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EXTRACTS FROM THE REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR ON  
POPULATION PROBLEMS IN LATIN AMERICA

Referring to the project of establishing a regional centre  
of demographic research and training

The seminar on Population problems in Latin America was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 5 - 16 December 1955. It was organized by the United Nations, under resolution 308 B (XI) of the Economic and Social Council, at the invitation of the Government of Brazil, the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, and the Fundação Getulio Vargas, and in collaboration with the International Social Science Council.

In addition to the opening and closing sessions, there were a total of 24 substantive meetings, organized under four major topics: (A) Demographic situation of Latin America and prospects for future population trends; (B) Relation of population trends to problems of planning for economic and social development; (C) Needed demographic research; (D) Organization of demographic research and training. The proposal to establish in Latin America a Regional Demographic Research and Training Centre was discussed at meeting 25, and references to the problem were made at meetings 23, 24 and 26. Relevant extracts from the Seminar's report are quoted here below:

/ Meeting 25



Meeting 25

INTRA-REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN DEMOGRAPHIC  
TRAINING AND RESEARCH

"390. The end of the meeting was devoted to discussion of a paper outlining a plan for the establishment of a demographic training and research centre at Santiago, Chile. The views of participants were sought on the following points:

(1) Location of the centre. It was explained that it was not a question of discussing the choice of the country in which the centre would be established (which was a matter outside the competence of the seminar) but of discussing whether the centre should be established in a university, as part of another body, or completely independent of any governmental agency.

(2) Optimum size. In other words, the number of students in relation to the number of teachers.

(3) Curriculum and length of course. When the various courses in demography given in Latin America were considered at a previous meeting, they were divided into three categories: elementary courses limited to the statement of the facts, higher courses which also deal with the problems raised, and courses of analytic demography which seek the solution of those problems and consider demography in its relationship with political economy, sociology, biology, etc. What level of instruction should be given at the proposed centre ?

(4) Research programme

(5) Selection of students. Should the centre take a few students from each country or teams of students from a limited number of countries who would be able on their return to secure the adoption of their views more easily than would an isolated individual ?

(6) Relationship with university courses. If the centre were set up in a university, to what faculty should it be attached ? Should consideration be given, in establishing the centre, to the creation of a diploma, university or otherwise, to be awarded to successful candidates ?

/(7) Progress

(7) Progress towards independence. While the centre is to be launched initially by the United Nations, it seems desirable that it should eventually be released from international control and become more or less autonomous. How would its regional character be maintained in such circumstances ?

391. It was understood that the financial problems involved in the establishment of the centre and the problems of its administration would not be discussed.

392. Mr. M. Diegues (Brazil) expressed his gratification at the initiative taken by the United Nations. In his opinion, the proposed centre would not be able to develop satisfactorily unless it could use the services of a national demographic research body already operating in the host country. He felt that the centre should take advantage of the work done in Brazil during the last twenty years by IBGE under the direction of Professor Mortara. He did not propose that the centre should be set up as part of IBGE, but that it should be linked with it as well as other Brazilian bodies.

393. Mr. E. Roca (Peru) felt that the centre should be part of a university where its teaching would in a sense supplement the courses given by the various faculties. The level of courses should be as high as possible; he hoped that it would be in the third category described above. The selection of students would be difficult in the early stages but after a few years they could be recruited from among university students. The object should be to train students capable of disseminating their knowledge later in their own countries. The University of San Marcos at Lima could easily satisfy all those requirements. Lima was relatively easy to reach from most countries of Latin America, and the climate was excellent. While he had no desire to belittle the work of Professor Mortara in Brazil, he noted that Peru possessed a group of statisticians who had already done excellent work in demography.

394. Mr. G. Jardim thought that there would be no advantage in integrating the centre with a university; he would prefer it to be independent. Universities had so far neglected demography and their statutes would not

/allow the

allow the establishment of the centre as part of the university. If a university had suitable statutes, it would, he thought, be too powerful and it would be difficult for the centre to preserve its independence.

395. Mr. J. Marull (Discussion Leader) said that the proposed centre could act as a catalytic agent for existing institutions in the country where it was established. In the early stages, the students would have to be chosen from among technicians, with responsible posts in the countries concerned. Only at a later stage would it be possible to find candidates among students who had completed their studies. The centre should be started on a modest scale and should be established in a place with a tradition of scientific research. Santiago did not seem to be an ideal choice because of the many other international bodies already established there. It would be better not to concentrate all activities in one place. Consideration should also be given to transport facilities, exchange problems and the facilities granted to foreign visitors by the host country. He felt that the centre should not be permanent but should develop as rapidly as possible into a national centre.

396. Mr. M. Lubin outlined the special position of the population of Haiti and said that it offered an ideal field of research for a demographic centre. Port-au-Prince would be happy to welcome the centre.

397. Mr. B. Jimenez (Costa Rica) said that in selecting the students, it was important to consider their educational background. Speaking from personal experience at the economic training centre organized by ECLA at Santiago, he said that the disparity of the educational levels of participants had been a great disadvantage.

398. Mr. E. Baldinelli (Argentina) felt that the centre should be set up at a university but should be independent of it. The university would be there merely to help the centre by providing it with teachers, equipment, books, etc. The centre should also be in touch with the national statistical office, which would supply it with the material for research. Teaching should begin at the intermediate level. After some years, courses in demographic analysis of the type referred to earlier might be started.

/The homogeneity

The homogeneity in terms of education, the desirability of which Mr. Jimenez had drawn attention to, could not, he felt, be attained in Latin America. Thirty students would, he thought, be the optimum number.

399. Mr. F. Quesada (Chile) thought that Santiago would be an excellent choice, as it would permit collaboration with ECLA. He stressed the importance of geographical factors in demographic studies. Social conditions in the country where the centre was to be established must be taken into account.

400. The discussion showed clearly that all the participants welcomed the establishment of a demographic training and research centre in Latin America. Although for understandable reasons of national prestige there was not unanimous support for the proposal to establish the centre at Santiago, it appeared that there would be no major objection to its establishment there."

#### Meeting 23

#### DEMOGRAPHIC TRAINING IN LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

"354. Other speakers, including Messrs. E. Baldinelli (Argentina), A. Bocaz (Chile), M. Lubin (Haiti) and M. Ponce de Leon (Bolivia), stressed the importance of establishing a demographic study centre in the region. In fact, speakers were unanimous in their support for the United Nations proposals to create such a center which would meet the urgent needs for demographic training."

#### Meeting 24

#### DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

"369. Mr. G. Jardim (International Statistical Institute) spoke of the role of international organizations in the matter of training and education. These organizations were anxious to encourage the training of personnel so that the best use might be made of the information available. He mentioned the Third Inter-American Statistical Congress and the work of the Commission

/on Statistical

on Statistical Education on the various problems connected with the training of skilled personnel in Latin American countries. Like other participants, he stressed the importance, as a first step, of training designed to obtain basic information. The proposed centre for demographic research should, Mr. Jardim felt, place major emphasis on the compilation and analysis of statistical data."

Meeting 26  
CLOSING SESSION

"404. Dr. Clotilda Bula of Argentina, speaking on behalf of the other government representatives and fellows, expressed appreciation for the opportunity of attending the Seminar and the conviction that the knowledge and ideas acquired at the Seminar would have practical applications in the participants' work in their home countries. On the other hand, she hoped that the participants had been able to provide information which would help international organizations in orienting their technical assistance programme so as to meet the most urgent needs of each country. Dr. Bula said the discussions had brought out the need for demographic studies in formulating effective government planning policies leading to material and cultural progress. Such studies, she said, should take into account the historical development of the population as well as the present composition and distribution. In view of these needs, the enthusiasm displayed toward the plan for establishing a centre for demographic research and training in Latin America was understandable."

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE SEMINAR, PROFESSOR GIORGIO MORTARA

"437. It was apparent from the information presented at the Seminar that, especially in recent years, a real need has been felt in a number of countries for a programme of instruction in demographic subjects, such as anthropography, population statistics, demography as a science of observation, and population policy, and that these subjects are being more widely taught.

/438. Inadequate

438. Inadequate training has hitherto been one of the causes of the poverty of Latin America's demographic literature. In some countries, there has as yet been no application of demographic analysis. Nevertheless, the reports presented by the participants, though incomplete, showed a promising development of research in some countries and a general desire for more extensive and thorough scientific research on population questions.

439. Accordingly, the idea of establishing a Latin American Centre for Demographic Research and Training put forward by the United Nations received general support from the participants, although there were differences of opinion regarding the location and the functions of such a centre. Other proposals for international collaboration (a demographic association, a demographic review, etc.) were discussed, but it was concluded that such activities could either be included in those of the proposed centre or could be carried out by already existing institutions (such as the Inter-American Statistical Institute, the periodical Estadística, etc.)"