

I - Erradication of poverty

At the Bucarest Conference some delegates entrusted "development" with the main responsibility towards stabilisation of the population. Development was then seen as the all-encompassing concept which the UN pursued throughout the International Strategies for Development and which reached its clymax with the Declaration on the New International Economic Order. The possibility of poverty to be absorbed by the process of development was then a widespread conviction.

Moreover the link between poverty and population growth, distribution and movement, though often analysed, didn't appear intelocked as the last two decades have shown them to be. (Evidence is striking in what concerns 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 that is 6 times less!

Today it has become common knowledge that, in countries with a high pewcentage of poor among their population, development cannot absorb poverty.

Let us then face the consequences for population policies. No traditional "population program" can effectively work under destitute and infrahuman conditions. Nor can people - without watwr (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 programs". (To attempt to reach them just for "population programs" at such levels of destitution is unrealistic and irresponsible - very similar to a violation of human rigts.)

This seemed however a too far-fetched path. More direct approaches to "population programs" with their family planning services became paramount in the implementation of the much broader Bucarest Programme of Action.

What to do then?

Prior to any action aimed at the future - and as the very condition for such a future - there is the survival of concrete people who live today in such misery. Urgent action is needed at this human interface of population-and-development.

It is time to make of development a manifols process. To include side by side with an economy geared to the competition in the international market specific economic and social strategies against poverty.



The contents of such strategies have been spelled out at different occasions by UNICEF, IFDA, World Bank, etc.. Political and institutional acknowledgment of the informal sector as part of a local subsistence economy, credit for small-scale initiatives, stimulation of the micro enterprises, land redistribution, health services with reproductive health sector, basic services built up with the interests and "expertises" of the poor, urban infra-structures to encourage the establishment of middle-sized towns - all pertain to the package of solutions to be worked out in each case.

The question goes even further than the fight against poverty today. 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?

Today 1 in every 4 persons on this planet lives in destitution. 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 half of the world population will be the world's poorest. Then it will be too late - there would be no solution but a violent one.

Because such poverty concerns the mere survival of people, because its magnitude will necessarily involve all nations, it poses the most urgent political and ethical questions to our collective consciousness. Within the frame of a few decades from now, it can be said to be the n.1 problem of population-and-development.

Indeed we have combatted colonialism, violation of human rights, apartheid. Today the priority lies elsewhere. As Juan Somavia has pointed out: "In our time the eradication of poverty is as imperative as the abolition of slavery in the sixteenth century." For a century civic rights took the limelight: organizations were founded, initiatives were taken, individuals seized all occasions to burst with indignation against the political and civic domination of human beings. But who is there today to burst with indignation against absolute poverty? Who is there ready to fight for the abolition of economic slavery?

II - Collective survival

A deeper question runs through this assumptions though. Throughout the preparatory meetings for the Cairo Conference the current patterns of consumption were put in parallel with population growth in their consequences for a sustainable development.

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.

An ethical question is then raised: it is unacceptable to act on population growth without acting, at the same time, on 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.

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. Being part of the ruling elite, 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 (just after the first oil shock and the process that led to the approval of the Charter on Economic Rights and Duties of States) 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 "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-orientated.

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 for the interdependent connections of population/development/environment.

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III - Scope and limits of population policies

In this context of change in concepts, strategies, even paradigms, the scope and limits of population policies acquire a renewed shape.

Population policies can never themselves to the organization of distribution and display of technologies, as they are often perceived in countries with a long experience in population programs. They have to address people in their manifold needs and interrelated, even contradictory, aspirations.

People to whom population programs are addressed are never to be seen as clients or recipients, even less as numbers to fulfill the targets of performance of the individual medical doctor or of the external expert. They are the full subjects of their destinies, the irreplaceable decisio-makers of the choices they have to make.

This is why 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.

They should always embody a vision of the "dynamic population balance in each society at different phases of its history. Such a vision encompasses the interplay of different balances referring to the "geological" composition of society: the balance - present in all civilizations through different norms and codes - between men and women, their rights and responsibilities, between young and old; the balance - made explicit by the industrial civilization - between those who are autonomous, actively earning their living, and those who are entrusted to the care of the community; the balance - acquired in the last decades and of which the Rio Summit was an institutional cornerstone - between society and nature.

In the short term, a vision on "dynamic population balance" should be translated into integrated policies. However, from all the continents comes the reaction of the people - men and women - to whom, for whatever reasons, "population programs" appear as coercitive (they speak of "a chain of coercion"), one-sided policy of the family planning servives dispensers.

The concepts used in ths document and particularly the decision-making capacity of women in reproductive matters asks for a decisive change in public policies.

First of all, no "population program" can be carried out with efficiency and in respect of the supreme right of the human person if it conveys a vertical way of public intervention. Horizontal policies, integrating goals, services and resources are essential.

As the human person is not a temporarily "assembled" machine, no family planning programs are acceptable outside reproductive health activities and the latter make little sense outside the nerwork of

primary health care services.

But how can this be made possible in a world where 1 billion people have no access to health services, most countries have only 1 doctor for 7000 people (in LDCs 1 for 19.000 and in south of Sahara 1 for 36.000 people)? How to devise integrated programs? The design and implementation of specific strategies against poverty are one way of getting closer to universal access to primary health care. Moreover one of the most urgent tasks consists in imagining "models" of primary health care services with their reproductive health services should be worked out by groups from the civic society in each region or sub-region of the world.

Moreover, the structural adjustments, advised (or imposed) by the creditor agencies and accepted by the national authorities, have diminished what are already low levels of confidence that people have in the political leadership. All future structural adjustments should be pursued in a way as to enhance the attainment of the aims agreed here by the community of the Member-States.

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