

Draft

## Introduction

The Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life has been conducting Public Hearings in all regions of the world. We have listened to hundreds of NGOs, community leaders, health experts, public officials. Their voices convey a message we cannot ignore.

They say: *"Looking at the population situation as a problem of numbers has seriously damaged the quality of life of people living in the countries where population control programmes are promoted";*

and: *"Let the direction and pace be people's choice. Let them be empowered, by a sharp increase in their access to education, communication, health care and technology".*

In Harare throughout the Public Hearing a group of young people kept saying: *"Who will listen to my voice? Who will be moved? Where is the community to whom I must speak? Will the cries I send out into the void always fall into emptiness?"*.

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In face of this: **Can we go on with just more of the same? We don't think so.**



For the first decades of its existence, the United Nations consistently fought against colonialism, imperialism, apartheid. Freedom was the necessary and urgent goal of resolutions, recommendations, declarations.

Today, though apparently over, that struggle is still unfinished. Because freedom cannot be achieved without "the conditions for freedom". And these conditions, spelled out in the Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, are still far from being accessible to all.

Hence the importance we give to the succession of the UN World Conferences stretching from Rio to Istanbul. They must create meaning, inspire innovation, capture the unique opportunity of their synergies.

By focusing on Population-and-Development, the Cairo Conference seizes the opportunity to redirect international priorities, to address creatively the destitution of millions of people today, to build a more habitable planet for future generations, to give decisive steps towards a new paradigm.

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Because of its concern with Population-and-Development, the Cairo Conference must seize the opportunity to be a landmark in a process of reshuffling of goals and means in communal action.

In the way we look at Population-and-Development resides the most important **transition** - not one perceived only by experts, not from one economic ideology to another but from an economy that ignores and marginalizes millions of human beings to an economy that re-asserts itself as a means to achieve well-being, quality of life of human beings. The transition from a money and profit centered economy to a **people-centered economy**.

## Integrated Population Policies

Turning to **population policies**, time is over

- . for what a group of medical doctors in South Asia called the "chain of coercion";
- . for imposing numerical targets to people, sometimes as a way to guarantee the promotion of dispensers of family planning;
- . for spreading technologies which people, and specially women, are not informed about;
- . for governments to exercise coercion on their fellow citizens;
- . for international agencies to ignore the frontiers both of sovereignty and of culture and human dignity.

Instead, time has come for a decisive innovation in the public policies coming together into population and development questions:

- . People to whom population programmes are addressed are never to be seen as clients or recipients, rather the full subjects of their destinies, the irreplaceable decision-makers of the choices they have to make;
- . population policies have to take into account, in each society, elements of culture, history, ways of relating to others, to the world, to nature. Most of all, they have to be guided by and rooted in the ingrained values present in each society,
- . whenever specific public policies, like education - and particularly education of women - and health are known to have a great impact on the population policies they should never be submitted to conjunctural difficulties of the economy (it is not defense that should remain untouched but health and education);
- . as population policies are part and parcel of an integrated approach to society's living forces, and their establishment central to political decision-making, they should be the responsibility of the State in dialogue with the representatives of the civil society;
- . the intervention of external agencies in population policies is only acceptable when it is integrated and subordinated to the population policy as defined nationally or locally.

International co-operation should be encouraged on two urgent tasks:

## Integrated population policies

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## International

Inter-regional co-operation should be encouraged on two urgent tasks:



- to imagine and to establish "models" of primary health care services with their reproductive health services, including family planning;
- to imagine and to devise "models" of providing basic education for women using the modern audio-visual tools.

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The Bucarest Conference, aware of the link between poverty and fertility rate, entrusted "development" with the main responsibility towards stabilisation of the population. The possibility of poverty to be absorbed by the process of development was then a widespread conviction.

Twenty years later, it has become common knowledge that, in countries with a high percentage of poor among their population, development cannot absorb poverty.

Moreover, evidence is striking about the relationship between economic growth and fertility rate decline. While Europe took 150 years throughout the industrial process to reach the fertility rate needed for the replacement level, the same transition in the Republic of Korea - starting at 6.1 fertility rate in the 60's - took barely 25 years, 6 times less!

Today, 1 in every 4 persons on this planet lives in destitution. If we are unable to incorporate in the economy and the social care the poor of today, what can we do during the next 30 years with 3 billion more? If we don't change drastically our modes of thinking and working out different forms of development, if we are not able in this generation to cope with poverty and to invent new forms of management of wealth and resources, in 30 years that ratio will be one to two, half of the world population. Then it will be too late.

The consequences of this prospect for population policies are radical. No traditional "population programme" can effectively work under destitute and infra-human conditions. Nor can people - without water (1.3 billion), without adequate food (daily calorie supply below the requirements in 45 countries), without generalized access to education (in all developing countries rate of enrollment for all levels of education, roughly half of rate in industrialized countries), without access to health care (1.0 billion) - be the object of massive "population programmes".

Specific strategies against poverty are not only a necessity in an ethical sense, but are also a must politically. Hunger, limited access to drinking water, to sanitation and health

services, and the deterioration of hygiene and of housing, constitute the lot for a growing proportion of people living in most of the regions of the world, notably in the mega-cities. It is not just the fact of appalling misery and deprivation for fellow humans which we must recognize here, but the continuing threat to the economic and political evolution of those societies.

Many of the specific strategies have already been spelt out and even tried in various places: strategies such as the political and institutional recognition of the role of the informal sector, land redistribution, or credit for small-scale enterprises. What we need now is the political commitment to make these work, or the elimination of bureaucratic restraints to allow such initiatives to work. Let us be clear about these strategies. They are the response to extreme poverty considered by the Commission **the Number One problem of Population-and-Development.**

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It is today confirmed that the damage to the environment and the threat to human life on the planet through the depletion of the resources and the accumulation of wastes is the result of the joint effect of population-and-consumption-growth.

Though new economic theories are not yet available to redirect consumption patterns, it is imperative to come to the roots of the problem and to attempt to see its extension. Because it deals with a civilizational question. To change the patterns of consumption and production **is a condition of collective survival. It is unacceptable to act on population growth without acting, at the same time, on consumption growth.**

The dominant economic paradigm no longer works. It has emphasized production; it has treated the exploitation of natural resources as if it were a form of income backed by an inexhaustible investment fund; it failed to account for environmental degradation by reflecting its costs in pricing structures; and it assumed that higher consumption implied proportionately enhanced welfare.

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Such consumption questions are not, as it may seem at first sight, a question addressed only to the countries of the Northern hemisphere. Today, there is also a "North", however mitigated it may be, in the South - this "North" conveys and spreads the same aspirations existing in the North.

But more pervasive than these individual behaviours, **it is the economic system itself that is at stake.** Unlike the euphoria that reigned in the UN system in the seventies, countries are not now searching for a path of "endogeneous development", based on their culture and tradition. On the contrary, the theory of technological "imitation" spread by the Asian industrialized countries as well as the compelling mechanisms of one global economic system led to the well accepted principle that the choice in economic "models" is between integration and marginalisation.



We are not speaking here only of moral questions addressed to individual consciences to slow down consumption, to change their life-styles. What we refer to is the change of the very patterns of consumption, of the way offer and demand are constituted in contemporary society. What is addressed here is **the need for the "reversal of the logic" of the system.**

The whole equation of production and consumption, inherited from the industrial revolution and transposed to unexpected levels of material performance by the informatic revolution, needs to be re-examined. The access to knowledge through well-protected patents, the Western-established prices of basic commodities, the transnational character of capital and its mobility, the vulnerability of a locally bound labour, the life-expectancy of technologies, the still external costs of wastes and by-products, the over-determination of offer and demand by marketing - all have to be scrutinized and re-oriented.

Thus economics needs to be re-directed in its goals and diversified in its modes of operation. **Either economics deals with human beings as the central concern or there is no solution** at the world level for the interdependent connections of population/development/environment.

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We are now convinced that a major political initiative has to take place among the community of nations and the emerging global civil society.

Aware of the issues at stake, pressed by the "collective survival" imperative, a high-power multi-disciplinary task-force should be formed to study and work out the articulation of the decisive factors of : human beings and production/production and employment/ growth and consumption/human and nature.

## Conclusion

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No State alone, no multi-lateral organization alone, can come to grips with these huge problems. All alive forces in each society and at the international scene are needed. Civic society at international level must take up its own responsibilities.

Ideological confrontation cannot solve the issues - it only reduces their scope. Modes of perceiving reality have to be clarified and platforms of consensus based on shared values have to be searched for.

In the long-term, it is a reasonable price for nothing less than "**collective survival**".

As the Nobel Prize Rigoberta Menchú said at our Latin-American Consultation:  
"*Nuestra gente es ansiosa de futuro*". "Our people are searching anxiously for a future".

May the community of nations help to build such future.

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