The last 50 years have seen the most dramatic changes in the world’s population ever recorded in any 50-year period in human history. Although population grew enormously over this period, fertility also fell sharply and remains really high only in sub-Saharan Africa and in some parts of South Asia. As fertility has declined and population growth rates slowed, population has disappeared from the radar screen of the international development establishment, except in the two high fertility regions. This in no way means that population-development relationships have ceased to be important. The relation between population growth and development will always be a topic of concern, as it has been since the time of Condorcet and Malthus. But the ways the relationships are seen and the particular focus of attention in the debate can and do shift.

It is interesting to compare the demographic transition in East and Southeast Asia with that in Latin America. Fertility rates fell faster and to lower levels in the East Asian countries than in Latin America. Some in the family planning field argued that this was the result of slower adoption of family planning programs in Latin America, but it must be borne in mind that levels of economic development in East Asian countries were also higher, and their pace of economic development during the 1970s and 1980s was extremely rapid. The fertility experience of Southeast Asian countries was more varied, with Thailand going below replacement level fertility in 1990, Vietnam, Indonesia and Myanmar reaching replacement around the present time, and Malaysia, the Philippines, and Cambodia lagging in the fertility transition.

What we need to keep in mind is that the relationship between population and development is a two-way street. This was rather ignored by the family planning establishment, until at the Bucharest Conference, the slogan “development is the best contraceptive” underlined the point. Attempts to sort out the role of family planning programs in fertility declines are greatly complicated by the fact that significant declines in infant mortality and significant socio-economic changes were taking place in parallel with FP program inputs. All these factors interacted to lower fertility in Asia and Latin America from the high peak of the 1960s.
When Latin American and East and Southeast Asian countries are compared in relation to a number of indicators, some important points emerge:

- population densities are considerably higher in Southeast Asia than in Latin America – but not as extreme as those in East Asian countries (including parts of China), or much of South Asia. This may have influenced the extent to which governments felt a sense of urgency in getting fertility rates down;
- we can observe some degree of inverse correlation between levels of economic and social development and fertility rates. But the correlation is far from perfect. Some examples are relatively high fertility in Malaysia and the Philippines; and remarkably low fertility in Vietnam and Myanmar, relative to their levels of economic and human development;
- in general, poorer countries in East and Southeast Asia have lower levels of fertility than countries with equivalent levels of economic development in Latin America. This is clearly the case when we compare China, Thailand and Vietnam with Latin American countries with equivalent per capita income levels;
- nearly all the countries in both regions have now reached low levels of fertility. The only countries with TFR remaining above 3 are Paraguay, Bolivia and Guatemala in Latin America and Philippines and Cambodia in Southeast Asia. Of these, only the Philippines is a really populous country.

So the issue so prominent from the 1960s to 1980s – the need to get fertility rates down - is now no longer relevant to discussion of issues of population and development in most of Latin America and East and Southeast Asia – unless we accept the view of some environmentalists that populations are already well in excess of sustainable levels. The first demographic transition is essentially over. What should therefore now be the focus of our consideration of population and development?

**Ultra-low fertility**

Based on the East Asian situation, one could make the case that the overriding concern from now on will be the issue of ultra-low fertility. In East Asian countries, TFRs have sunk to remarkably low levels, in the range of 1.0 to 1.4, and the labour force has already been shrinking for 15 years in Japan and is about to start shrinking in South Korea. Total population is projected by the UN medium projection to decline from 127 million in Japan in 2010 to 102 million in 2050 (and to 90 million in the low projection). Over the same period, South Korea's population is projected to decline from 48.5 million to 44.1 million (and to 38.7 million in the low projection).

How serious are these issues of population decline? Looking at it from one point of view, the projected 2050 population would only bring Japan's population back to the number it had reached in 1968 and South Korea's to its 1993 number. In both cases, many commentators in these countries at that time considered Japan and South Korea to be overpopulated. So why the disquiet about
falling back to such levels? Clearly, because the issue is not just one of population size but also one of population structure and population trajectory.

- The structure of the population would be altered in problematic ways, with the share of the elderly (age 65+) reaching proportions not yet seen in any country of the world (in the case of Japan, rising from an already high 22.6 per cent in 2010 to 37.8 per cent by 2050; in South Korea, rising from only 11.0 per cent in 2010 to 34.2 per cent by 2050).\(^1\) Not only do such increases raise difficult issues about the sustainability of different kinds of income support programs, and care for the disabled and frail elderly, but also there is potential here for inter-generational conflicts.

- In contrast to some countries in Europe, where some fertility “recuperation” appears to be taking place, no such fertility recuperation is in evidence in the East Asian countries, and there are good reasons for arguing that such a recuperation is unlikely in the medium-term future (FREJKA; JONES; SARDON, 2010).

- If TFR continued to remain below 1.5, a continuing downward trajectory of population would be followed, with each generation about one third smaller than the previous generation. Continued over a few generations, the population would shrink dramatically. No country can be expected to welcome such a decline.

What has caused these declines in fertility, and what can be done to redress them? I have discussed this in detail elsewhere (JONES, 2007), so will only make the points briefly in point form.

- These are countries whose economic success has stunned the world. Their economic success is built on a model of enhanced human capital, with very high levels of education.

- Delayed and non-marriage, both voluntary and involuntary, has played an important role. Involuntary non-marriage has to do with the changing gender balance in different marriageable age groups as a result of the educational advances just noted, the tradition of hypergamy, and the time taken to get established in a career. Voluntary non-marriage has to do with the diminishing priority given to marriage as a result of various factors noted below, and the lack of appeal to women of the East Asian “marriage package”.\(^2\)

- Women want to be in the workforce to take advantage of their education, and because rising expectations mean that two-income households are perceived to be necessary. Governments in the region also want them to be in the workforce to boost economic growth rates. But workplaces are family-unfriendly, thus posing great conflicts for women who want to combine a career with raising a family

- Men are continuing to hold traditional attitudes toward the gendered division of labour in the household.

\(^1\) By contrast, the proportion aged 65+ in Brazil is projected to increase from 6.9 per cent in 2010 to 22.5 per cent in 2050.

\(^2\) This is “the entire package of marital roles for the wife including children with their intensive care needs, a heavy household task load, and co-residence with parents-in-law, which is potentially included in the bargain” (BUMPASS et al., 2009, p. 218).
• Children are very costly, in terms of financial, time and emotional investment.
• Appropriate policies to support child-rearing have been lacking until recently, and even now are not comprehensive.

Looking ahead, should planners in Brazil be anticipating a similar need for policy interventions? I am not well qualified to judge whether there is really potential for fertility in Brazil to fall as low as in many European and East Asian countries. I do note that fertility in Brazil is already clearly below replacement level and that TFR in the Southeast and the South is already down to 1.7 (POTTER et al., 2010).

**Low fertility and international migration**

As already noted, for East Asian countries, it is hard to see forces that will raise fertility to anywhere near replacement in the foreseeable future. There is always, however, the potential role of migration in preventing the populations of the high income, low fertility countries from falling too rapidly. While there is no shortage of potential migrants, if we are not too concerned about the skill levels, ethnicity and religion, the populations in Europe, Japan and South Korea show little appetite for the changes in their ethnic and religious composition that such immigration would bring. Even populations of countries such as Singapore, Australia and the USA, all noted for their ethnically varied populations deeply influenced by migration over long periods, are currently making it clear to their political leaders that they are not happy about high levels of immigration.

Coleman (2006) is concerned that the comfortable assumption that immigrants will gradually lose their distinctive identity by converging towards the behaviour and belief patterns of the majority population, and creating a “hybrid” population through inter-marriage, will not necessarily hold in the case of Europe. The resistance of European countries to immigrants is no doubt partly because the origins of these inflows differ markedly from those to the United States, Australia or Canada and are seen as more problematic in terms of integration. Brazil certainly falls within the ranks of countries heavily influenced by immigration, and its population is ethnically very mixed, which should make its capacity for accepting migrants greater than that in very homogeneous populations such as those of many European countries and of Japan.

**Urbanization**

Latin America is well ahead of Southeast Asia in its level of urbanization (80% urban compared with 42% urban). Levels of economic development appear to explain most, though not all, of the difference. For example, Thailand is considerably less urbanized than the Latin American countries at much the same level of economic development (though a restrictive definition of urbanization in Thailand explains part of this).
Given that the greatest economic dynamism tends to be in the large urban agglomerations, considerable importance attaches to understanding the dynamics of change in population and employment in such urban agglomerations. I note that very sophisticated analysis has been conducted on Brazilian cities (summarized in MARTINE et al., 2008). There would be some value in collaborations between those working on these issues in Brazilian cities and those conducting related analysis on the mega-urban regions of Southeast Asia – Jakarta, Manila, Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City. One fertile area for collaboration would be in better identifying urban agglomerations and studying the dynamics of change in mega-urban regions. The United Nations Population Division recognizes the problems they face in having to accept whatever urban agglomeration data are supplied by the member states. A recent study which attempted to define urban agglomerations according to a simple but comparable set of criteria produced widely different estimates of urban agglomeration data for the largest Southeast Asian cities in 2000 than those used by the United Nations (Jones; Douglass, 2008).³

What do we mean by development? And what do we mean by poverty?

Population and development is all about lifting people out of poverty. Poverty means having inadequate income to maintain a minimally acceptable quality of life. But is that all it means? There is a need to broaden the concept. Poverty is not only a lack of income and productive assets but also a lack of access to essential social and economic services and a lack of power, participation and respect. These dimensions of poverty are interrelated and need to be addressed simultaneously to make a significant impact.

Development in very poor countries is about providing the basic necessities of life – food, clothing and shelter. The MDGs of the United Nations and the World Bank go further, but they are still about meeting basic necessities, viewed a bit more broadly, admittedly – to include universal primary education, improving maternal and child health and combating various diseases. As incomes rise and the bulk of the population rises above subsistence level, there is more possibility of focusing on other things as well – such as developing a richer cultural life.

What does a broader view of both poverty and development entail? One approach to poverty is to consider it "disadvantage". The notion of social exclusion emphasizes the multidimensional aspects of disadvantage, and focuses particularly on relational issues, such as inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power. But if we manage to measure "disadvantage" according to some objective criteria, will this measure correlate with people's wellbeing?

³ The figures were: for Manila, 16.24 million, compared with the United Nations figure of 11.63 million; for Jakarta, 17.78 million, compared with the United Nations figure of 9.21 million.
There has been a ferment of discussion over the best ways of measuring human wellbeing. Because of dissatisfaction with measures of wellbeing that rely on economic output, such as per capita GNP, new measures have sprung up, such as the Gross Happiness Index. When we ask people about their level of life satisfaction, beyond a certain threshold there appears to be little correlation between “self-evaluated happiness” and GDP per capita (EASTERLIN, 1995; DEINER; BISWAS-DEINER, 2002); in other words steady economic growth does not appear to have raised happiness levels in rich countries. At the same time, though, the risk of unhappiness is much higher for poor people in poor countries (DEINER; BISWAS-DEINER, 2002), thus providing support for efforts to raise incomes and increase equality in these countries.

**Education as a key to equality and development**

Education is a key element in attacking capability deprivation. The key role of education in economic growth has long been accepted, though the case is made in different ways by different authors (e.g. EASTERLIN, 1995; SCHULTZ, 2002; LUTZ, 2009). There are many reasons why education is not always given the role it deserves in development by governments, communities and households. For example, we see in South Asian countries a significant lag in providing equal educational opportunities to girls and boys. This is related to the patriarchal structures in Hinduism and South Asian Islam, which militate against providing education to girls.

In relation to the argument that development must be seen in broader terms than merely elimination of dire poverty and raising of per capita income levels, there is much to be said about education as a key vehicle for expanding opportunities, tackling capability deprivation and enabling a broader participation in cultural life. Some of the issues are particularly important, I feel, in large countries with many pockets of rural poverty and isolation, including Brazil and many other countries in Latin America, as well as Indonesia, the Philippines and other countries in Asia.

Unfortunately, equality of opportunity in education remains a distant dream. In Indonesia, for example, 1998 data show that if we compare the proportion of young people aged 16-18 (the ages of upper secondary education) in school according to the education level of the head of household, the proportion was about 25 per cent where the household head had none or incomplete primary education, but over 80 per cent if the head had upper secondary or higher education. The poorest schools and least trained teachers tend to be found in the poorest and most isolated areas. Students from these areas have enormous difficulty in moving up through the school system and entering tertiary education. In Indonesia, the key dropout point in the education system is the transition from primary to lower secondary education. But transition from lower secondary school to upper secondary school is also extremely difficult, because of high costs at this level, including both the high cost of school fees and other payments, and the need for children from isolated areas to somehow board in town, because such schools are not available within commuting distance (JONES et al., 1998).
One would hope that the disadvantages faced by children in city slums and in poor and isolated rural areas would be counteracted, at least to some extent, by the pattern of government spending on education. Unfortunately, often this is not the case, and patterns of educational spending by governments actually exacerbate the prevailing educational inequalities. In many countries, the small group of students which reaches post-secondary education receives heavy public subsidization. A high proportion of this group is from white-collar backgrounds, with higher family income levels. In other words, public funds are being used to benefit those who are already advantaged by socioeconomic background. The Indonesian study I just mentioned argued that the goals of both equity and efficiency would be furthered if the government adopted a scheme to provide scholarships for bright but poor children to proceed into and through secondary school (JONES et al., 1998).

**Education and ultra-low fertility**

In East Asian countries that have progressed economically, parents tend to accord great importance to the educational progress of their children. I want to sound one discordant note in assessing what is generally considered to be a commendable trait in parents and indeed in whole societies. In the ultra-low fertility countries of East Asia, among the many factors making for low fertility, the single-minded emphasis on pushing one’s child to succeed in the highly competitive education systems is, I contend, an important factor that has pushed fertility to unsustainably low levels. For many of those contemplating becoming parents, the high expectations placed on them to raise quality children, and the heavy investment of time and money in arranging coaching and other out-of-school activities become reasons not to have children at all, or to have only one or two.

The economic success achieved in these East Asian countries has much to do with the high quality human capital they have achieved through just such an emphasis on pushing children to strong educational performance. The dilemma is that the advanced economy so created will be enjoyed by increasingly fewer citizens and may itself be put at risk by the downward spiral in labour force and (with some delay) in population size. It is ironic that the pressure to prioritize economic growth and the factors that can contribute to it – long hours of work, involvement of women in the workforce on much the same terms as men, strong pressure on children to perform outstandingly in school, and the extra tuition and coaching that is considered indispensible for reaching this goal – contain the seeds of an inability of the population to replace itself.

**Conclusions**

Let me pull together a few of the threads of my argument, and leave with you with one key issue for East Asia that may have some bearing on discussions of population and development in Brazil. (1) The successful East Asian economies are placed at risk by a shortage of people to continue to power
the economies and enjoy their fruits, as a result of ultra-low fertility generated by the very factors that have resulted in the growth of these economies in the first place. (2) In these wealthier countries, economic growth is not raising happiness levels. (3) The pattern of economic growth that they have been following is endangering environmental sustainability. Therefore I think we have grounds for some serious questioning of the model of economic growth that we have been following.

References


