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FROM NUMBERS TO QUALITY OF LIFE

I. The story

A revolution took place in the Cairo Conference. People - with their lives, feelings, needs, aspirations, hopes - took back their right place. ~~They are now~~ at the center of the population-development equation. No science, no technology, no State policy, no development agency program can replace their right and capacity to decide their own destiny.

It is clear that the irreducible complexity of human life cannot be encapsulated by any particular science and, even less, can it be answered to by vertical policies, unaware of the interwoven patterns of human needs and desires.

In the Public Hearings conducted by the Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life in seven great regions of the world, hundreds of witnesses, ranging from grassroot activists to researchers, from charismatic leaders to State officials, were unanimous in their categorical refusal of ~~having~~ people dealt with in quantitative terms. Speaking ~~from~~ ^{out of} their experience with ~~simplistic~~ ^{one-sided} "population programs", they denounced the inadequacy of demographic indicators "to describe the lives of people".

being

Important as demography is in providing warning signals about the growth, structure, composition, ~~movement~~ of any given population, evidence gathered in the South Asian and the Latin American Public Hearings shows that the social cost of sectoral, ^λ isolated population programs is too high [∴] "looking at the

population situation as a problem of numbers has seriously damaged the quality of life of people living in the countries where the population control programs are promoted". No wonder, then, that researchers are ^{acknowledging} agreeing more and more that "the obsession with numbers, percentages, ratios, has to be given up if people themselves have to come first".

* subsec. 3 II. The linkages fall short

Indeed the "population question" would be short of its fundamental goal - how to provide quality of life for all - if it would be contained within the boundaries of ^{isolated} ~~one single~~ science. As "population" has to encompass the multiplicity and diversity of real life situations, it has to be addressed politically on the basis of correlations of different sciences ^{of the interplay of public policies, of integrated disapproach} and approaches. As we hear from many outstanding voices in the field, the need is urgent for "an alternative policy framework ^{4/e} (which) will treat the population problem as more than a problem of large size and unsustainable growth rates".

This reasoning goes even further - it asks for the redefinition of the population problem. ^{at grass-root level} In the words of an Indian scholar in a recent publication: "a re-definition of the population problem, taking into account its many dimensions, is called for".

The Cairo Conference, having taken place at a moment of profound questioning in the realm of population sciences, has contributed decisively to this redefinition.

Dev. projects which ignore the pop. \bar{f} or pop. programs which develop in isolation from other dev. policies ~~do not~~ are not able to face the whole question.

Likewise,

Reproductive rights are part of a panoply of fundamental human rights and guarantees. They take root in the right of inviolability of the human body as they are part of the right to health care and of the right to the protection of the family.

Reproductive rights are indivisible from the right to reproductive health which is nothing but a part of the right to primary health care. Again, the full exercise of reproductive rights in good human conditions provides an opportunity to refocus health public policies.



Unless a coercitive approach to family planning is accepted no population question can be dealt with efficiently apart from the exact definition and the the steady implementation of health and education policies.

Indeed, how is it possible to launch family planning programmes respectful of women's quality of life when we see the figures of utter destitution? How to introduce efficient new technologies asking for medical supervision in countries (like all the countries south of Sahara) where there is one medical doctor for 36,000 inhabitants? Where sanitary facilities are nonexistent and there is no access to water? How to abilitate women with their reproductive rights when their scholarization still reaches less than 20% in countries like Mali?

At this time of history it would be unthinkable to devise programs and actions that would tackle the population question without attacking the sources of underdevelopment illustrated by the figures at hand.

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The interdependence between population and development cannot avoid anymore the change (the shift) in the understanding of the role played by social policies in any development plan. They have to become the hard core of political problems - healthy and educated human beings will be able to shape their own society and to make enlightened choices in all realms of their lives.

~~From the already acknowledged role of health and education~~ Other social policies should be looked into - ^{as well land-use, transport,} housing, urbanisation, transportation, energy, each in its own way is a decisive factor in the determination of a balanced population dynamics and in the shaping of the quality of life of the population. But as we are still far from interpreting the interactions among all these factors we still fail to draw up the exact policies which are so strongly needed. The next UN conferences are occasions to deepen those relations and to assert the commitment of all countries to the policies that will guarantee the quality of life of the coming generations.

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↓ can only be based on a thorough interpretation of the interactions among all these factors.

"The parameters of assessment have to change from quantitative to qualitative."



6. It is clear that the irreducible complexity of human life cannot be encapsulated by any particular science and, even less, can it be answered to by vertical policies, unaware of the interwoven patterns of human needs and desires.



7. The Cairo Conference ~~has~~ contributed decisively to this redefinition.

8. Most of all because it resituated the global population question as a ^{positive} dynamic challenge to the world community. And it did so, not as a prolongation of malthusian concerns of the past but as a courageous commitment to the future. Indeed, unable as we appear to be in sharing resources and organizing our institutions ^{at the world level} so as to include the 1.3 billion human beings who live under total destitution, how are we going to ^{care for} welcome in the next 30 years the 3 billion who will be brought into life by the generations in ~~the~~ reproductive age? ^{during that period?}

10. An important breakthrough took place in Cairo. ^{the} The central place ^{was} acknowledged to women at all levels of the population question. ^{The main issue is about women's role in the} ~~became~~ more than ^{to} a new step in ending discrimination against women. ^{and} Even more than ^{to the} a reaffirmation of their rights. ~~It stands~~ ^{They} now as an imperative to reshuffle public policies and to re-orientate ~~political~~ goals at the national and international level. ~~points~~

13. By giving priority to the autonomy of women's decision-making in the chain of human reproduction, the international community

has pledged its political will ^{to move} ~~into a definite direction~~. It has committed itself to the public policies capable to support a coherent population policy. This is particularly evident in the decisionst concerning the establishment of social policies and ~~in the lucidity with which the allocation of resources have been dealt with.~~

✓ which are the pillars of a coherent



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9. It is clear that these tremendous responsibilities cannot be coped with within the scope of the same assumptions used in the past. A major shift is necessary.



11. First of all a definite and unsurmountable link between population and development has been firmly established. Of course, the linkages between the population factors and the different components of development and environment had been amply documented in the past twenty years. Population exhausts environmental resources, depletion of environment undermines development, scarcity of resources induces greater poverty and with it the cycle to more population growth.

But the Cairo Conference has shown that any "population programs" unaware of such linkages are deemed to failure. An experience-based consensus about those undeniable linkages was thus brought strongly into focus.

14. This acknowledged interplay of population and development can be seen even in the flagrant fact that the newly industrialized countries of Asia have reached in less than 25 years the population stabilization that took more than a hundred years for Europe to reach. But the question is not only, not even first of all a question of economic growth. It is a question of sustainable development where the social policies take a proeminent role.

~~We are still~~ This won't be easy. We are still lacking a widespread understanding that social policies are a most important guarantee of the primacy of political will over the dictates of the market.

14. The Cairo Conference didn't fail to give a decisive place to the social policies that are known to be of a direct relation with the population question. With the idea that social rights are merely indicative and not of an immediate responsibility of the public policies, most Governments are often not consistent in the definition and implementation of social policies. At the most, social policies are estimated to be corrective of the shortcomings of the economy in periods of crisis. Seldom are they considered to be pivotal to governments' programs. Moreover, the current changes undergone by the welfare state as well as the complete erasing of the social policies in the former Communist countries seem to put again social policies at the mercy of the economy.

in the world
In such a context it is even more important to reaffirm that in what concerns, among others, population policies, there is no short-cut: social policies have to become the hard core of political action. Healthy and educated human beings will be able to make enlightened choices in all realms of their lives and to shape their own society.

15. The political meaning of the social policies as expression of the interdependence between population and development goes beyond practical goals. Their right place in the political decision-making process is a guarantee of a democracy adapted to our time. They are the sign by which a democracy shows that it has the power to regulate the market and to put it at the service of the collective well-being.



Among social policies, ^{of} education + health

16. Women's education is ^{and} known to be a decisive step in women's capacity to determine their own reproductive life. ^{We face these} It is true

^{highly difficult,} that many decades of development effort didn't erase yet ^{W's literacy} the ~~the~~ puzzling fact that ^{almost} less than 50% of women in the LDCs and south

of Sahara have no school education at all. The awareness of the

acute consequences of ^{lack of schoolisation in} a high fertility rate provide more than a ^{incentive to strengthen ed. programs} pretext to move forcefully in the direction of innovative,

multimedia ways ^{to} of providing ^{necessary} women everywhere with basic

education. It is a turning point in the ^{universal right of} practical affirmation of

^{access to education,} women's human rights.

Likewise,

17. Reproductive rights ^{are} part of a panoply of fundamental human ^{the protection of} rights and guarantees, ^{demand new approaches to reproductive} namely, ^{health,} the right of inviolability of the

human body, the right to the protection of the family and the

right to health care) Reproductive rights are indivisible from

the right to reproductive health which is nothing but a part of

the right ^{to} of primary health care. Again, the full exercise of

reproductive rights in good human conditions provides an

opportunity to refocuse health public policies.

18. Indeed, how is it possible to launch family planning

programmes respectful of women's quality of life when we see the

figures of utter destitution? How to introduce efficient new

technologies asking for medical supervision in countries (like

all the countries south of Sahara) where there is one medical

doctor for 36,000 inhabitants? Where sanitary facilities are

nonexistent and there is no access to water? How to abilitate





20. The Cairo Conference didn't avoid the question of resources for those policies to be effective. We have still on the table the 20/20 proposal: a definite proportion of the budget of developing countries to be allocated to social policies, particularly to health and education and a definite percentage of the development aid earmarked for the implementation of the same policies. The question is not the discussion about the percentages (though realistic percentages have to be allocated) but the stability of the political and administrative institutions to pledge consistently such percentages.

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The Cairo Conference took place at a moment of profound questioning in the realm of population sciences.

For some the question at stake was the very redefinition of the population problem. Analyzing the history of the population policy in India and affirming the central place of women's decisions, an India scholar wrote: "An alternative policy framework, that does not conflict with but supports women's interests and successfully deals with the country's economic problems, will treat the population problem as more than a problem of large size and unsustainable growth rates. A redefinition of the population problem, taking into account its many dimensions, is called for."

For others "the experience of the last three decades demonstrated the fundamental weakness of the assumptions used in the past and limited effectiveness of the policy approaches predicated upon them".

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They couldn't but reinforce and make explicit the task already contained in the very title of the Cairo Conference on Population and Development. Such a shift necessarily implies that things cannot go on as usually - "reinvigorating analysis of population-development relationship is urgently needed."

Thus the real questions both substantive and methodological are far from the ^{penetrationist ones} census spread all over the world during the ten days of the Cairo conference. However important they may be, they only represent one specific point within a much wider agenda and a much more radical shift in the approach to the population question.

Now that discussions can be conducted with a more subdued tone it may be opportune to come back to such real questions. The UN Conference has provided a context for a new articulation of broader issues and of more challenging answers.

(B) What are we talking about when we say "pop. prof.?"

(C)

The starting point in Cairo itself as well as in the sounding board of the media around the world was the dazzling awareness of the expansion of the world population ^{having led} ~~leading~~ in this century to a triple of the number of human beings.

Analyses, studies, diagnoses, projections ^{put} ~~port~~ over the desk of scientists and politicians. Through all them the question came sharply: What can be done?

The evolution in the awareness of the universality of human rights excluded any new Malthusian attempt in national or international policies.

Moreover, given the number of young adults during the next decades, the prospect of 3 billion more on the planet at the end of the next thirty years has made ever more acute the question of the social and economic policies to guarantee them a quality of life that makes life worth living.

The problem ^{is} ~~seems~~ not to be a fragmented one, but rather a all-embracing question ^{is isolated to} ~~urging~~ leaders at all levels to reach still unattained degrees of responsibilities for human kind.

Throughout all the studies conducted, it had become evident that the close relationship between high scolarization of women and decline in fertility rates regardless of the levels of other economic indicators.

Women's self awareness and women's self esteem revealed themselves of the outmost importance in the women's autonomy to determine if and when they are ready to bear a child.

The assumption of the reproductive right of women flow at the same time from the centrality of the woman in the process of women's reproduction and of the centrality of women's in any process of development.

The experience of women in the last decade as object of family planning problems has led to a renewed affirmation of women's role as subject in both processes.

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Reproductive health services seen as part of health primary care facilities and policies are dedicated frames from women's information and choice in what concern their reproductive rates.

Unless a coercitive approach to family planning is accepted no population question can be dealt with efficiently apart from the efficient definition and steady implementation of health and education policies.

Indeed, how is it possible to launch family planning programme respectful of women's quality of life when we see the figures of utter destitution? How to introduce efficient new planning technology asking for medical supervision in countries (like all countries in the South of Sahara) where there is one medical doctor for 36,000 inhabitants? where sanitary installations are nonexistent and there is no access to water? How to abilitate women with their reproductive right when their scolarization still reaches less than 20 per cent in countries like Mali?

It would be unthinkable to devise problems and actions that would tackle the population question without attacking directly the sources of underdevelopment illustrated by the figures just mentioned.

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At this time of history the interdependence of population and development cannot avoid anymore the change in the understanding by the role played by social policies in any development project. I know that they are supposed to act as corrective distortions of economic and social inequality.

But paradoxically in most situations of this destitutions they are the last priority ^{even} below defence.

But the increase number of human beings, their age composition (with huge cohorts of very young people needing education, work, housing) and with growing number of the elderly don't allow us to look anymore at the social policies as the subsector of development.

On the contrary, they have to become the hard core of political problems - healthy and educated human beings will be able to shape their own society and to make enlighten choices in ^{all fields of} relation ~~relation~~ to their lives.



(D)

Of course health and education are not the only decisive factors. Housing, urbanization, transportation, energy, (type of technology) industrial - each in its own way are decisive factors in the determination of a balanced population dynamics and in the shaping of the quality of life of the population. But we are still far from interpreting the interactions among all these factors and hence we fail to draw up the exact policies which are so strongly needed.

The next UN Conferences are occasions to deepen those relations and to assert the commitment of all countries to the policies that will guarantee the quality of life of the coming generations.



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