taken advantage of favourable temporary situations. The list of these promoters is made up of doctors, feminist leaders, entrepreneurs, members of the media, demographers, sociologists, lawyers; from very different areas, but few identify themselves as professional politicians, although almost all of them do belong to some group or party.

But this origin makes them vulnerable in that the negotiations and agreements which develop, above all in the initial organizing and operating phases, depend on the survival of the supporting nucleus in the decision-making position. This is so much the case that there are hardly any initiatives that cannot be associated with a specific name or institution. These projects do not develop in the bosom of a political movement or party, but in other areas. Political instability, the alternation of parties, the fleetingness and

rotation of heads and, particularly, the absence of agreed programmes for the medium term are their main enemies.

In the same way, since population questions touch on various Ministries or Secretariats and it is always necessary to resolve budget problems, their inclusion in the networks of executive power packages is very complicated. It is necessary to squeeze into a space in a very rigid institutional network. Latin American history shows a long list of initiatives which have failed in the face of these barriers.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that recent laws resort to heterodox solutions, such as national interministerial councils, advisory or consultative councils and peripheral or ambiguous Secretariats.

In this way it has been possible to generate a space in the bureaucratic system which allows, among other things, the giving of a recognizable place to these pioneer or trial nuclei and thus opening a sort of parenthesis in the dividing up of the executive area. The contradiction is that *ad hoc* solutions are not efficient for medium- or long-term purposes.

So the basic problem has not yet been resolved, only postponed. A single experience, that of Mexico, can be qualified as successful and lasting. All the rest have had a short life or exist without performing the task the law assigns them. And that is one of the factors conditioning future initiatives. Other factors are the argument of this paper: the need to win suitable political space within the ordinary State structure, with its priorities, its network of relationships and responsibilities, its share in the regular national budget, its place in the messages of the executive power and to overcome other such limitations.

Until this happens, population policies seem condemned to continue to be included in the list of exceptional matters and, in the end, to receive exceptional attention. That is, from time to time, but not always.

### 3.2 *Government time versus policy time*

This aspect is absolutely complementary to the preceding and has much in common with the history and fate of development plans and programmes and other initiatives which extend over the period of several governments. For a consolidated government which lasts for a long time, the point loses a lot of its meaning; this is not true under regimes which periodically renew their authorities, where it is of particular interest.

For the purposes of this analysis it is relevant to distinguish three time periods: the duration of the government's mandate, the time necessary or inherent to achieve certain explicitly or implicitly established goals and which, obviously, will vary according to the nature of each goal, and the longer time where the changes in the whole or the pattern, arising as an expression of the changes resulting from the policy, become apparent.

In the history of the region these times have not been distinguished. Neither have they been defined, except for the period of government, and therefore, the policies have no time-tables or these are diffuse. This has happened with goals for health, education, social security, etc. When they were adopted, the completion point was very distant and when it was necessary to evaluate results, seemed too close. The same thing happened with the goals of the World Population Plan of Action; they appeared extremely modest, but they were not reached. In countries where they had been overcome, it was thought, "we are

not so bad" and little progress was made. This lack of correspondence of the time periods means that those who approve the goals do not have to explain and those who are in power do not feel committed by them.

By way of hypothesis, it could be said that the frustration which follows the enthusiasm and energy of the initial phases of installing a policy, is a result of the ending of the first of these time periods. Moreover, since at the beginning stage many points of inertia, inexperience, delays in setting up teams and such have to be sorted out, this time is used up very rapidly. A qualitative process or change must also take place which means providing the final touch for the move from the sphere of interest of the supporting group to the consolidated and recognized institutional level. With local variations, this is the dominant pattern in Latin American history. On the other hand, there have been no contrary experiences, or they are hardly noticeable; this could be the case if a policy were put into operation, not very coordinated at the beginning and made up of various programmes, but forming part, from the beginning, of the ordinary administrative structure. In this way, the need for legal sanction could be delayed and in the preliminary stages it could operate within the existing legal framework or under administrative resolutions less binding than a law. In other words, the globalizing pretension would be superseded by the effectiveness of partial actions.

In this way, the political times would be less restricting, making it possible to concentrate action on specific goals, even though at first it may appear uncoordinated. For this it would be sufficient for the policy to be in an initiating unit, very close to the decision-making powers. Only after this inclusion and first evaluation stage could the possibility of a law formalizing the policy as an organic whole be considered.

Obviously, the question of continuing political support over successive government periods is still unresolved.

### 3.3 *Sovereignty and international migration*

Finally, in this section, the delicate question must be briefly touched on of the relationship between sovereignty and international migration, a sensitive subject which evokes various reactions, but is always, explicitly or implicitly under debate.

The subject of international migrations and movements of persons across frontiers is, unreservedly, the topic which appears most persistently and with the greatest detail in decisions about population policies. It was already seen in the grouping of countries in a previous section of this paper, that this was one of the few matters which appeared in all the bodies of law and had its own and explicit place within the ordinary State structure. Independent of whether they have population policies or not, all the countries, without exception, have an external migration policy which is still related to internal State security.

To go further, in reading introductory chapters and parliamentary speeches referring to migration questions, it is possible to recognize the extent to which the broad general public opinion feels the need to protect itself against the immigration of foreigners and the persistence of racial and cultural prejudice. Sometimes statements are made which refer to anthropometric models and ideal types.

In reading some regulations the importance can be seen which is still given to frontier control as a tool for protecting national sovereignty. A kind of anachronism exists, if this position is compared with

the transnationalization processes of the economies, the banking systems, trade marks, communications, insurance, mass media, publicity, etc. The contradiction is more flagrant when today pragmatic integration initiatives between bordering countries are reappearing. Paradoxically, in countries with a still relatively low population density, it is common to come across statements and pronouncements in favour of "populating the territory" to broaden markets and strengthen the nation as such through international migration. In these circles the old idea, which has long since been discarded, prevails which identifies the powerful nation with the nation with a large population.

Without taking sides in the argument over whether or not international migration is a useful tool for demographic policy, for the moment, the intention is to make an absolute distinction between what pertains to a population policy, conceived as a harmonic and coherent whole, with a view to building a society on specific basic foundations and the creation of administrative rules and regulations about the flow of passengers or transfer of persons with the intention of permanent residence. A legal distinction between the two would have beneficial consequences for the administrative units whose responsibilities are duplicated and which —sometimes in the absence of a legal basis— take on responsibilities which exceed the area of jurisdiction for which they were created.

#### **4. Population in the trilogy of the new international order**

In the last years of the 1980s and the first years of the 1990s, a large part of the world has witnessed, not very consciously and to some degree perplexed, the arising and consolidation, more quickly some places than others, of three new orders which will certainly be fixed in contemporary society and govern it for a long time. A new international economic order, a new political order —still contradictory and unstable— and a new order of international security.

A forth order should be mentioned —the ecological— still embryonic but, since it is demanding confrontation with extremely powerful interests and implies very profound changes in the consumption habits of the richest countries, it will certainly follow a zigzag path. This new ecological order, which is just beginning, will collide headlong with the first of the above, because it questions the whole basis of the appropriating, accumulating and predatory behaviour of its protagonists. Consequently, it is difficult to use it in the present analysis, although, at the end of a few decades, it could be the most weighty factor.

It is not the intention here to judge these trends, but simply to recognize them and identify them and to explore some of the consequences they could have on the demographic variables as an object of policy or on the perception of the role that these, in turn, could play in the future as conditioners or collaborators within these orders, from a Latin American point of view. It serves, in any case, as a simple background for introducing a few elements.

It is almost superfluous to remember that the new international economic order began to develop almost two decades ago; the first national experiences as examples to be followed appeared in the 1970s. Latin American chronology —almost country for country— is an excellent illustration of this process. But the new economic order which is being installed does not have much to do with the Latin American proposal, also of a new order, which came to a peak in the first sessions of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Thus, different situations, proposals and ideologies are managed under the same label.

This new order, of open and free markets, gives priority to the private sector and the initiative of productive, efficient and competitive entrepreneurs, reduces the functions of the State and, by virtue of the subsidiary principle, relegates them to the minimum possible, but it neglects the social component, the redistribution practices, and relies on the free interplay of factors. This new order can, from the demographic point of view, be described by two words: excluding and diverging. Excluding, because it leaves an important, and at the moment increasing, number of persons outside of its circuit who receive no share of the distribution or of the accumulation. Divergent, because the differences between those benefited and those excluded are becoming greater, both between and within countries, above all in the poorest.

The first indication is the increase of what in demography is called differential mortality, that is, the breaches observed between the more and the less favoured, expressed in terms of risk of death and the kinds of causes of death.

Although national life expectancy figures for different age groups are still rising, internal differences, both geographically and by social group, have become greater. An examination of the main prevailing causes of death shows that an extremely high proportion occur from causes the single condition of an adequate system of clinics over the whole country could have prevented. The increase in infectious-contagious and parasitical diseases in the excluded sectors of some societies, or, rather, markets--confirms that the economic order excludes an important portion of the population. In some Latin American capitals, health conditions have become so precarious that the downward trend in infant (less than 1 year) and child (1-4 years) mortality has stopped and in some places there are indications of its rising.

The popularity of medical assistance programs operated under the rules of the market have increased their costs, marginating important numbers of persons and at the same time contributed to destroy mutual or cooperative systems. To complement this, the pharmaceutical market has been freed.

Within the exclusive nature of the ruling order, the roots of a formidable expansion of the informal sector of the economy can also be detected, as well as a stimulus to emigration of intermediately and technically skilled workers as well as the absence of investment in drinking water and sanitation and other basic infrastructure, whose deficits sometimes reach incredible magnitudes.

It seems that the Malthusian assumptions of necessary inequality are being proved by fact, more now than ever before.

Such a system, wherever it takes root for a period of years, soon generates an absolute demographic surplus, understood as that population which, by definition, by not following the established rules of the game, is excluded. There is no evidence to judge whether this is temporary or not. It could be said, to use an economic concept, that the present order generates an antagonism between population and human capital, since it is difficult for a portion of the first to become part of the second. And it makes no difference if the country has a high natural growth rate or almost none; the region provides examples of both situations.

Given that an excluding order has been established, which means some people are outside of the system and given that its growth in the area has been very fast, it is tempting to conclude that a selective reduction in the demographic growth rate, particularly of those groups which are in danger of going over the limit in an attempt to harmonize —instead of fighting against— the rate of population increase with

the ruling distribution laws. But such a temptation would violate the principle of individual liberty which underlies these ideas.

It seems that the new international political order is still oscillating, but tending more towards unipolarity than tripolarity and for this reason has been described as unstable. What is certainly clear is that Latin America has turned into an area where the almost hegemonic influence of one of those poles is present in various areas of activity. This turns into a visible degree of uniformity among the political scenes and in the carbon-copy application of solutions which are not always very native.

This new political order has been superimposed on a western democratic model of political parties and the periodic renewal of authorities by elections. But the links of the national governments with the outside world —or with the poles— are so strong, that the area of genuine autonomy has been restricted. Another of its axes is the principle of guaranteed individual liberty, but today this idea is different from, for example, the idea of liberty consecrated by the French Revolution. The idea of present use, in function of the rules of the market and of the reduced State responsibilities, leads almost inevitably to inequality.

Latin America seems, thus, to be going through a diverging and excluding process which, for part of the population, results in a growth rate of poverty which is greater than the rate of natural growth.

Now, this liberty causes some restrictions to the pure operation of demographic behaviour which should be noted.

The first refers to what is called the right to reproduce. In a regime of genuine individual liberty, every woman or couple must have the explicit and coherent right to exercise the ability to have or not to have children in concordance with her or its personal convictions, principles or beliefs and not with those which a national or transnational power —political or religious— imposes. There is flagrant evidence of how this right, after being affirmed and defended in declarations and international forums, is later curtailed, invalidated or not according to the ideological and theological currents influencing the main power centres. In this matter, unlike what is happening in the field of economics, the State has reserved to itself the decision over what is acceptable and what is not. The article dealing with the right to reproduce, as a coherent body of doctrine and law is absent in Latin American legislation, in spite of the importance and distribution of family planning and the increasing use of sterilization and other practices. For example, there has still been no distinction made between matters related to sexual relations and those related to fecundity.

It must be added that the dependency of Latin America on its centres has visibly increased in this area as well, in recent years, even in those countries which adopted avant-garde legislation at the beginning of the 20th Century.

It is also relevant to look at what happens to liberty in the question of territorial mobility. This is a very different activity when it occurs within a national territory from when it crosses frontiers. And frankly discriminatory practices result when citizens from poor countries try to emigrate to rich countries. This means that it is a restricted, a conditioned liberty, where, once again, the State has ceded little. It has already been discussed above, how this position played a negative role in the success of recent political efforts.

But there is an aspect of this question which has been neglected, and that is the absence of clear and explicit proposals to compensate the countries of origin for the gigantic transfer of ability produced by the emigration of professional and skilled persons. This asymmetrical relationship, is governed by the rules of the market, but in the medium term serves to broaden the breach not so much through the loss of individuals as through the loss of human capital.

Thus, in future migratory policies, compensation for loss of formed capital in the country of origin must be made explicit. The receiving countries argue that they do not ask them to come and again and again apply discriminatory treatment at variance with signed agreements; but the inequality in negotiating power is so marked that in the country of origin, the decision and the risk are exclusively individual, in other words, the State simply lets them leave. In the receiving country, the State —and not the individuals— is omnipresent and it is the State that decides how many, who and when can enter their territory. Such a relationship necessarily causes tensions in frontier areas or migration transit stations and is the origin of the discriminatory treatment.

The Gulf War, the official end of the Cold War and the reforms adopted at the beginning of 1992 to the operation and priorities of the United Nations are sufficient indications that a new international security order is operating. Whether this new order will have visible and direct repercussions on demographic behaviour in the developing countries will depend, almost exclusively, on the strategic value placed on population as a variable. If it is removed from the realm of social and economic development aid, where it has been to date, and becomes, as a result of these reforms, a factor in the negotiations for financial assistance from the large world organizations, it will undoubtedly become a variable with considerable power of persuasion. The Amsterdam proposals (1989), although not governmental, could be understood as a sign or indication that demographic growth will become a component in maintaining the peace and security of states and, in the end, susceptible to international follow up and control. Such a position would not be surprising, since in the preliminary studies for Bucarest, before 1974, there were some unsuccessful initiatives in this direction.

Thus, it could be that soon this could also go beyond the limit of national sovereign power and become part of the international authority, the administrator of agreements and commitments, just as has occurred in other areas. And since poverty and environmental deterioration are partly caused, according to some people, by uncontrolled demographic growth, the conclusion is obvious.

But the Secretary General of the United Nations has said that the world is suffering simultaneously from underdevelopment and from overdevelopment. It could be said that an indication of the first is a high rate of demographic growth, and that unmistakable indications of the second are hyper-consumption, inexorable aggression against the environment and the wasting of the planet's common heritage for the benefit of the few.

Nothing assures that, even if the poor countries took such drastic measures as reducing their natural growth rate to the replacement level, the other side would be disposed to change the intensity of its aggression against the environment or the intensity with which it exploits natural resources. There is no way to do it, because that is also where the power is concentrated which rules the three orders.

Finally, it must be said that in each one of the orders identified, double-talk is spoken and double standards are applied. What is illegitimate at home is not always so abroad. Subsidy, tariff, foreign trade, international migration, strategic arms supplies policies are well-known examples. There is no reason to

exclude demographic variables from these double standards, above all, if they become part of the critical scaffold which will support the society of the future.

## **5. Population policies or demographic reform?**

Since their most remote origins, population policies have always been associated with the effective exercise and retention of power. Today the power of national states is being diluted as a result of international interdependence and the inequality of relationships between states. Thus, population policies suitable for today have to reconcile three different interests: those arising out of individual rights and their corollary, the obligations of the inhabitants; the responsibilities still in the hands of the national State for taking and ceding spaces; and the configuration of the international relationships among states and between individual states and international corporations. These elements will become a basic axis delimiting the arena of future action.

Over the last two decades, there has been a decline in enthusiasm and initiative for resolving some of the development problems in Latin America and the Caribbean by means of population policies, as inseparable elements of development plans and strategies.

Much talent, energy, time and money was spent in this way, without the policies being applied and producing more or less satisfactory results. Meanwhile, the patterns of underdevelopment broadened and deepened. The lessons left by this experience and the questions it raised provide a second reference point.

A third arises out of the need to consider whether the United Nations system, above all in its regional activities, is making the necessary internal preparations for helping the governments to reexamine their demographic situations, their trends and possible areas of political action. Repeating the schemes which predominated at the beginning of this exercise, reopening discussion with more or less the same thematic structure, bringing up to date some approaches which underlay unsuccessful activities or programmes, would be extremely prejudicial for the beneficiaries of these proposals. An internal examination and evaluation within the system itself is still pending. It would not be very creative to prepare for the third world meeting without having done this preliminary job.

The fourth pivot points to a review of the individual experience in each country, extracting what could be shared with others, seeing what did not work, what should be modified or rejected and, finally, what could be useful. This would mean asking questions to be answered by those with more insight and critical sense. To take a position with respect to strategies, making their theoretical bases, their instruments and their purposes explicit.

Only for the purpose of stimulating dialogue, it is first proposed that, in the light of recent history, perhaps a better road would be to abandon the attempt to adopt population policies exactly as they have been conceived, with all their legal and institutional aspirations.

Instead of this, it is proposed to introduce the idea of demographic reform based on various modes of operating and taking advantage of the opportunities the existing structure of the State offers in the way of niches for possible action. That is, to take a very realistic approach, using the ordinary institutional framework already existing in each country.

Thus, the title of this section, "Population policies or demographic reform?" is not only a play on words, but an alternative route which, by integrating parts and packages, leads to reaching certain goals.

The central idea is: with the present structure of the state, where ministerial jurisdictions are more or less rigid and consolidated, budgets are limited and with all the other facets of the region today, is it possible to cushion and perhaps improve the intolerable conditions in which an increasing portion of the society lives? If the answer is not negative, a way would be opened to bring about demographic reform.

What is meant by that? A set of sectoral programs, which could be independent of each other, located in the area of executive power, for achieving very explicit goals, with pre-established time-tables and to be completed within the mandate of a single government. In short, to fulfill the contract signed without reservations in the international area, which was not done, to be consistent with the commitments assumed in the past.

Suppose a government at the beginning of its administration admits that the infant mortality rate in the country is too high and proposes to reduce it by several digits. The demographers and specialists in public health would be able to tell him rapidly, how many deaths must be prevented each year to reach progressive goals. The vital statistics, which have to be salvaged and ordered, will tell him which are the most frequent causes of death and, therefore, what specific health action it is appropriate to take, where and when. He could also decide what technology to use and how much it would cost. It would be known, on the other hand, where the mothers live who bring children into the world with little probability of surviving their first year and how much education they have, and prenatal attention could be directed there—with the costs of its infrastructure—and should be effective.

A reduction in infant mortality can be achieved, providing there is a firm political decision, sustained over time, effective and lasting management on the part of the public health services at all levels and a budget negotiated with the treasury. Neither a law nor a new agency is necessary. The structures exist, the diagnosis and the solution, as well. And nobody would deny that a low rate of infant mortality is a goal aspired to by the whole of society.

Let us suppose that another government considers that the average number of children among poor women is incompatible with their material well-being, with what they can offer their children, and that the social cost of welfare assistance cannot be met. There are only two alternatives: either to transform this reproductive conduct through motivation and instruction in the use of effective contraceptive practices or to use coercion. If the latter is excluded, the way is open for a programme of family planning or fecundity reduction directed to a group of women who constitute the population objective. Given the goals and the instrumental alternatives, it is only necessary to allocate resources and to define mechanisms within the already existing structure. Certainly, appropriate external or private cooperation could be added. In this case as well, it is not necessary first to develop a policy like those which have failed; it is simply a question of initiating a reform of the reproduction pattern of some of the women and nothing else. But this is no small thing, because what is required is a very frank, honest and explicit statement from the political leadership, of the problem to be resolved and the means to be adopted to this end. And in this way, as many examples could be presented as there are recognized problems. Using this approach, the political authorities could approach the solution of concrete situations, identified and quantified, and which are defined as individual problems, with no pretension to an overall policy, which still seems very remote.

It could be said that such a proposal is no different from strengthening a social policy and that is correct; but beyond the label, it is important to emphasize the possibility and urgency of common-sense action on the most serious manifestations of inequity, as are made plain in socio-demographic studies.

Finally, the subject seems hardly to have been touched on in the findings of the international forums but was, recently, in the Amsterdam Declaration (1989) given specific mention; it is a question of the necessary funds, national and international in origin, which must be committed if the desired demographic goals are to be reached. According to this document, it is estimated that in all the developing countries, the funds committed for international cooperation in population programmes reached some \$US 4.5 billion per year in 1987 and that by the year 2000 they should have increased to at least \$US 9 billion per year.

Faced with the seriousness of the problems affecting a very considerable part of the inhabitants of the planet, these magnitudes seem disproportionately modest. This could be interpreted as an underestimate of the difficulties to be overcome, or else, that these problems are not considered first priorities.

When these amounts are compared with the estimates for oil prospecting in Latin America and the Caribbean, to the order of \$US 98-108 billion in 10 years, or what the European Community has to invest to recycle the garbage generated by packaging and wrapping, in accordance with the new standards, unofficially estimated at \$US 10 billion per year (The Economist, August 22-28, 1992, p. 54), it is difficult not to think that the disproportion between the size of the problems and the funds allocated to solve them is partially the cause of the persistence of the problems.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The institutionalization, operation and consolidation results after two decades of national population policies in Latin America and the Caribbean, show that progress fell far short of the expectations of the early 1970s.
2. Various factors explain this result, but that which seems to be most important is the absence of a firm, explicit political decision, with goals for modifying or changing the course of the demographic variables, which are considered unfavourable, operating over various years with specific strategies or conceptions of economic and social development. It is precisely the existence of this element which stands out from the others in the few exceptional cases in the region.
3. In contradiction to this situation, the international atmosphere irradiates very clear messages, originating in the more industrialized countries, emphasizing the need to slow down population growth, particularly in the developing countries.
4. Not only is political commitment to the management of demographic questions absent, the dominant opinion on population policies is based on a model of the individual whose behaviour exceeds the tolerance norms of nature. Any future population policy must take on the job of organizing itself on bases with a heavy ecological content, if it is to go beyond the narrow horizon of a reductionist concept, so that the principles of equity and sustainability —above all in the international sphere--can be translated into recognizable action.
5. The fact that population policies have not prospered in the way that was hoped does not mean that the demographic situation of the region remained unchanged. Much to the contrary, if anything can describe the Latin American and Caribbean populations as a whole, it is precisely, the profundity and speed of their demographic transformations.
6. As a consequence of this rapid passage through successive levels of reproduction and mortality, the natural growth rate shows a pronounced decline, certainly in some countries more than in others, some of which are still in the initial stages. Everything seems to indicate that this process of converging towards even lower growth rates will be the trend for the next three or four decades, with resulting effects on the age structure.
7. In reducing fecundity, the operating of family planning programmes have played a very important role, with its two principle features: contraception and sterilization, which encourage and support a very important change in value systems with respect to family size. Nevertheless, the methods by which these programmes have been applied have not always respected the explicit principle of freedom of choice, leading to the use of means and techniques in function of incentives or interests on the part of the supply of such services.
8. The repercussion which the new international order could have on the priority allocated to population growth and the contradictions mentioned between the rights and obligations of individuals and of states, should lead the states to more precisely and unequivocally define the area of liberty reserved exclusively to the woman or the couple on the question of whether or not to have children. This delimitation involves ethical decisions which have been long postponed in the institutional realm and also by the individual.

The same should happen with respect to territorial mobility and international migration.

9. In the face of the experience described in this paper, and considering the situations of inequity affecting the region today, in terms of health, education, housing, basic services, the alternative is proposed here of bringing about a demographic reform which, in a very pragmatic and urgent sense, meets the most dramatic cases by the most direct route.

This does not mean abandoning the adoption of an organic population policy, with medium- and long-term goals; only that the eloquence of the demographic, social and economic indicators demand the search for more immediate solutions.

10. The degree of inequality and exclusion from the distribution of well-being, whose origin —sometimes— is attributed to inconvenient demographic growth, means that this subject should be given priority over other matters of the same level of significance, such as the energy question, oil exploration, structural reforms of the State and other enterprising strategies. This implies an immediate change in the attitude of governments and international cooperation agencies with respect to the magnitude of funds required, which must be multiplied several times over in order to achieve reasonable improvements in the next decade.



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