

*Prescription
for social change
spelled out*

This presents a stubborn public policy dilemma. We know that family-planning programs, while desirable ends in themselves, also have some demographic impact. And we know that much remains to be done to effectively and efficiently deliver such services to all desiring them. But what measures are there to use in addition? What aspects of development strategy influence population factors and fertility in particular? The working group talked in general terms about the importance of equity in international economic relations. In the Plan of Action, more specific prescriptions for social change included the following: provision for greater participation of women in the development process; measures to reduce infant mortality; achievement of better income distribution; promotion of universal educational opportunities for the young; elimination of child labour; establishment of old-age security; establishment of a minimum age for marriage; and the strengthening of health and family-planning services delivery. It is also recommended "that countries wishing to affect fertility levels give priority to implementing development programs and educational and health strategies, which, while contributing to economic growth and high standards of living, have a decisive impact upon demographic trends, including fertility..." But no one knows how much more must be put into educational or health programs, or into which parts of them, to bring about desired fertility declines. Even with massive programs, the resultant change in attitudes is a long-term process. Many countries, particularly in Asia, do not have time before current imbalances between population trends and resources result in rising death-rates. In such situations, large-scale family-planning programs continue to be a major policy instrument to accelerate population change.

*Time has run out
for correction
of imbalances
between resources
and population*

The expansion of knowledge in this area will involve much better understanding of the factors that influence family size in different developing-country settings. This implies a much greater research effort by social scientists in these countries themselves. The list of changes referred to above constitutes a feasible starting-point. Some measures, such as creating alternative roles for women, education of the young, establishment of old-age security schemes, are possibilities that could alter significantly the costs and benefits of additional children. None has been adequately studied in search of public-policy measures that are both economically and administratively feasible.

The primacy and immediacy of pop-

ulation growth, exacerbated by the gloomy predictions of disappearing food-stocks, did not completely overshadow other aspects of population problems considered by the conference. The working group on the Plan of Action attached considerable importance to the reduction of mortality, urbanization and aspects of international migration — particularly the problems of the migrant workers.

One of the heaviest votes in the working group occurred in the discussion of the relation between development and mortality reduction. By a vote of 48 - 47, with 11 absentions, the Group decided that mortality declines should be achieved with "massive" social and economic development rather than "accelerated" development. In its consideration of ways to influence internal migration, adverse aspects of urbanization were accorded prominence. These were attributed in large part to the dependent position of developing countries in the international economic system. Emphasis was also placed on finding ways to improve conditions in rural areas to stem the rural-urban drift. It was pointed out that urban problems resulted as much from consumption patterns as from the concentration of population.

Plan's purpose

The major purpose of the Plan was to recommend policies to influence population variables. As a result, it contains little on how to provide for the population expected in the years ahead. The majority of the present global population of 3.9 billion are young people. Even if all couples entering fertile ages during the next 25 years have only two children — almost completely unlikely —, we shall number nearly 7 billion by the turn of the century. Demands on resources to feed, clothe, educate, house and employ these additions will be considerable. Drawing on their own experience, the Chinese introduced the principle that "of all things in the world, people are the most precious", to emphasize the importance of viewing human populations as resources, not liabilities. Argentina stressed the importance of enhancing our efforts to increase food supplies and of orienting development planning to develop human resources. The United Nations was asked to begin monitoring population trends, the signal for much-needed research on the implications of current population trend and policies. But these are only beginnings. At present, our ability to provide even for the needs of existing populations looks exceedingly inadequate.

Wide publicity has been given, particularly in the North American press, to un-