



Consejo
Nacional
de
Ciencia
y
Tecnología
Mexico City

Science and Man in the Americas

Mexico City 20 June to 4 July 1973



American
Association
for the
Advancement
of
Science
Washington, D.C.

Problems of Population

Problems of population in the Western Hemisphere will be one of the central themes discussed 26–28 June. The writers of 16 papers, and an equal number of discussants (divided between North Americans and Latin Americans) will take part in eight panel discussions, each lasting from 2 to 3 hours. Two of these panels will deal with problems of urbanization and internal migration; three with economic and social problems of population growth; and the remaining three with questions of population policy.

Overall population densities in most of the countries of the Americas are low, averaging only 13 per square kilometer in Latin America and 10 in the United States and Canada, compared to 109 in Middle South Asia, 62 in Southeast Asia, and 150 in Western Europe. The population problems of the hemisphere do not arise from high population densities, but from unprecedentedly high rates of population growth in tropical South America and Middle America, high levels of internal migration, and extremely rapid growth of cities. At present growth rates, the populations of tropical South America and Middle America will double in about two decades. Cities of more than 100,000 in tropical South America are doubling in population every 10 years, and in Mexico and Central America every 12 years. More than half the growth of larger cities in tropical South America results from migration out of the countryside, even though the number of people in rural areas is also rapidly increasing.

In both North and Latin America, all the larger cities have serious problems of poverty and socio-economic inequality; poor housing; inadequate transportation and traffic congestion; pollution of water, air, and land; crowded, unsatisfactory schools; and

un- and underemployment. In the United States these problems are exacerbated by racial conflict; in Latin America by the difficulties of assimilating the waves of rural migrants. Rural-to-urban migration also weakens the countryside, because the migrants tend to be the younger, better educated, more vigorous adults.

Undernutrition and malnutrition are widespread among the children of the poor in Latin America, particularly among children in the large families which characterize rapidly growing populations. Economic growth in the modern, industrialized sector is unable to keep up with the tide of young people entering the labor force and seeking employment. In many countries, two societies exist side by side, one modern and industrialized with rapidly increasing levels of income and welfare, the other backward and impoverished, lacking in modern skills, living by subsistence agriculture in rural areas and by poorly paid jobs in the cities. The rapid increase in the numbers of children, combined with gross inequalities of income, creates severe problems for educational institutions. Resources are strained to increase the number of teachers in schools and to distribute them more equitably.

The governments and private institu-

tions of the Americas have attempted to develop policies and programs to cope with the problems of migration, urbanization, and rapid growth in human numbers, but these differ widely in intent, scope, and effectiveness among different countries. In some Latin American countries with large land areas and low population densities, governments are less concerned with the penalties of rapid population growth than with the benefits that might come from attaining a larger population. In others, notably Costa Rica, Mexico, Chile, and Colombia, governments are moving as rapidly as they can to slow down the growth rate. In the more developed countries of the Americas, rates of growth are already low and the population-related policies of governments are aimed at reducing the numbers of hazardous illegal abortions or the rate of illegitimacy, improving maternal and child health, and enhancing the ability of individual couples to regulate the size of their families. The confrontation between these different policies will be one of the important aspects of the sessions on population in Mexico City.

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Wildlife and Its Environments in the Americas

The expansive land mass of the Western Hemisphere is situated so that most of North America is located in either middle or high latitudes while most of Middle America and South America are within the low latitudes and, consequently, tropical and endowed with a richer species component. Environments in Middle and South America are favorable not only for resident wildlife species but also for a host of

migratory organisms which breed in the higher latitudes but winter in equatorial areas. Latin America thus occupies a place of special interest in a hemisphere characterized by a great variety of environments, which support a diverse assemblage of wildlife.

This symposium has been designed to examine the biota of the Americas (using a few selected examples) emphasizing its diversity, how little we