

Feature Development

Facing the Realities, Shaping the Future

by Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad

To turn our fault into our strength, let us look back and learn from our experiences, take stock of the prevailing realities and formulate a vision for the future on that basis, and so armed march forward as a nation with an integrated approach, placing national interests above everything else and creating, through a people-centred democratic governance structure, opportunities for all citizens to participate effectively in the socio-economic and political processes at appropriate spaces and benefit therefrom equitably.

EXPLAINING why they were in a hapless position Cassius (in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar) said: "The Fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." One may paraphrase this statement and say in the context of today's Bangladesh, after 23 years of Liberation: "The Fault, dear reader, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are in a mess."

The government claims, with certification from the World Bank, IMF and other donors, that Bangladesh is ready for take-off to economic growth rates of 7 or 8 per cent or more, by virtue of the structural reforms that the country has so successfully implemented since 1989. However, the donors insist that in order to realize that potential it is necessary to implement more reforms. Because, although significant, reforms achieved in terms of privatization, deregulation and import liberalization are not enough. The governments, on its part, according to policy pronouncements, is fully committed to the prescribed reform process. But, it seems to be becoming increasingly difficult for the government to introduce more doses of reforms given the realities on the ground and/or because of considerations relating to the forthcoming national election. It is interesting to note, in this context, that while the government claims that the economic growth rate achieved in 1993-94 is 5 per cent, the IMF puts it at 4.5 per cent. It is possible that there is a genuine difference relating to the estimation and interpretation of the results achieved. However, there may be more to it than that. The government can use the higher figure as a basis for claiming that most of the needed reforms are in place and the promised forward thrust of the economy is taking place so that further reforms are not all that much important. On the other hand, the lower figure would reflect a stickiness of economic growth and can be used by the donors as an argument for more reforms so that the soil that has been prepared by the reforms already implemented is fertilized adequately ensuring big harvests (high economic growth rates) in the coming years.

Let us briefly review the prevailing socio-economic realities in the country. The per capita GNP is only US \$220. Income distribution is highly skewed (in 1988-89, the share of the top 20 per cent was 46 per cent and that of the top 5 per cent 20.5 per cent, while only 17.5 per cent accrued to the bottom 40 per cent), reflecting a highly differentiated access to sources of income (land, other assets, employment). Planned development of earlier years failed to move the economy forward or alleviate poverty, nor has the free market economy, being vigorously promoted, particularly since 1989, has made much of an impression on either economic growth or poverty alleviation. Indeed, the annual economic growth rate during 1990-94 has been about 4 per cent. On the other hand, according to World Bank data, the rate was higher at 4.8 per cent during 1981-90 and 4.9 per cent during 1973-80. Industrial contribution to GDP has remained virtually stagnant at less than 10 per cent. Foodgrain production has increased at annual rate of only about one per cent since 1989-90, as against an annual population growth rate of 2.17 per cent. This year's long drought has had further adverse effect on foodgrain production, which is largely dependent on the performance of the weather. In fact, agriculture in Bangladesh has historically remained largely starved of investable resources on both government and private accounts. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data, about 50 million people (44 per cent) of Bangladesh are below food poverty line (i.e. their calorie intake is below the minimum required for healthy living); other estimates put the count at around half the population or 55-60 million. Then, the 1992 UNDP Human Development Report showed about 100 million people (86%) to be living in

conditions unworthy of human dignity (lacking access to a minimum level of food, clothing, shelter, medicare, sanitation, education and freedom of choice). Although, the 100 million figure may be on the high side, there is no doubt that the existence of 70 or 80 million people of this country is below the human dignity line. Available evidence suggests that unemployment runs at one-third to 40 per cent in terms of labour time. Moreover, of those who are employed a very large proportion suffer from low productivity owing to a lack of training, technological backwardness and other constraining circumstances. Adult literacy including those who can just write their names is only 35 per cent. Infant mortality is about 100 per thousand live-births, compared to 69 in the developing world as a whole and 13 in the industrialized countries. Women and girl children are relatively much more disadvantaged than their male counterparts. There are signs all around that the structure of governance is also collapsing. These include pervasive corruption, political uncertainty, government indecision or insensitivity relating to basic issues while making tall claims of success on various socio-economic fronts, bureaucratic procrastination, tension in the administrative system due to professional cadres being treated as underlings, lack of public accountability, campus violence and poor law and order situation. Many more items can be added to this core list. National interests have always tended to be sacrificed at the altar of the interests of self, kin, social groups and political parties. The persisting political uncertainty in the country is due to the failure to establish true democracy at all levels of the society from grassroots to the centre, and create the necessary institu-

tional legal and administrative frameworks for people's effective participation in the process of governance. Clearly therefore we are in a mess; and the globally standardized prescription of more structural reforms is no answer. The real answer lies in addressing the real issues faced by the real people of this country. That is, the situational context must be built into the reform process, adjusting the on-going structural adjustment reforms accordingly. The main constraints faced may be grouped into - demographic pressure, economic pressure, environmental pressure, crisis of governance, political uncertainty, limited skill and managerial capability, and social inequity. (I have elsewhere discussed these constraints in some detail). In order to address the issues effectively and find escape routes from the constrained situation, it is crucially important that the various aspects of the constraints are specified in detail and policy responses formulated and implemented in an integrated fashion. The various constraints feed upon one another; any one of them cannot therefore be addressed in isolation. In this context, it must be understood that market economy may be expected to work for all citizens when there exists necessary legal framework, rules of business, appropriate institutions and accountability ensuring equitable participation of all in the mainstream social, economic and political processes and all have the knowledge and ability to take advantage of the existing and emerging opportunities. In the context of a highly differentiated society, as is the case in Bangladesh, a free market economy cannot work for the disadvantaged large majority even if a level-playing field can be established with all the appropriate policies, institutions, rules and laws, because the players will remain highly unequal, with

the less equal being liable to remain the losers. It is well known that the playing field in Bangladesh is grossly uneven; and power elites control all the high points. The fundamental problems of inequality, poverty and political uncertainty have been with us ever since our independence; the overall situation has in fact become more entrenched overtime. The nation has failed to address the problems realistically and effectively. The responsibility squarely lies with those who have been in leadership and management positions successively in the country. They have failed to place the national interests above narrow self, kin, group and party interests. In pursuing these narrow interests, they have often found themselves obliged to be subservient to outside influence and dictates even when detrimental to the national interests. It should be clear from the above paragraphs that this nation is and has always been in a mess and that the fault for our continuing predicament lies with us, and not in our stars. It is an outstanding lesson so far that shortsighted and obsessed with the interests and perceptions of self, kin, group and party that the power-that-be not only has always excluded all others but also become so blinded by the trappings of power and privilege that one has not learnt from the past, even the immediate past. The best chance that one may have of avoiding the pitfalls of the predecessors and the consequences befalling on them and to embark upon a course of appropriately shaping the future of the nation is to learn from the past. Nothing can be gained by lamenting over the past. To turn our fault into our strength, let us look back and learn from our experiences, take stock of the prevailing realities and formulate a vision for the future on that basis and so armed march forward as a nation with an integrated approach, placing national interests above everything else and creating, through a people-centred democratic governance structure, opportunities for all citizens to participate effectively in the socio-economic and political processes at appropriate spaces and benefit therefrom equitably. The writer, an eminent economist, is chairman, Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP).

Waging War against Illiteracy

by Jerome Sarkar

P RIMARY education is recognised by development experts as the single most effective development 'tool' in the struggle against poverty. No other development investment yields comparable returns - a fact recognised by the Government's declared intention of Education of All by 2000. Yet Bangladesh confronts a massive challenge in striving to achieve this worthwhile aim. Nationwide, 6.9 million children - or almost two out of every five between the ages of 6-10 - are not enrolled in primary schools. With high drop-out rates prevalent, less than half of Bangladeshi children enrolled complete even five years of primary schooling. In northern Bangladesh, a recent survey of primary education needs conducted by

6,732 children in every thana on average. Since there are five boys enrolled for every four girls, these estimates probably understate the number of girls who lack the opportunity of basic schooling. The high incidence of drop-out exacerbates the problem. Like other large NGOs, RDRS has welcomed the recent Government drive to close the gap through its innovative Non-formal Primary Education Programme seeing this as a vital complementary task to its ongoing work of motivation and training among landless and poor rural adults. Over the 22 years RDRS has been working in greater Rangpur and Dinajpur, it has built or reconstructed literally hundreds of primary schools as well as a large number of

Government Ministry of Education, RDRS has built and runs 335 NFPE schools for over 10,000 children and a second phase will enable a further 166 schools accommodating another 5,000 to operate. NFPE schools are an appropriate and cost-effective solution to this massive challenge. By utilising the skills of NGOs to reach out to disadvantaged children through using low-cost buildings and voluntary teachers to teach thirty children an attractive curriculum for three years. NFPE tackles the under-representation of girls since 70 per cent of NFPE pupils are girls. A similar proportion of volunteer teachers are women. Drop-out rates are minimal (0.21 per cent). NFPE provides three years of basic schooling to children excluded from



Keen to learn - photo RDRS

a non-governmental organisation, Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), confirms the scale of action required at local level to close the massive gap in primary education. In its concentrated working area of 28 thanas in six districts of Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh and Dinajpur, there is an estimated 737,063 school-age children out of a total population of 6.2 million. Although the estimated enrollment appears higher than the national average (548,565 or 76 per cent), that still leaves one child in every four deprived of the basic human need of education. The estimated 188,498 children who are left out of the existing school system is equivalent to

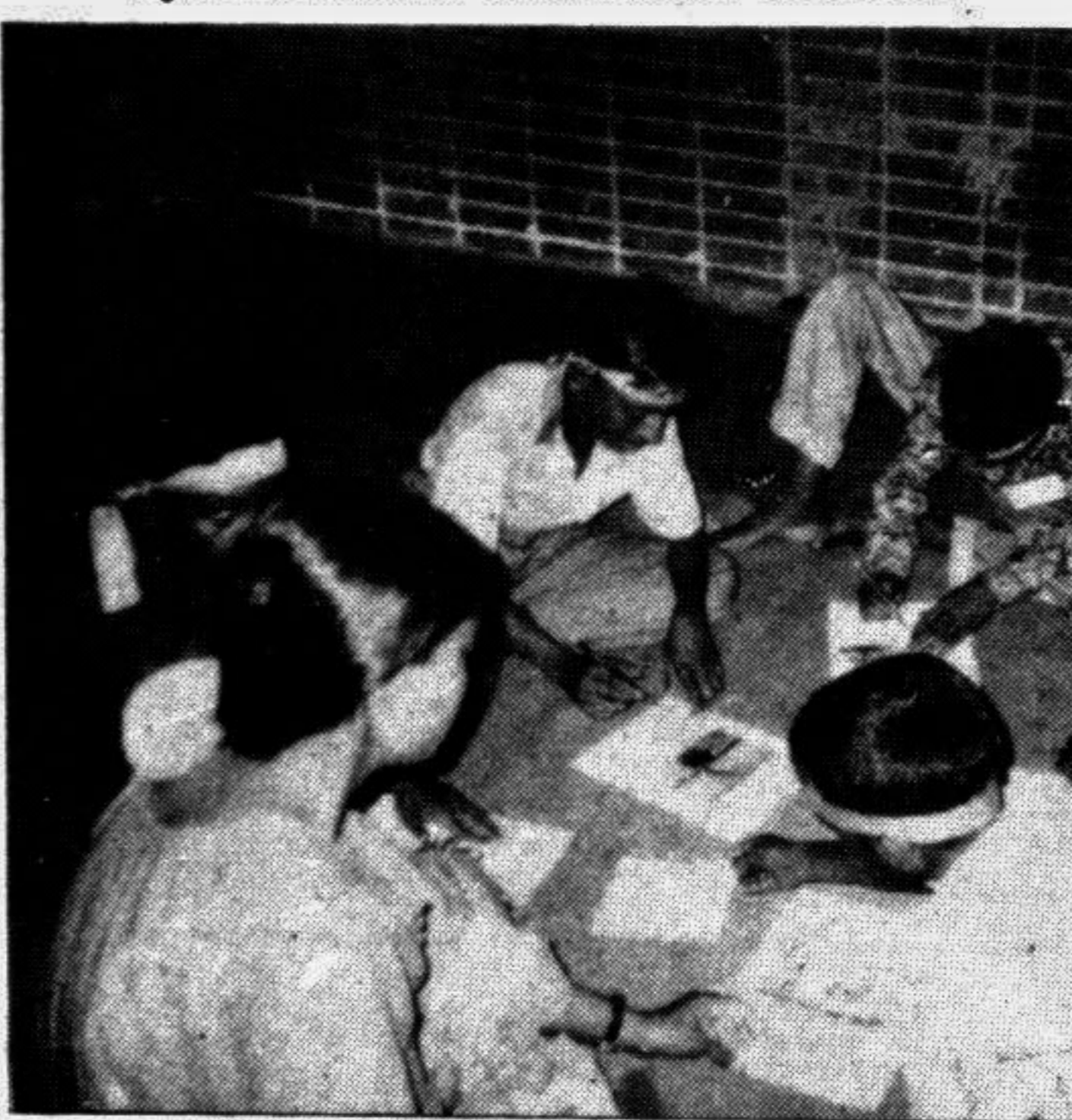
secondary schools and colleges. From its own resources, the organisation also runs 26 Children's Education Centres and, through staff voluntary contributions, a further 13 Shishu Nilay (informal education centres) often in remote and inaccessible areas where government schools are scarce. Above all, the 200,000 families with whom RDRS works each year are themselves educated on the importance of schooling for their own children. From 1993, the NFPE programme has enabled some progress to be made in closing the huge gap. As part of the nationwide programme coordinated by the Mass Education Division of the

existing government or private primary provision equipping them with basic learning for later life and the chance to progress in the formal sector. Yet more must be done. The survey estimates a further 6,000 NFPE schools - an average of 214 per thana - are still required simply to tackle the existing enrollment problem. In poor northern Bangladesh, the challenge remains great. But recent progress gives hope that, given the will and modest resources, the bane of a poor region - ignorance and lack of learning - can be finally overcome within northern Bangladesh the foreseeable future. The writer is associated with RDRS.

Emancipating Rural Population through Training

by Khandakar Mahmudur Rahman

EVERY society desires or should desire to have high quality people, people who are intelligent, creative, skilled and hardworking, in all spheres including its farms, factories, offices, educational institutions, administration and politics. We badly need people with high productive capacity evaluated in terms of both quantity and quality of their output, i.e., goods and services, which contribute to the well-being of the individuals, the community, and the country at large. It should normally be a matter of concern to allow a country's brain drain to other countries to continue. It is not a matter of pride, rather a matter of shame that a country exports its skilled technical man-power, which is already quite in short supply within the country itself, because of lack of productive employment opportunities. It is indeed very sad that in all sectors there is enormous productive and capable man-power which is under-utilized or unutilized. In the early 1970s, while visiting Bangladesh, a French economist, Dr Rene Dumont, pointed to a paradox that there were so many people sitting idle while so much work needed to be done all over the country. The importance of human resource development has not been duly appreciated in many Third World countries. It is now recognized that sustainable rural development involving the villagers in the various stages of development management cannot be achieved without developing the capabilities of the rural population. It is meaningless to talk of participative management for sustainable development unless provisions are made for strengthening the management capability of the leaders or key personnel of the village institutions. Education and training must, therefore, be emphasized with a view to improving management capability, developing skill in productive activities, technical expertise and promoting leadership among the rural people. It is also necessary to create opportunities for the rural people including women to participate in the decision making process through broad-based organizational and management structure. Further, an appropriate educational programme needs to be adopted to meet the needs of human development.



Tempo helpers at a workshop - photo RDRS

Human resource is by far the most important resource in a society although this has been recognised only recently. Human resource development is now considered an essential component of a comprehensive development programme. In economic terms, this implies accumulation of human capital and its effective utilization for development of the society. Any plan for a positive change in institutions, technology and ideas must be supported by a programme of education and training. This is all the more true of the traditional societies. The basic aims and objectives are: a) fuller use of the existing potentials of the population; b) releasing people's creative energy; c) capacity building or empowerment of the disadvantaged sections of the population and d) improving the physical quality of life. There are several critical aspects of human resource development. While the conventional strategies include education, training and health service improvement, without concern for village-based development, improvement in skills in certain specific activities at the same time, creating and increasing the scope and opportunities for participation are considered very important. Training is necessary for the village leaders of key personnel of the village organiza-

tion, the extension workers and the villagers at-large. The major subjects of training for those involved in management include institution management, project management, local level planning, resource management, disaster management, small enterprises management, and leadership development. For the extension workers or local development workers, the main subjects of training should include agriculture, Livestock, pisciculture, small Enterprises Management, marketing, health and family planning, functional education, accounts management, training management, and motivation and organization. Moreover, skill development training in the various vocational trades for the villagers will from a very important component of the total training programme. With an appropriate training programme opportunities for self-employment can be created for the otherwise unemployed or under-employed women and youth. The most basic strategy for human resource development is education. The education programme should take care of primary and secondary education with effective measures for prevention of drop-out of children from school, particularly female children. Women's education should have special

incentives to motivate them there should be non-formal education promoting mass literacy and functional education and education is selected human development areas, such as, health and nutrition, family planning, child and maternal care, sanitation, personal hygiene, environment etc. In order to promote truly village-based development, there should be a broad-based organizational and management structure in the development programme. The broad-based management committee involving all interest groups of the village and sub-committees for specific major activities, such as, planning, implementation, supervision, monitoring and evaluation, training, public relations and liaison with outside agencies etc., the villagers will be in a position to effectively participate in management and decision-making and thereby take responsibility or their own affairs. The operational procedures of the committee and its sub-committees should be worked out clearly specifying their responsibilities. It should be ensured that the meetings of the various committees are held regularly and with maximum attendance. The village organization should see to it that women and youth are adequately represented in the various committees. To conclude, it has to be realised that the population of a country is its most valuable asset but it needs to be developed so as to make it productive. A man's capacity, if developed properly, is immense, may be limitless. Sky is the limit. It should also be appreciated that human resource development involves all efforts directed to (a) to removing the constraints or hurdles faced by a man or a woman to becoming what he or she can become or has the potentials of becoming, and also (b) to acquiring newer and newer or additional capacity to become more than what he or she has become. The practical steps in human resource development, therefore, include conscientization, Education, skill development training, health service improvement and improvement in the working conditions covering provisions for protection of fundamental human rights and democratic environment and, above all, access to opportunities. The writer is Director, Bangladesh Rural Development Training Institute, Khadimnager, Sylhet.

High fertility rates are often blamed on poverty. Developments is the best contraceptive.

Dr Karan Singh argued in 1974. Solve the poverty problem, the old argument goes, and the population problem will solve itself. There is some truth in this. The size of family that people prefer depends on the costs and benefits of having children. Among poor families in poor countries, rearing children costs little more than feeding them, yet the benefits they bring are high. As youngsters they help out with family work. As teenagers they can do paid work and bring their earnings into the family. They provide the only source of social security for elderly relations. But the theory has its limitations. The evidence shows that in many countries rapid population growth has slowed development and increased the numbers in poverty. When this happens, development never gets the chance to begin its contraceptive effect. High fertility rates can trap families and nations in a vicious circle of poverty. Fertility Rates and Family Poverty High fertility rates contribute to poverty at the family level. An authoritative study from the International Fund for Agricultural Development found that population growth was among the three leading causes of rural poverty in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Population growth has helped to shrink land holdings, often pushing them below subsistence level. In most developing countries the principle of equal inheritance applies. Holdings are split up among heirs - the more heirs there are, the more the individual holding shrinks. This process is common to countries as far apart as Guatemala, Rwanda, and Bangladesh. In India the average land-holding dropped from 2.28 hectares in 1970-71 to 1.68 hectares in 1985-86. Marginal farms with less than one hectare rose from 51 per cent to 58 per cent of all farms. In regions where there are reserves of unused land - as in Africa - larger families can open up bigger areas. But even here surveys show they end up with less land per person. The Jobs Challenge At national level, population growth makes the task of job creation harder. The employ-

Jobs, Income and Poverty

The old theory that economic development is the best contraceptive has been discredited. Rapid population growth can be an obstacle to economic progress, both in families and in nations. Nations that had achieved slower population growth enjoyed much faster economic growth in the 1980s, and had a far easier task of job creation ahead of them. ment problem facing the developing world is daunting. Between 1990 and 2025 population growth is expected to boost the world's labour force by 1.29 billion people. No fewer than 1.23 billion of these extra jobs must be found by developing countries. These are just the new jobs needed to stop unemployment rising. Many millions more jobs will be needed to reduce unemployment. The challenge is getting harder. In the 1950s the world's labour force grew by only 16 million per year. But over the next two decades (1995-2015) every year will see an extra 39 million job seekers. Some 36.5 million of these will live in developing countries. In the North, growth in the labour force will slow and level off by 2010, then fall. Even here job creation will not be easy. The labour force ex-

panded in developing countries by 2.3 per cent a year in the 1980s. This provided a continual flow of cheap labour, so manufacturing industry shifted South. Northern companies had to improve productivity to complete and fewer jobs could be created, so unemployment rose even in years of economic growth. The task of job creation is hardest of all where population growth is highest. In 1980 South Asia's workforce was smaller than East Asia's by 103 million. Yet South Asia must create 660 million extra jobs by 2025, while East Asia will need only 294 million, because of lower birth rates. India's case shows just how hard it can be to create enough jobs in a situation of high fertility rates. Although national economic growth always kept ahead of population growth, India's jobless total rose inexorably from a mere 2.6 million in 1966 to 9.6 million in 1976 and 36 million in 1992. Population and Economic Growth The links between population growth and economic growth are still controversial. A few economists believe population growth stimulates economic growth. There has never been any evidence for this view in developing countries. However before 1975 there was little evidence that rapid population growth was a handicap either. Between 1965 and 1980 there was no correlation with growth in incomes per person in 82 developing countries studied by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Since then the picture has

changed dramatically. In the 1980s there was a large disparity in income growth between countries with slower or faster population growth (see graph). The 41 countries where population was growing more slowly managed an average income growth of 1.23 per cent a year. In the 41 countries with faster growth, incomes fell by an average of 1.25 per cent a year. The difference between these two groups was a massive 2.5 per cent a year. We cannot be sure from this one period whether slower population growth brought faster economic growth - or vice-versa. It is therefore important to see how population growth before 1980 affected economic growth in the 1980s. The effect was quite marked. The 41 countries with slower population growth in 1965-80 saw their average incomes grow at 0.9 per cent a year during the 1980s. But the 41 countries with faster population growth in 1965-80 saw average incomes fall by 0.9 per cent a year in the 1980s. The difference in income growth between the two groups was 1.8 per cent per year. Regional factors cannot explain these findings. The same link between slower population growth and faster income growth applies within the four main developing regions. The reasons are complex. Countries with slower population growth tend to be those with better education and improved health - and these factors also help economic growth. Slower population growth also helps to increase savings, since families with fewer children have more surplus money after meeting basic needs. A UNFPA study of data from 76 developing countries showed the 38 countries with slowest population growth during the 1980s had savings ratios averaging 18.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) at the end of the decade. However the savings ratio averaged only 12 per cent in the 38 with the fastest population growth. The old theory that economic growth is the best cure for rapid population growth has been turned on its head. There seems to be more truth in the view that slower population growth is a good recipe for economic growth. - Marie Stopes International

