

with the national or regional setting. It was emphasized that population policy consists of measures that directly and indirectly affect population variables; and some of these indirect measures are also the common components of broader development programs.

Considering the historical context of population debates, this kind of discussion was inevitable. Doctrinal debate between those espousing "Malthusian" and "Marxist" views was anticipated. Such talk was inevitable considering the heavy emphasis that has been placed during the past decade on family-planning programs as the adequate and necessary means to reduce population growth. In some instances, aid donors have urged family planning on poor nations with a conviction that has encroached on national sovereignty. In this context, the working group responsible for producing the 109-paragraph strategy document, the Plan of Action, rejected a proposal that by 1985 family-planning information and services be made available to all desiring them, and replaced it with an Argentinian phrasing, considered more acceptable, recommending that all countries "encourage appropriate education concerning responsible parenthood and make available to persons who so desire advice and means of achieving it". Despite the rejection of the target-date, the right of "all couples and individuals" to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so (whether to achieve a larger or smaller family size), was included in both the prescribed principles to be followed in formulating population policy, and in recommendations on specific policy options to influence reproductive behaviour.

Quantitative targets for reducing population growth were rejected by the working group. For example, the use of projected declines in population growth-rates that could result by 1985 was rejected (projected rates for 1985 are: developing countries 2 per cent, developed countries below 0.7 per cent and global 1.7 per cent). Similarly, in a paragraph encouraging governments to set quantitative targets and formulate population policies for reducing growth that hampers development, the reference to targets was deleted. The major arguments given against targets were that national situations were too diverse to summarize in global targets and that their existence created the risk that outsiders would tell countries what they should do.

Subsequently, two other relevant paragraphs were accepted, one pointing out

that the projected declines in growth-rates referred to above would require declines in birth-rates in developing countries by 1985, to 30 a thousand from the present average of 38 a thousand. The other paragraph recognized that achievement of these levels would require substantial national efforts in socio-economic development and population policy. This was balanced by recognition of the need to give equal emphasis to increasing life expectancy.

Then, after two of the closest votes in the session, the following paragraph was adopted: "In the light of the principles of this Plan of Action, countries which consider their birth-rates detrimental to their national purposes are invited to consider setting quantitative goals and implementing policies that may lead to the attainment of such goals by 1985. Nothing herein should interfere with the sovereignty for any government to adopt or not to adopt such quantitative goals." Following the rejection of a move to delete the phrase "by 1985", China suggested addition of a further qualifying rider noting the undesirability of uniform-growth goals; but this, too, was rejected by a very close vote.

These votes show the sensitiveness of the subject. But the notion of targets remains, to be adopted by individual countries as they see fit. It is not useful to attach too much importance to rejection of absolute levels. Very few countries aspire to high growth-rates, since there is no evidence that, in developing economies, high rates of population growth promote attainment of economic growth objectives. Most countries acting in their self interest wish to reduce growth-rates.

#### **Family planning not enough**

The central issue that remains, however, is *how* to achieve reduced growth-rates. Development policies and population policies are inextricably linked. People living in traditional subsistence agricultural environments know only too well the characteristics of their environments: high infant death-rates, traditional sex roles, high illiteracy rates, grinding persistent poverty, total dependence on the vagaries of climate — to name some of the most obvious. In such settings the idea of influencing one's destiny, of planning for the future, is foreign. The family is a precious resource; control or planning is anathema. Until changes occur in the wider environment — inevitable if true development is under way —, the idea of reducing family size so that each child may benefit more from the fruits of change, is alien — not to mention irrational. Who would have few children if the risk of losing them persisted?

*Close votes  
reflect  
sensitivity  
on targets*