

POPULATION RESEARCH AND THE DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESS: SOME THOUGHTS ON A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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The past 40-year period witnessed a gradual change in the status of population as a variable in the development process. From being perceived as a factor that retarded economic growth it changed into an integral component of the development process during this period. This change in perception, accordingly, was accompanied by an increase in the number of countries adopting population policies to facilitate their attempts at development. Today, the majority of the world population is affected by population policies of one form or another. As revealed by a recent IPPF datasheet 67 countries accommodating 63 percent of the world population adopt population policies aimed at changing their current fertility levels (IPPF, 1984). Many countries, meanwhile, have implemented various programmes in order to alter their population distribution patterns perceived as unfavourable.

It has become increasingly difficult to delimit and define population policies. A major reason for this difficulty is the wide range of factors that affect the components of population dynamics. For instance, although the birth of an infant is a biological event, it is, at the same time, an outcome of a multitude of factors that extend well beyond biological boundaries. The Davis-Blake model of 'intervening variables', to some extent, showed the diversity and complexity of the factors that affect fertility levels in different societies (Davis and Blake, 1956). Likewise, mortality depends not only on physio-demographic variables but also on a host of other factors which may be collectively called socio-cultural. Migration, on the other hand, is a complex process activated by personal decisions and factors beyond the control of the individuals and households. The components of population change, at the same time, are interdependent. Thus, a wide variety of options are at the disposal of population policy-makers and planners who are attempting to alter the demographic profiles of their countries. The correct selection and formulation of policies and their successful implementation, however, depend on the clear understanding of the above-mentioned mechanisms, which constitute the "demographic process". Nevertheless, in population planning to date, sufficient attention has not been paid to this important factor. As a result, population policy formulation and programmes have become time-specific and component-specific exercises resulting in unexpected and unfavourable demographic, social and economic consequences. Research must be directed, therefore, to identify and study the