International thinking on population policies and programmes from Rome to Cairo: Has South Africa kept pace?

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This paper reviews global thinking on population policy expressed at the world conferences on population matters from 1954 to 1994. The review is complemented by an overview of trends in South Africa that constituted a de jure population policy during the apartheid era. There is also a brief discussion of the Population Green Paper tabled in 1995, aimed at the establishment of a national population policy for South Africa. This is evaluated against the Programme of Action decided on at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt in 1994. There is an indication that finally, South Africa can be said to be genuinely moving in the direction of respect for human rights in its population policies in harmony with global convention. In a sense, it is catching up with global trends in the population field after years of isolation resulting from sanctions against the apartheid government.

Introduction

The world population had reached one billion by 1800. By 1950, it had reached 2.5 billion and today it is estimated to be 5.5 billion with projections indicating the likelihood of reaching 6 billion by the end of this century. The World Bank and the United Nations have projected that this figure will have doubled by the end of the next (twenty-first) century, meaning an additional 6 billion people. Most of the growth is expected to occur in the developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Concern about the adverse effect of this rapid growth in population was expressed 200 years ago by Parson Thomas Malthus. In his work published in 1798, *An essay on the principle of population as it affects the future improvement of society,* he postulated that there was a tendency for population to outstrip all possible means of subsistence. According to Malthus:

"Far from ascending to an ever higher level, society was caught in a hopeless trap in which the human reproductive urge would inevitably drive humanity to the brink of the precipice of existence. Instead of being headed for utopia, the human lot was forever condemned to a losing struggle between ravenous and multiplying mouths and the eternally insufficient stock of Nature’s cupboard, however diligently that cupboard might be searched." (Heilbroner, 1989:76).

Although Malthus disavowed the practice of birth control, his ideas of preventive checks against population growth as practised through birth control has been termed Neo-Malthusianism.

Malthus and those who grappled with the population problem in his time were mainly economists. Their concern was with the population problem in Europe. In Malthus’s case, he was reacting to the ideas of Adam Smith on the question of the implications of the growing number of Englishmen in that country. This trend of focusing on Europe and America in population matters continued until the end of the Second World War. With the advent of the decolonisation process, interest in the population of poor countries arose. This was characterised by the coining of such phrases as “underdeveloped country” and “Third World” (the latter was coined by Alfred Sauvy in 1955) to refer to these countries.

Neo-Malthusianism, which saw contraception as a means of lowering birth rates, appeared in these developing countries as part of the thrust of corporate involvement in the so-called Third World. Thus, the theory that held sway among demographers prior to the 1954 Rome Conference was that demographic change occurred in response to structural change: a view which led to the formulation of the demographic transition theory (Hodgson, 1988). This structural change was regarded as the process of modernisation. The demographic transition theory was postulated by Kirk, Notestein, Davis, Thompson and Lorimer in the 1940s. The idea of structural change, termed the “modernisation process”, proposes to explain worldwide demographic trends by means of a linear progression through four stages, i.e., pre-transitional to post-transitional, marked by declining mortality and fertility as a response to these changes. The theory argues that the escalating population growth rate in the developing countries is an inevitable part of this process of modernisation. In this process, and with
exposure to modern medicine, the mortality rate declines without a simultaneous decline in the fertility rate because of a cultural lag. Population control is therefore considered as a means of intervene in the population growth rate. The view originated from analyses of demographic trends in Europe before industrialisation and into the twentieth century. Socioeconomic conditions were seen to induce fertility decline. This framework dominated international thinking in the decades following the Second World War until the early seventies. In South Africa, the National Party government articulated its understanding of population dynamics within this framework. The seventies saw a shift in thinking on population matters with the recognition that population growth itself could hinder economic growth and development. In South Africa, it was not until the late eighties that a significant shift in thinking occurred.

The post-Second World War years and the Rome Conference of 1954

The Rome Conference, coming as it did in the wake of the Second World War, confined the debate to the question of which road to development was to be followed by the developing countries: capitalism or socialism. Thus, the Cold War made the developing countries potential proselytes, this time not to colonial religions, but to imperial ideologies for development. Industrialisation (read “modernisation”) was not only a prerequisite for economic development, but also for fertility decline as enunciated in the theory of demographic transition. This theory took a Neo-Malthusian view of population growth that links poverty to large family sizes. The alarm over rising population numbers was sparked off by none other than Notestein at the end of the Second World War in a paper in which he foresaw a year 2000 world population of 3 billion - a mark surpassed in 1960. The concern, under the Neo-Malthusian assumption, was that the world would soon have insufficient resources to cope with the escalating population. The bulk of this demographic expansion was affecting the less developed countries in which mortality rates were expected to continue declining. If this trend was to continue, it was argued, fertility rates had to decline as well. The rationale for this point of view, which aggregated global population trends, was that the slowing down of the population growth rate would increase the per capita income in the less developed countries. Still, how were policy makers in these countries to buy this rationale and who exactly would benefit from such policy interventions? What ensued was a delicate political bargaining between the West and the less developed countries.

To combat their rapidly increasing population (brought about by declining mortality) and improve their economic performance these “uncommitted natives” in the less developed countries had, according to transitionist thinking, to be persuaded into what Professor Ali Mazrui (1990) terms “a dual partnership” with the West. In this partnership capitalism, culture and the Protestant “work ethic” would be the Western commodities for sale while the developing countries had raw materials and cultural pliability awakened by the shimmering illusion of Western consumer goods. In the newly decolonised countries the political bargaining involved new leaders who had to persuade their subjects against “imprudent breeding” in exchange for Western investment. The tool to do this job was not the Malthusian “moral restraint” but the Neo-Malthusian contraceptive. In South Africa, which was under internal colonialism, no political bargaining occurred and the objective of the contraceptive was a eugenist bid to lower birth rates selectively to avert a “swart gevaar” (a black peril) - a danger to the existence of whites (Chimere-Dan, 1993:38).

At the Rome Conference, held under the auspices of the newly-formed United Nations, the protagonists were the United States of America (USA) and the USSR. This conference had been preceded by the rise of organisations such as the Planned Parenthood Federation and the Population Council, created in 1952. The former had a mandate to link birth control movements emerging in many countries, while the latter’s mandate was to serve as a scientific resource for the field. The rise of these agencies for the reduction of fertility through contraceptive technology reflected the statist social engineering conception of policy making.

Colonial experiences and apartheid: A question of population numbers

The question that troubled most African countries who had just emerged from colonial rule was whether this was not a restaging of the Berlin Conference for the scramble and partition of Africa: only this time it was happening in Rome! Was imperialism redefining its tactics, this time casting its eyes on developing countries under the guise of “development”? They could, indeed, not forget how colonial occupation came in the guise of philanthropy.
At this stage, most developing countries remained unconvinced that rapid population growth constituted a barrier to development (UN, 1993). These countries had witnessed the virulence of racial separation under colonial rule which, as far as health was concerned, ensured that medical services for the natives were in response to the need for protection of European settlers against contagious diseases (cordons sanitaires), rather than a genuine concern for the health of the natives. Even when this was provided by missionaries, it was only a tool for conversion to Christianity. What was to convince them of the sincerity of the European “Master” on the issue of fertility? This suspicion is understandable if it is borne in mind that aid to the countries concerned was attached to a precondition, namely that they adopt a family-planning programme (Klugman, 1991:22). These programmes offered modern contraceptive technology and related services free of charge to those who wanted them. The question that begged an answer was whether these services were “costless” after all? What the West was selling were political ideologies that found a voice in economic rationalism for human reproduction: that, to achieve development, each household had to reduce the number of its members to ensure “surplus” wealth. The aim was to increase per capita income by reducing population growth and, as President Lyndon Johnson was to claim at the twentieth-anniversary celebration of the United Nations in San Francisco, “less than five dollars invested in population control was worth a hundred dollars invested in economic growth.” It was never made clear, however, whether the resources to be protected from the dangers of overpopulation had, in the first place, been shared equally among all the parties interested in the “population problem.” It was with this question in mind that most of the African countries saw the need to eradicate the legacies of colonialism. These legacies, such as the uprooting of populations and the wars characterising the history of African nations during those decades, framed later policies such as apartheid in South Africa. The superpowers sought ideological control of the African nations, while African nationalists campaigned for economic and total political autonomy. The West was concerned that the large populations of the new African nations might prove easy converts to communism in the fact of lack of improvements in per capita income.

To the Africans, the primary cause of their underdevelopment was the evil they had been subjected to, namely slavery and colonial exploitation. Little did they know that for the next few decades, capitalism and the values of “modernism” would continue to dictate not only their ideological persuasion, but also their development agendas and policies including those dealing with their own populations. In South Africa, political liberation from internal colonialism was nowhere in sight. To the colonial governments, the forced removal of natives from the land was an essential modus operandi that had ensured expropriation of most of the land for use by the white population.

This entire process had a major demographic impact on the population of South Africa. “The entire apartheid concept and practice were based on explicit demographic considerations - the fear of losing political and economic control to the majority of the population” (Klugman, 1994:6). This fear led to the creation of “independent states” (called the Bantustan experiment) to which the African population was exported. This “experiment,” thus, involved a crude reorganisation of the demographic profile of the country. In granting “self-government” to Transkei in 1962, Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd acknowledged the need for this experiment stating that otherwise, “If the one multiracial state were to become a federally constituted state or a unitary state (based on the liberal party’s proposition of “one man, one vote”) and at the same time be truly democratic and in harmony with the spirit of the times, it would inexorably lead to Bantu domination.” In his words: “... in the long run numbers must tell” (Klugman, 1994:6. Chimure-Dan, 1993:32).

**Neo-Malthusianism and the Belgrade Conference of 1965**

The demographic transition theory still held sway even during the 1965 World Population Conference held in Belgrade. The 1960 round of censuses had sounded the alarm bell for most developing countries as it gave evidence of rapid population growth with possibilities of doubling in the next 25 years or less.

India’s adoption of a comprehensive family-planning policy as an integral part of its development plans even as early as 1951 and the baby boom in the West, which proved wrong the expectations of “incipient” fertility decline brought about by industrialisation, led to an altered approach which assumed a Neo-Malthusian inclination. Hence, “reduced rates of population growth [was viewed] as essential aspects of long run social and economic advances in the densely peopled agrarian societies...” (Hodgson, 1988:543) as India had so well demonstrated even before any industrial growth.
Under the Neo-Malthusian paradigm, population control measures had to be instituted in those countries characterised by insufficient resources to cope with the rapid increase in human numbers if overpopulation was to be avoided. The danger was that if such measures were not taken, these communities would find themselves with “too many mouths to feed.” This led to the notion that there is a relationship between population growth and poverty. The notion of access to contraception as a basic human right was promoted with the expectation that it would lead to a decline in population growth.

The role of such agencies as the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), was to offer aid for the implementation of measures to control population - therefore, family-planning programmes. Aid to developing countries was often subject to the adoption of family-planning programmes. In South Africa, those programmes were seen by the National Party government as opportune tools to reduce the population growth of the majority population. In 1972, Prime Minister B.J. Vorster, in referring to the majority black population, stated that “We would like to reduce them ... and we are doing our best to do so, but at all times we would not disrupt the South African economy” (Klugman, 1994:6). This constituted a de jure policy of the apartheid era.

The impact of this policy on the demographic processes, namely mortality, migration and fertility, can be understood against the background of the notion of demographic transition which saw reduction in fertility rates as an inevitable process linked to cultural behaviour. The apartheid regime therefore saw an easy scapegoat for its discriminatory practices. It did not acknowledge that the lower nutritional status of the majority population (brought about by deprivation of their traditional means of subsistence, food, access to effective education, training and employment and an inequitable distribution of medical care, coupled with the migrant labour system and influx control) had deleterious effects on the demographic profile of the majority population. Its answer to this maldistribution of privilege was population control through a family-planning programme, established in 1974.

Orthodoxy and the Bucharest Conference of 1974

Increasing sophistication in the tools of demographic analysis and data gathering heightened the debate as to why these unpredictable patterns of fertility regimes emerged both in the West and in some developing countries. This led to the view that mortality decline caused by extra-economic factors resulted in unprecedented rates of population growth, which no longer made it easy to view population trends as a function of progress. Government intervention through family-planning programmes in countries with no industrial economies, such as India and Bulgaria (Hodgson, 1988), had led to fertility decline - hence the birth and rise of orthodoxy.

It was against this background that the United Nations declared 1974 as the year of world population. In the same year, the third World Population Conference was convened at Bucharest, Romania, bringing together high-ranking government officials and population experts. It was here that views that saw the benefit of induced fertility decline in forestalling famine, economic catastrophe and political turmoil in the nonindustrial world were entrenched. Population growth was a problem in the developing countries and, as the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) surveys had shown, most couples in the developing countries were desirous of reducing fertility. This latent demand for contraception needed to be satisfied.

This, and the need to check the emergent ideological persuasion of the communist world, led to the provision of funds by the United States Government and agencies such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations for the promotion of contraception in developing countries as a means to combat the evil and threat of rapid population growth: too many mouths to feed compared with finite resources and absence of industrialisation. These agencies and the United States Government provided substantial funds for research into contraceptive technology, which saw the production of intra-uterine devices, and also for the publication of journals such as Demography, Population and Development Review, Studies in Family Planning, and International Family Planning Perspectives.

The Bucharest Conference was indeed an opportune and ideal forum for the United States to present the gospel of family planning to developing countries. This conference perhaps best illustrates the political atmosphere marked by the cold war and the immediate post-colonial decades. The western countries, led by the USA, saw the problems of underdevelopment, food shortages (malnutrition) and unemployment as fundamentally linked to population growth. Their position was that the
cause and solution to these problems could be found in the Third World themselves. Rapid population growth was the cause of these problems and fertility control, aided by money and technical advice from the First World, for the implementation of fertility control programmes, would lead to a solution. The stance of the developing countries was, however, marked by suspicion of the motives of the western nations’ advocacy for fertility control programmes. Was this a eugenics conspiracy? To the developing countries, underdevelopment, unemployment, malnutrition and rapid population growth were fundamentally caused by the ties of dependency that had bound and still bind the Third World to the developed world. They saw a solution to this as requiring a global redistribution of wealth and power within a new international economic order. The threat to the point of view held by western capitalist nations was not the traditional Marxist critique of capitalism, but a new scepticism in the Third World states who had for more than a decade witnessed the failure of family planning to reduce fertility to any substantial degree. That is why the head of the Indian delegation received resounding support when he argued for a liberal version of developmentalism, which, he argued, would motivate couples to have smaller families. A popular slogan was “Take care of the people, and the population will take care of itself” (Gillis et al., 1992:184). At Bucharest the developing countries had pushed their case and won a political battle with new converts to their views, among them non other than the World Bank under Robert McNamara and the head of the Rockefeller Foundation, John D. Rockefeller.

Bucharest saw the adoption of the World Population Plan of Action that reflected a developmentalist approach rather than a narrow “orthodox” pro-family planning approach. This marked a political defeat for the orthodox stance led by the United States. From here, “… donors and international agencies working in the field have defined population policies and programmes in terms of mortality and migration in addition to fertility and in terms of social and economic policies and programmes that influence demographic variables other than family planning” (UN, 1993:27).

Even the inclusion of family planning as a component of the development package marked a departure from strict orthodoxy. At Bucharest the concept of population was enlarged and infused with a political content by giving recognition to the fact that the real dimensions of population problems are social and institutional, hence the manner in which societies are organised.

Although the main leaders in population research in South Africa recognised this by a tacit acknowledgement of the role of development in demographic trends, it fell far short of the Bucharest World Population Plan of Action’s proviso that: “True development cannot take place in the absence of national independence and liberation. Alien and colonial domination, foreign occupation, wars of aggression, racial discrimination, apartheid and neocolonialism in all its forms, continue to be among the greatest obstacles to the full emancipation and progress of the developing countries and all the people involved” (UN, 1975, in Klugman, 1991:29).

The adoption of the World Population Plan of Action was influenced by the adoption, only three months before, of the United Nation’s General Assembly of the Declaration on the Establishment of a New Economic Order (Resolutions 3201 [S-VI] and 3202 [S-VI] of 1 May 1974). The principal idea of this declaration was that the most important function of a balanced world would be distribution, not only production. The chief cause of the population problem was regarded as underdevelopment and the practice of considering demography out of its economic and social context has become increasingly pointless. This thinking became ideological common ground internationally, except in South Africa where it was only adopted fairly recently.

The Bucharest World Population Conference of 1974 coincided with the launching of the first formal population programme in South Africa. Whether this was due to a pragmatic recognition of the need for more pro-active efforts or a belated reaction to the direct censure to apartheid in the Plan of Action, we may never know!

South Africa’s national family-planning programme was aimed at providing counseling, clinical and information services nationwide. Informed as this programme was by the ideology of population control, it offered no reproductive health care and it reinforced unequal power relations between men and women by focusing exclusively on women without offering men information and services as well which would have encouraged them to share responsibility for reproduction. This bias arose out of the programme’s goal of reducing numbers by lowering the fertility of the black population rather than being a health or sexual and a reproductive rights programme (Klugman, 1994:7).
Revisionism and the Mexico Conference of 1984

Meanwhile, on the international scene, as the political battle was being won by the developmentalists. China had embarked on a fertility-control programme marked by heavy government intervention and the use of the so-called “barefoot doctors” to spread the contraceptive message. Also, in most of the developing countries, the population growth rates were on the increase with no fall in fertility. Their preoccupation was not the question of whether this was as a result of failed industrialisation but on the reality that rapid population growth rate itself hindered economic development. The way forward was to reduce this growth by family-planning programmes - they had, unfortunately, finally accepted the message of orthodoxy. Here, at last, was unanimity among the targeted countries about the goal of reducing fertility and promoting family-planning programmes (Hodgson, 1988; UN, 1993). This hope for unanimity was dashed by the American delegation to the World Population Conference held in Mexico in 1984, with their revisionist pronouncement that saw population growth as, of itself, a neutral phenomenon. The United States had opposed this very view that they now propounded during the previous World Population Conference held in Bucharest. Clearly, internal American reaction to cases of Chinese abortion and Indian vasectomy of young boys, coupled with dwindling funds among agencies as a result of the conversion of the World Bank and the Rockefeller Foundation at Bucharest, had had a role to play in the newly-discovered American revisionist stance.

In South Africa, a year earlier, the report of the Science Committee of the President’s Council into Demographic Trends in South Africa was published. It argued that South Africa did not have the water resources to maintain a population greater than 80 million people. It did not, however, take into account the urgent need for water planning and management to ensure equity of access to water supply (Klugman, 1994:8). Based on this scarcity of water, it proposed that a Population and Development Programme (PDP) be established to ensure that population numbers were streamlined with resource availability. The PDP, established in 1984, now falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Welfare and Population Development and is serviced by the Chief Directorate of Population Development (until now one of the Directorates within the Department of National Health and Population Development). The role of the PDP was to facilitate development initiatives in local areas and to popularise the view that South Africa had too big a population. This was to be accomplished through information, education and communication (IEC) (Klugman, 1994:9).

The PDP had five specific aims: (1) to stabilise the national population size at 80 million people by the end of the next century, (2) to accelerate social and economic development of all population groups to achieve parity in opportunities for development as soon as possible, (3) to achieve a national total fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman by the year 2010, (4) to promote a basic level of good health among all population groups, and (5) to achieve orderly geographical distribution and development of the population in the rural areas of South Africa.

The PDP is certainly the best-funded population programme in Africa with an annual budget of R33 million (Klugman, 1994:8; Chimere-Dan, 1993:34). It has, through its IEC and family-planning components, caused a high contraceptive prevalence in South Africa. The PDP has, however, had to face serious obstacles due to the racial and political divisions characterising the South African society. It had no legal powers to institute radical measures towards changing the racial, socioeconomic and gender inequalities. It was therefore seen as working on the assumption that the system of apartheid would continue and acquiescing to the existing system of unequal resource distribution and consumption. The fact that it centred on a community with no vote and therefore no say about its existence, coupled with its participation in the National Security Management System, which was set up to undermine community mobilisation against apartheid and specifically the United Democratic Front, made it look, in the eyes of the majority population, like an apartheid government tool to reduce the black population (Chimere-Dan, 1993:36, Klugman, 1994:11).

Global ideal of equitable distribution and consumption of resources and the Cairo Conference of 1994

Perhaps the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo marked the proper global unanimity with the United States’ laissez faire approach to population while giving due recognition to the fact that population was a top ranking issue. The Cairo Conference drew participants not only from governments, but also, for the first time, a huge delegation from Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) as well as a large press contingent of over
4,000 journalists. The discussion of population was placed firmly in a development context. The preamble of the conference clearly showed the broad mandate of this conference. "The 1994 conference was explicitly given a broader mandate on development issues than previous population conferences, reflecting the growing awareness that population, poverty, patterns of production and consumption and other threats to the environment are so closely interconnected that none of them can be considered in isolation" (Cohen & Richards, 1994:150).

Issues shifted from stabilization or control of populations per se to emphasis on reproductive health, sustainable development and humanitarian goals ranging from those regarding refugees and migrants to a heated debate on abortion. This conference, influenced as it was by the United States Government's stance earlier at the Bucharest Conference, was also tempered by the attendance of a large delegation of women and NGOs and the Vatican's stand on contraceptive and abortion issues. The Cairo Conference has, as a result, been seen as a resounding success due to its shift from a focus on the goal of fertility limitation to placing the emphasis on the reproductive health and rights of women. Emphasis was placed on the need to strive for sustained economic growth, bearing in mind that this happened within the domain of peoples' rights, thereby ensuring adequate standards of living and the upholding of human rights. Population concerns should be integrated into development strategies. At Cairo, the population and environment linkages were given explicit acknowledgement by the view that consumption trends that tended to be excessive were bad. In this way, the ICPR became the first conference to raise the developmental issue of global distribution of wealth and power. Its emphasis on issues of the environment and human rights may have occurred because it was influenced by two important forerunners, namely the Earth Summit in Rio De Janeiro in 1992 and the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Austria, in 1993.

The Cairo ICPR can be regarded as a ground breaking conference in that it was successful, despite the fact that it was held in an Islamic country, and in view of the defeat of the Vatican's attempt to align itself with Islamic states in its opposition to resolutions on reproductive health, abortion and contraception. A consensus was reached on the need for resource allocation to research into contraceptives, family planning, disease prevention and research, data collection and analysis in a bid to move on to the implementation and service delivery stages. Governments committed themselves here. The announcement of the formation by ten developing countries of partners in population and development - a 'South-South' initiative for the promotion of programmes that would rely on women as the agents of change, the promotion of culturally sensitive family-planning programmes, and the involvement of religious leaders - was a sign of a translation of the programme of action into action, even before the conference actually ended.

In South Africa, the shift from the narrow goal of reducing population growth to an approach integrating development, human rights and equitable distribution of national resources and consumption patterns was echoed in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Delegates from South Africa attended the ICPR in Cairo, and the Green Paper on population policy, tabled for public discussion in 1995, was a first step towards the formulation of a population policy infused with the ideals of the programme of action agreed on in Cairo. Although most of the demographic issues mentioned in the ICPR programme of action had been acknowledged on paper by the PDP, it had been unable to translate them into action in the apartheid era. With the changes in the country that allowed all South Africans to participate in the election of the government, the possibility of incorporating the ICPR programme of action in a population policy that would have the blessing of political legitimacy has become real.

Conclusion

The debate on population growth and its relation to economic development has come a long way - from the cold war era, when debates were largely blurred by the political expediencies of the time, to the post cold war era, when the goals of sustainable development and equity as well as human rights and environmental concerns are being integrated into population issues. This happened when global trends in policy thinking began to regard the centrality of the status of women and cultural autonomy of target populations as most considerations in the success and implementation of population programmes. Cairo therefore represents the culmination of efforts towards global harmonisation of development ideals and also marks the first real efforts at the implementation of resolutions.

Cairo marked a transition in demographic thinking and efforts, mainly in its repudiation of orthodoxy, where the message of contraceptive revolution was preached and expected to occur without development (sponsored by charitable organisations
from the West), to the realisation that charity is not only seen as capitalism’s answer to the problems of maldistribution and a means of cooption and consolidation of allegiances in the Third World, but also as a totally failed attempt to alleviate the suffering of the poor or the diffusion of their anger. Cairo made a statement in favour of distributive justice in consumption of resources, expenditure on research, environmental preservation, human rights and, in a revolutionary way, suggested, through the enormous presence of women, that perhaps if states become androgynous, then real development would be achieved as women do not seek dominance or tyranny but only parity. This is perhaps the secret of Cairo’s success.

In its rejection of resource maldistribution and inequity in consumption, whether that inequity is between countries, gender or races, the IC PD implicitly recognised that the ethics of politics are the ethics of responsibility and that the consequences of differentiated action could be disastrous. In South Africa, the inclusion in the Population Green Paper of the rights of women, reproductive rights and the need for equitable distribution of resources was a radical departure from past policies which, because of their roots in a patriarchal and racist ideological context, limited the population problem to the need to check ‘overpopulation’ through targeting women, and especially black women, for family planning. With the abolition of influx control laws and the introduction of health regulations to address past disparities in the provision of health care, the possibility of having a harmonious population policy is indeed real. This will be greatly nourished by multi-sectoral cooperation to ensure the goal of sustainable development. The participation of South Africa in the IC PD at Cairo was therefore opportune since this conference was the very first of its kind to raise the issues of equitable distribution of wealth and power within a development context. This is exactly the goal of the RDP in South Africa. There is hope therefore that, despite the lag in keeping up with international trends on population policy in the past, South Africa may truly catch up!

References