

and for development strategy in general, it is important that they be clearly understood. Their essential aspects are as follows:

It was argued that conventional approaches to development had frequently presented rapid population growth as a major obstacle to solutions to problems of poverty. Similarly, conventional interpretations of environmental problems had emphasized rapid population growth as a critical factor in problems of pollution and rate of resource use. It had followed, therefore, that a major element in solving problems of poverty, pollution and dwindling resources was reduction of rapid population growth.

These interpretations were rejected as too narrow in conference debate. It was argued that other factors were as important as population growth, but had often been ignored. We could solve problems of poverty more directly, it was argued, by better distribution of resources, international distribution in particular. Furthermore, it was pointed out, if standards of living were more equal among nations, we could not only support the present world population but even the 6.5-7 billion projected for the year 2000. The argument also asserted that, as a result of more serious development measures and better resource and wealth distribution, high fertility rates would subsequently decline. Problems of pollution and dwindling natural resources were also caused by people's consumption patterns, it was stated, and by such factors as lack of planning of urban environments. Curbing wasteful consumption and changing demand patterns could reduce both resource use and pollution.

These arguments have much to commend them. Too often, we have tended to define the development goals of underdeveloped countries in terms of achieving Western living standards, and we have calculated resource requirements while holding our living standard and its rate of increase as a fixed parameter. Following this line of reasoning, since it is impossible to raise all populations on the globe to our levels of living, the obvious alternative is to reduce the numbers to be provided for. But this view no longer holds among the developing nations. Western living standards involving waste and affluence, and the right to maintain such standards, is no longer an accepted element in their thinking. In this context, curbing rapid global population growth was rejected as a major conference objective.

It was unfortunate that, in the general reaction against global diagnoses, certain

documented facts were rejected. The draft Plan of Action considered by the conference pointed out: "Although most countries at present have no explicit policies designed to affect their natural growth rates, and several countries wish to increase them, *the majority of the world's people, and a large majority of the people of the less-developed regions, live in countries whose governments are attempting, as a matter of urgency, to reduce significantly their rates of population growth.*" Although this statement was based on information collected by the UN Secretariat from national plans and official replies to UN questionnaires, and was contained in one of the official conference background papers, it was deleted from the Plan of Action. It should be stressed, however, that rapid growth, if diagnosed as a problem by a particular country, received much recognition and attention. Emphasis was laid on the diversity of national problems and on the importance of each country defining its own problem. This is a healthy development. It is in the countries themselves that solutions must ultimately be found; the conference was to recommend internationally-acceptable policy options from which governments could select. And many governments, particularly in Asia, define rapid growth as a major development problem.

#### Policy options broadened

The conference devoted considerable attention to broadening the policy options for dealing with rapid growth. As politicians and development experts have become increasingly concerned with growth-rates during the past 15 to 20 years, family-planning programs have been the major program effort prescribed as a cure. In some cases, there developed unrealistic expectations about the potential demographic impact of such programs. Yet the available evidence indicates that the supply of family-planning programs by themselves do not have the substantial demographic impact sought by nations faced with rapid mortality declines and subsequent rapid rates of increase. More and more, it has been recognized that these programs are demanded and used by people when broader socio-economic change is under way, with consequent increased motivation to reduce traditional family size.

Thus it was argued at the conference that population problems must be viewed in their socio-economic context. Both development and demographic measures must be used to influence population variables. The mixture of the two will vary

*Debate over importance of population growth on development*

*Pollution and resource problems tied to consumption patterns*