

## ECONOMICS AND POPULATION RELATIONSHIPS

In this "International Workshop on Communications Aspects of Family Planning Programs", an economist without any claim to the knowledge of medicine, public health, biology or mass communication, runs the risk of exhibiting a good deal of nonsense and irrelevance. However, the title: "Economics and Population Relationships" chosen for me for this talk, looks innocent enough for me to chance it.

### *TO PLAN OR NOT TO PLAN: NON-POLICY*

In considering the communications aspects of Family Planning, the presumption, may I take it, is that family planning is a good and worthy objective? I have no doubt that everybody gathering here to-day believes in family planning. But do governments believe in it? More specifically, does the government of Thailand believe in it sufficiently to make it a national policy? In this exciting period before the general election in Thailand, an event which has not taken place for more than ten years, has there been any political party that considers family planning important enough to make it a part of the electioneering platform? I am afraid the answer to these questions is still "No".

The facts are that in this country, family planning service as allowed by cabinet resolutions is still subject to inflexible conditions, subject to restrictive rules and regulations. Doctors, nurses and social workers contravene these conditions and regulations at their own peril. We hear of course of isolated cases of success in pilot projects or in some metropolitan or provincial health

clinics; but efficient organisation on a national basis for family planning service is still impossible in this kingdom. Underground tactics have still to be used by doctors and social workers who are enthusiastic and courageous enough. If underground and clandestine tactics are used for this service, I cannot help asking whether the communication aspects discussed at this workshop are not perforce subject to similar conditions and restrictions.

### *FROM HAND TO MOUTH: PRESS THE ELECTION CANDIDATES*

On the basis of recent performance, we Thai people are among the champion breeders of the world. It is true that for each mouth, God creates a pair of hands. But the capacity of the pair of hands is always limited, particularly in the poorer nations; whereas the requirements of the mouth are unlimited both in quantity and in variety. The mouth will not be satisfied merely with adequate food, it also demands better food, better clothing, better schools, better water and electricity supply, better houses, better hospitals, not to mention such things as good games, good cinemas, good drinks, good fun, refrigerators and motor cars. Furthermore, as more mouths and hands are being created, fertile arable land can be increased only marginally. In a dynamic fast growing society, the proportion of people with lusty mouths but with unproductive hands also keeps growing. If we consider, in a nation, people age 16-59 as producers and people of all ages as consumers\*, the ratio of producers to consumers in Thailand twenty years ago was about 55%; ten years ago it was about 50%; today about 48%. At the present rate of growth, it will not take long before reaching 40%. Surely, the economic and social welfare of the people of this country calls for a national family planning

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\* This is of course a rough way of reckoning. Some men in the 16-59 age-group are not only non-producers: they are actually parasites. In Thailand, perhaps greater weight ought to be allotted to women as producers than to men. In Thailand also, the dead usually remain consumers, through funeral rites, sometimes for several years.

policy and the earnest implementation of that policy.

At this stage, my first recommendation is for us to endeavour to communicate to the masses and to the politicians and government, the need for a national family planning policy. The best way perhaps is for each of us to ask each candidate in the general election where he stands on the issue of family planning and to vote only for those who are sympathetic to our great cause.

### *ECONOMICS: INPUT, METHOD AND OUTPUT*

Assuming that one day in the near future, next year if you like, family planning is adopted as a national policy, what can economics contribute to the communication aspects of this policy?

A central economic principle goes something like this: efficient input and effective method will produce best output. I believe this principle can be applied to the communication problem.

In the case of family planning, the input is really a delicate matter. In order to control birth, I understand that recent research has produced a number of good things, be it pill or loop or other devices. I am also told that the application of each kind of device or pill has to be done with care, to suit each subject treated. I do not need to remind the audience that only a few mishaps in this matter will undermine so much confidence that a great deal of good work may fail because of them. In the case of fertility promotion, I read that some kinds of pills can yield excessive results in that 5 or 6 babies have been born at one time instead of the one wanted. I also read of a recent speech by an eminent doctor in Europe saying that most couples who think they are infertile need not take any pills, all they need is to change the position in their sexual act. If what I read or am told is true, it means that we have got to do more research and exercise more wisdom in our research and experiment, instead of allowing ourselves to be carried away by the thrill of new chemical or other scientific "discoveries".

The effective *method* of communications in family planning is

of course as important as the subject is delicate. In order to reach the masses, perhaps some mass media are inevitable. A good talk and discreet demonstration on the television, a simple, easy-to-understand article in a popular newspaper or journal will be very valuable. On the whole, however, I must confess to a personal distrust of the mass media. Government slogans on TV or radio tend to appear to sceptical citizens, enlightened and illiterate alike, as the opposite of the truth. Newspapers reporters and editors normally have a penchant towards sensational headlines and sensational portions of articles. Perhaps, I ought to learn from various eminent speakers in this workshop like Messrs. Wallace, Tyagi, Karlin, Lufti, Wilder, Foote, etc. that what I have said so far is all wrong.

In my lay opinion, mass communication on family planning in this country is not very difficult. Most Thai women and men are already easy acceptors. We also have a very good old-fashioned "bamboo radio" system, whereby good and bad tidings go from mouth to mouth covering great distance in no time. The problem is to see that our tidings do not get distorted. Our Buddhist priests, I think, are our invaluable allies. Nothing is there to prevent them advising a woman to keep the size of her family commensurate with her worldly means and her spiritual happiness. I also think that social workers, for example in Mother and Child health clinics and in hospitals are cautious and patient enough to act as good media for mass communications of this kinds, if the Government encourages them to do so.

Because I do not know what to say any more, it remains for me to offer you all my best wishes for your good work.

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