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IMPLICATIONS FOR POPULATION ACTIVITIES IN THE CARIBBEAN

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The views expressed are those of the staff member and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean.

The International Conference on Population was held in Mexico City, 6-14 August, 1984, to appraise the World Population Plan of Action adopted by consensus ten years ago, and to make recommendations for further implementation over the next decade.

Delegations from several English-speaking Caribbean countries participated, as well as observers from the ECLAC/CDCC Secretariat and the CARICOM Secretariat.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE CONFERENCE

General activities of the Conference were organized around two main meetings which met simultaneously:

- (i) Plenary where the general Debate on the review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action took place; and
- (ii) Main Committee which met to finalise the Recommendations for the further implementation of the World Population Plan of Action, submitted by the Preparatory Committee Meetings.

#### HIGHLIGHTS OF CONFERENCE

The experience of the last decade, as presented by Heads of Government, demonstrated that a variety of policy approaches could be effective when designed and implemented by national governments with due regard for their particular political, social, cultural, religious and economic conditions.

In general, the Conference confirmed that the principal aim of social, economic and human development, of which population goals and policies are integral parts, is to improve the standards of living and the quality of life.

#### 1. Population and Development

The theme of the Conference was the interrelationships between population and development, and this was reflected in most of the addresses by Heads of Governments from both developed and developing countries.

Consequently, the first four recommendations of the World Population Plan of Action are devoted to a reaffirmation of this relationship and the provision of guidelines for future action by governments.

In general, the Conference acknowledged that population issues were increasingly recognised as a fundamental element in development planning, and emphasised the urgent need for development policies, plans and programmes to reflect the links between population, resources, environment and development. It was stressed that priority should be given to active programmes integrating all essential population and development factors.

Within this context the importance of training programmes need to be emphasised. Indeed, recommendation 75 specifically states that, "governments are invited to develop an adequate corps of trained persons for the effective formulation and implementation of integrated population and development policies, plans and programmes at all levels. In this regard, increased efforts should be made by Governments and Training Institutions, both at national and international levels, to further facilitate the integration of population studies into training curricula for policy-makers and executives who plan and implement development programmes."

To date, no training programme on Population and Development has been conducted in the Caribbean. The ECLAC/CDCC Secretariat is, however, planning a series of training activities in this area and Governments are being urged to support and participate actively in these training programmes.

Of significance to this theme is the set of recommendations devoted to the development of population policies. Recommendation 11 repeats the call to governments to formulate population policies as integral components of socio-economic development policies. Of importance also for Caribbean countries within the next year is recommendation 12 which refers to the implementation stage of the policy and encourages governments "to provide adequate resources and, where appropriate, to adopt innovative measures for the implementation of the population policy." This is probably the most challenging stage in the process of executing a population policy, and Caribbean countries are urged to develop guidelines and devise strategies for implementing the policy.

It is essential for each country in developing its national population policy to ensure that the goals of the policy are perceived as an integral part of the country's social and economic development. In addition, the integration of population into development planning should constitute an essential component of the population policy implementation plan.

The ECLAC/CDCC Secretariat is prepared to assist countries with respect to the above.

## 2. Status of Women

Improving the status of women and enhancing their role was considered an important goal in itself and a special section was devoted to issues related to women in recommendations 5-10 for further implementation of the World Population Plan of Action. It was emphasized that swift action should be taken to assist women in attaining full equality with men in social, political and economic life. Of interest is the new recommendation 9 which emphasises the necessity for men and women to share jointly responsibilities in areas such as family life, child-bearing and family planning.

The appointment of a desk officer or establishment of a bureau in Government Offices of Caribbean countries with special responsibility for women's affairs is an important first step towards the creation of mechanisms for increasing the integration of women in the development process. Many research and training programmes are currently being conducted and the generation of education and employment opportunities for women in the Caribbean are also being encouraged.

However, as recognised at the Conference, progress has been slow since 1974 in the achievement of equality for women. Additional strategies to address these concerns will be formulated at the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women to be convened in Nairobi in 1985.

## 3. Family Planning

Family Planning issues are subsumed under section 3 termed 'Reproduction and the Family' in recommendations 26 and 35. On the whole, the

conference recognised that Family Planning Programmes had contributed significantly to fertility decline over the past decade. It was, however, recommended that efforts should be made to ensure that couples and individuals have free access to the necessary education, information and means to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children.

The conference indicated that, in most cases, although some services are available, an appropriate range of methods and follow-up services are not. This was reflected in the data from World Fertility Survey for developing countries which indicated that, on average, over one quarter of births in the year prior to the survey had not been desired.

Worthy of mention also is recommendation 28 which, inter alia, endorses the integration of family planning services with health care programmes which is in keeping with existing Government policies of many Caribbean countries. In addition, the need for more research into the development of safe and acceptable contraceptive methods was emphasised.

Recommendation 29 addresses family life and sex education for adolescents. It should be pointed out that this recommendation stated that "suitable family planning information and services should be made available to adolescents within the changing socio-cultural framework of each country." This implies that countries should aim at devising methods and utilising innovative channels of communication with youths.

Another set of recommendations pertaining to family planning and of relevance to the Caribbean are recommendations 32 and 33 which refer to target setting. Essentially they urge governments, first of all, to set fertility goals and establish programme targets. In addition, however, they encourage that these goals and targets be translated into operational steps that can be clearly understood by all people.

This has important implications for those Caribbean countries now in the process of formulating quantitative goals for their population policies. It is recommended that countries should set out clearly step by step the mechanisms through which the goals and targets can be achieved. Not only is this important for assisting the society in achieving a clearer understanding of these goals, but it is essential for the successful implementation as well as more effective monitoring and evaluation of the policy programmes.

This is an area of concern and it is essential to explore ways of defining goals in more operational terms as well as conducting research to provide information that will assist in clarifying the issues at hand. In light of recommendations 32 and 33, Caribbean countries currently involved in the formulation of population policies may wish to reassess their goals and make further efforts to specify more clearly the measures indicated to achieve these goals.

On the subject of operational research, recommendation 70, under the section headed 'Research' provides some very important guidelines for further action in the area of research for implementing family planning programmes. It urges "governments, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations to give priority to service and operational research, including (a) acceptability of programme and methods; (b) programme design and implementation; (c) management of programmes, including training of personnel, monitoring, logistics and evaluation; and (d) effectiveness of programmes, including information on planning the number of children. To increase the acceptance and to improve the design of family planning service programmes, priority should be given in the social research areas to determinants and consequences of fertility." Within this context, special attention is drawn to the need for further research into the kinds of programmes and policies required to address the problems of teenage pregnancy.

Governments are also urged to increase their support to the management of population programmes in recommendation 73. They are urged to "expand their training programmes in population fields, particularly in the areas of demography, population studies, survey research, management, family life, sex education, maternal and child health, family planning and reproductive physiology. Such efforts should focus on action-oriented training, reflecting the milieu of the area, country or region concerned."

#### 4. Health

As part of the goal to improve health standards for all, the conference recommended that governments should aim at reducing levels of mortality and morbidity and should give special attention to maternal and child health

services within a primary health care system. Moreover, governments should intensify their efforts to reduce foetal, infant and early childhood mortality through breast-feeding, adequate nutrition, clean water, immunization programmes, oral rehydration therapy and birth spacing.

Although achievements in the above-mentioned areas in some Caribbean countries are well recognized, indications are that the improvement in the mortality situation starting in the 1920s has not continued into the 1980s. Furthermore, there is some suggestion that the quality of public health and health management in some countries has begun to deteriorate, while deaths from accidents and occupation hazards are increasing.

There is therefore need to pay greater attention to the area of health than in the past and steps should be taken to maintain current health standards in an effort to effect further improvements in the Caribbean region.

#### 5. Population Structure

It was recognized that, despite the decline in fertility, developing countries would continue to experience rapid increase in the absolute number of children and youth. Special programmes would therefore be necessary to respond to their needs, including appropriate training and productive employment.

Positive steps should therefore be taken over the next decade to address youth-related issues especially with respect to vocational training programmes as well as employment creation programmes in the Caribbean.

On the other hand, the issue of aging populations, currently being experienced by developed countries, was perceived as an impending social problem for which developing countries should begin planning programmes.

National committees should be established to focus on the emerging problem of the aged and to devise programmes to deal with population increases at older age groups. A committee of this nature has already been established in Jamaica.

6. Internal Migration

Integrated rural and urban development was perceived as an essential part of population policies and governments were urged to continue to promote more equitable regional development and to improve economic and social conditions in rural areas.

In the Caribbean, the extent to which internal migration represents a problem varies with the size of the country. Governments should therefore continue to undertake studies and surveys to provide information for use in planning programmes/policy to accommodate as well as redirect the flow of migrants and upgrade rural areas.

7. International Migration

The outflow of skills remains a serious human resource problem in many countries. While observing the right of the individual to move freely, Governments are being urged, inter alia, to formulate national and international measures to obviate its adverse effects.

Recommendation 46 is of special relevance to most Caribbean countries where at present emigration of professional and skilled personnel is a major concern. In some countries positive steps are being taken to encourage their return through the provision of favourable economic environment and policy incentives. In addition, action is being taken to redress the imbalance of skills through the establishment of a Skills Bank (termed Human Resource Facility) on an international level to provide developing countries with specific skills required on a short term basis. Caribbean countries are being urged to support the development of the Human Resource Facility.

8. Data Collection and Analysis

The Conference emphasised that the collection and analysis of population and related statistics is an indispensable basis for accurate understanding of population trends and prospects, formulating population and development plans/programmes, and for monitoring as well as implementing these plans and programmes.



Recommendation 68 urges governments to "collect, compile and publish on a timely basis statistics needed to plan and evaluate population and health programmes including family planning programmes." To this end, the strengthening of civil registration systems are recommended.

Critical gaps still exist in the collection and processing of vital statistics in the Caribbean. Despite the efforts being made to address this problem, there is need for further improvements in the quality and timeliness of the data to ensure effective evaluation and monitoring of the current socio-economic and demographic position and to make meaningful projections.

Funds have recently been provided by UNFPA for the purpose of training as well as improving the quality of vital statistics in the Caribbean region. It is expected that these programmes will have positive effects on the vital registration systems of the region.

#### 9. Role of International Co-operation

The needs of developing countries for assistance in population activities have increased dramatically. While the countries themselves are allocating increasing shares of expenditure for population programmes, further assistance is required from the international community.

A critical need of Caribbean countries at this time is the availability of adequate resources for both continuation of the process of policy formulation as well as the implementation of national population policy. With regard to the implementation aspect, it is urged that countries should not only seek technical as well as financial assistance from the international community but should also make national provision through increased budgetary allocations for population-related programmes. This aspect of national budgetary provision is essential for the success of the implementation process and Caribbean countries still in the process of policy formulation should provide for related activities in their budgets.

#### CONCLUSION

In reviewing and appraising the World Population Plan of Action, it is possible to acknowledge that many Caribbean countries have made great

strides in implementing the recommendations over the past decade though at varying stages of degree and magnitude. However, at this point, it is being suggested that further action is needed in the following areas:-

- (i) Increased integration of population into the development planning process of all sectors.
- (ii) Acceleration of efforts to assist women in attaining full equality with men in the social, political and economic life.
- (iii) Increased availability and accessibility of family planning services.
- (iv) Improved standards of health care.
- (v) Further provisions of training and employment opportunities for youth as well as programmes to cater for the special needs of the aged.
- (vi) Expansion of integrated rural and urban development programmes to minimize rural/urban drift.
- (vii) Provision of incentives to reduce emigration and programmes to attract skills.
- (viii) Improvement in the quality and timeliness of vital statistics and other population data.
- (ix) Support from international communities for further implementation of national population policies.

The Mexico Conference provided the opportunity for co-operation among the English-speaking Caribbean countries in addressing population-related matters as they pertain to the region as a whole. This augurs well for future collaboration in the area of population and development within the region. The experience has also shown that the English-speaking Caribbean countries should strive to arrive at some consensus and devise a common strategy/position prior to their participation at an international forum.

Attention is drawn to the establishment at the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean in Port-of-Spain of the ECLAC/CELADE Demography Unit. Its establishment allows for the expansion of ongoing technical co-operation work in demography and for assistance to countries, at their request, in dealing with some of the matters raised above in implementing the recommendations of the World Population Plan of Action.