

F) What's new about this? There are two very interesting new developments:

- 1) New reports from UN show this transition moving even more quickly than originally thought. The rate of growth, not the population levels, is dropping sharply. A UN release dated November 13, 1996 highlighted this slower population growth -- now growing at 1.48% per annum (much below the 1975-1990 average of 1.72 %) at 81 million per year, which is also considerably below the 87 million per year average that occurred between 1985-1990, known as the peak period in the history of population growth. This is about 1.8% in LDCs; .4% in industrialized. This lower growth means that the 1995 population was 29 million or 1/2% lower than forecasted in 1994: broken down it was 34 million lower in LDC and 5 million higher in industrialized countries.
- 2) The world average of 2.96 children per family is down from 3.10.

G) So what does all this mean for what is ahead in the forecast? Well, the medium fertility variant is now set at 9.4 billion in 2050 (11.1 billion as the high and 7.7 billion as the low variant).

- 1) Small differences in the post fertility stabilization numbers will make enormous differences in the population picture. For example, if India's fertility stabilizes at about half a birth *below* replacement, population size a century from now would be about where it is now -- .9 billion, instead of the 1.9 billion presently forecasted. If fertility were to stabilize at half a birth *above* the replacement rate, the population in 2100 would be 3 billion. Modest efforts to reduce fertility have large effects on future growth.
- 2) There is compelling new evidence that the linkage between the level of development and the onset of the fertility transition is changing. Population Council research has established that the level of development at the time of the onset of transitions varies systematically *and has declined over time*. There is a clear decline in the level of development associated with the onset of the transition. Fertility transitions are well underway in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka where incomes vis à vis the rest of Asia are modest. These societies are a great deal less wealthy and less developed than Hong Kong and Singapore were when their transitions began. This is an important new appreciation.

H) So, is the population issue 'over'? Has the explosion fizzled? Not at all. It is a serious prospect to contemplate a world with 50 to 60% more people than the current population and with most of that growth taking place in the next three decades. It does mean that the internal dynamics of the population issue are changing and that there are new opportunities.

I) The big question for today is this: What further thoughtful intervention is still needed? And what role should the Commonwealth play in such activity?