

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION SEMINAR FOR THE ECAFE REGION

21 November to 3 December 1955

THE Seminar was held by the United Nations and its Commission for Asia and the Far East, at the invitation of the Government of Indonesia and in collaboration with the International Social Science Council. This was pursuant to a resolution of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, which recommended the Technical Assistance Board to take into account the relationship of population to economic development in programmes of technical assistance for under-developed areas. Dr P. K. Whelpton, Director of the Scripps Foundation for Population Research, was appointed Director of the Seminar.

2. Altogether sixty-three members, delegates from eleven countries of the ECAFE region and representatives and experts of the United Nations and other interested organizations, participated in the deliberations. Brief national statements about the trends of fertility, mortality and population growth in each country, indicating at the same time the facilities available for demographic research, were submitted by the participating countries. The topics selected for discussion in the twenty-three working seminars were widely diversified. Apart from fertility, mortality, migration, size structure of population and general demographic outlook for the individual countries and the region as a whole, there were sessions on consumption, housing, labour force, employment, public health, education, social welfare, agricultural development, capital formation, industrialization and community development; the concluding sessions were devoted to the question of organization of demographic research in the region, the information needed, exchange of teaching and research personnel and establishment of a Regional Centre for demographic research and training.

3. Excluding Japan, the main problem in the region was the recent sharp fall in mortality resulting from comparatively low-cost improvements in public health measures and the widespread use of antibiotics and other modern inventions in medicine, without any corresponding fall in fertility, in which, on the other hand, there might have been a little rise because of improved health conditions. The accelerated population growth resulting from this new lack of balance between the components threatened the already low level of living of the region, unless a still higher rate of acceleration could be induced in economic development. The socio-economic implications of this situation, in the particular conditions and development possibilities of the various countries of the region, were discussed at length. In this context, there were also lively discussions on the relative importance of fertility limitation as a measure of economic betterment.

4. The lack of good-quality demographic data in the region generally, excepting Japan and to some extent India, became apparent in course of the discussions. Collection of essential data and improvement of their quality were thus very important for the region. Ajit Das Gupta, an actuary attached

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to the Indian Statistical Institute, who participated as a delegate of the Government of India, was invited to explain the methods adopted by census actuaries to estimate mortality from successive census age distributions where reliable death registration data were lacking. The methodology and usefulness of population projections was another topic of direct interest to the actuaries present. Two sets of population projections for India provided the main basis of discussion and criticism. Participants from Indonesia and the Philippines described the 'transmigration' operations adopted by their respective Governments for redistribution of population pressure and development. Under these operations inhabitants from the more densely populated islands were being actively encouraged and assisted to open up new cultivation in the uninhabited islands. Both countries reported very high output/capital ratios in these projects.

5. Generous tributes were paid by the participants to the Population Branch of the United Nations for the valuable work done by it for the advancement of the science of demography, particularly for the comprehensive set of reading and reference material compiled. The Seminar was exceedingly useful in bringing together officials and other technically qualified persons concerned with various aspects of demography and in effecting frank and realistic discussions and exchange of information. The host country, Indonesia, made excellent arrangements for the stay of the participants. The sponsors can be well satisfied with the results.

A.D.G.