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Background

The population of Sri Lanka, at present, is estimated to be over 13 million, whereas a hundred years ago it was around 2¹/₂ million. The table below shows the enumerated population at successive census dates, the population, the amount of increase, per cent of increase and average rate of increase during the period 1871-1971:

<u>Census year</u>	<u>Enumerated population</u>	<u>Amount of increase</u>	<u>Per cent of increase</u>	<u>Average annual rate of increase</u>
1871	2,400,380	-	-	-
1881	2,759,738	359,358	15.0	1.4
1891	3,007,789	248,051	9.0	0.9
1901	3,565,954	558,165	18.6	1.7
1911	4,106,350	540,396	15.2	1.4
1921	4,498,605	392,255	9.6	0.9
1931	5,306,871	808,266	18.0	1.7
1946	6,657,339	1,350,468	25.4	1.5
1953	8,097,895	1,440,556	21.6	2.8
1963	10,582,064	2,484,169	30.7	2.7
1971	12,711,143	2,129,079	20.1	2.3

This indicates that in 100 years, the population of Sri Lanka has increased by 10,310,763 or by 429.5 per cent - representing a more than five-fold increase between 1871 and 1971. However, the growth of the population during the hundred years has not been uniform. The annual rate of growth fluctuated between 0.9 per cent and 1.7 per cent up to the end of the Second World War. The post-war years recorded a sudden spurt in the rate of growth which reached a high of 2.8 per cent for the period 1946 to 1953. During the decade 1953-1963 the average rate of growth continued to be high at 2.7 per cent; but dropped to 2.3 per cent in the 1963-1971 period. The downward trend has continued and in 1973 the rate was estimated to be 2.2 per cent.

The growth of the Island's population has been occasioned by two factors - i.e. migration increase and natural increase. The increase by migration has been about 58 per cent of the increase in population during the period 1871-1901; and about 16 per cent between 1901-1946; the average for the entire period 1871 to 1946 being about 27 per cent. However, as a result of severe restrictive measures adopted in and after 1948, migration ceased to be a significant contribution to population growth. It is estimated that the increase in the population due to migration after 1946 has been only 2 per cent. Yet, the rate of growth of the population since 1946 has accelerated remarkably due to an increase caused by the widening disparity between the birth-rates and the death-rates of the country. During the post-war period there has been a sharp decline in the death-rate, primarily due to the improvement of welfare services such as health, feeding programmes, food subsidies, etc. However, the birth-rate continued to remain almost unchanged at traditionally high levels. The result was an increase in the rate of population growth which was unprecedented in the country's demographic history.

Government policy

The Government has been conscious of the seriousness of the problem of population growth and the need to adopt policies aimed at reducing the rate of population growth to levels consistent with the requirements of the country's economy. On this basis, a reduction in the rate of population growth through fertility control is now accepted as an important component of social and economic development, although such a reduction is not considered as a substitute for vigorous economic development efforts. In this context, the Five-Year Plan of Sri Lanka (1972-1976) states:

"The continued growth of population at the present high rates will pose problems which would defy every attempt at solution. In the short term, any further increase of the number of births from the present level of around 370,000 per year will place inordinate strains on the school system, on hospitals and the supply of other goods and services and in such a situation, it is only by a shift of investment from productive activities that it would be possible to maintain these services even at present levels. In the long run, the expansion of population at present rates would result in a population of about 27 million in the year 2000. Even with a rapid decline in fertility rates, the population would grow to 20 million by the year 2000. The strain on resources imposed by the present rate of population growth would be almost intolerable. The Plan thus gives very high priority to the diffusion of family planning facilities amongst the mass of the adult population."

Family planning activities (voluntary and official)

Although the antecedents of family planning in Sri Lanka pre-date the Second World War, population activities in an organized form of family planning originated in Sri Lanka only in 1953 with the establishment of a National Family Planning Association. This was the first voluntary and non-governmental organization to be founded in Sri Lanka in this field. The Government recognized this Association and supported it by annual grants. Besides various ad hoc activities, the Association now runs more than 100 clinics throughout the Island and several training courses for doctors, nurses and midwives in collaboration with the Department of Health Services. It has also intensified its publicity work through exhibitions, instruction, advertising and film production.

In May 1958, the Government entered into an agreement with the Royal Government of Sweden to co-operate in order to promote and facilitate a pilot project in community family planning. This pilot project was designed to investigate attitudes towards family planning and the prospects of family planning activities, give instructions in family planning methods and help to train public health officers in this type of work. The original agreement (expired in May 1961) has been renewed twice.

Since then the number of international and national bodies promoting family planning have multiplied. Some of the international organizations active in the field of population control in Sri Lanka at present are, the SIDA, C-Plan Bureau, IPPF, Oxfam and United Nations agencies such as UNFPA, WHO, Unesco, etc. Similar local non-governmental organizations are the Family Planning Association, Young Women's Christian Association, Girl Guides Association and Mahila Samithi.

At the Government level, a National Co-ordinating Committee has been established to co-ordinate the activities of various governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in this field.

An agreement concluded between the UNFPA and the Republic of Sri Lanka on 12 February 1973, provides liberal assistance to population activity programmes under a Country Project spreading over four years (1973-1977) at a total cost of \$6,000,000. As a requisite under the basic agreement relating to this Project, a Project Implementation Committee, consisting of the following has since been appointed:

1. Secretary, Ministry of Education
2. Secretary, Ministry of Health
3. Secretary, Ministry of Communication
4. Secretary, Ministry of Labour

5. Representative of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs
6. Representative of the UNDP.

All programmes of the respective ministries have to be approved by this Committee for action as well as for finance.

An important component of this Project is the Population Education. The Ministry of Education, which is entrusted with the execution of the Population Education Programme, has been allocated \$476,657 under the above-mentioned Country Project. The Programme of Population Education is to consist of three main activities:

1. Population Education in Schools
2. Teaching of Human Reproduction (at university level)
3. Establishment of Demographic Training Research Unit at the University of Sri Lanka.

As regards item 1, population education has already been introduced to grades 6 to 9 (age group 11+ to 14+) in 50 pilot schools in various parts of the Island on a trial basis. This has been introduced through the existing instruction materials in Social Studies, Science, Health Education, Mathematics and the mother tongue (Sinhala/Tamil). The Curriculum Development Centre under the Ministry of Education prepared the draft instruction materials, which were introduced to the 50 pilot schools through a group of pilot school teachers specially trained for the purpose at a residential vacation course. The principles of the 50 pilot schools too have been given an orientation on the programme. The Ministry of Education also plans to conduct an orientation course for all the regional directors of education and the field supervisory staff in charge of the 50 pilot schools. This is scheduled for June 1974.

This programme of the Ministry of Education is aimed at providing the pupils with the basic data about population, its trends, the factors which give rise to changes in population, skills of making decisions and the consequences of population changes (increases/decreases), with the idea that the pupils in future will make rational and desirable decisions regarding population matters.

Draft instruction materials for grades 6 and 7 will be revised before the end of 1974 on the experience gained during this year and the revised materials introduced to grades 6 and 7 in all schools in 1975. Similarly trial materials for grades 8 and 9 will be field tested in those grades in the 50 pilot schools and the revised materials introduced to grades 8 and 9 in all schools in 1976. The Ministry of Education will also consider in due course the continuation of Population Education in grades 10 and 11 and also at the elementary school level (grades 1 to 5) subject to the observations made and the experience gained in regard to the programme in grades 6 to 9 and subject to the availability of funds.

In 1975, a syllabus for Population Education will be prepared for the teachers' colleges. This will be field tested in 1976 and introduced to all the teachers' colleges in 1977. When the Population Education materials are introduced to schools on an Island-wide basis, a training programme for principals, field supervisory staff and all relevant teachers will be introduced. A similar programme is expected to be conducted for lecturers in teachers' colleges as well.

Regarding items 2 and 3, the University of Sri Lanka is now in the process of making the necessary preliminary arrangements. The progress has been rather slow solely due to the non-availability of qualified personnel in this new field.

International Population Year 1974

In celebrating the International Population Year 1974, the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka has taken the lead by organizing an International Scientific Congress - the first of its kind in Sri Lanka - with the theme "The Recent Developments of the Medical and Scientific Aspects of the Control of Fertility and their Implications in the Implementation of Population Programmes". The Congress which was held at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall from 21 to 26 January, was attended by a number of experts from abroad, besides the local experts.

As regards other national activities in celebrating the Year, the Project Implementation Committee referred to above, which is the National Committee in this field at present, is expected to decide upon suitable programmes. While the non-governmental organizations and the National Commission for Unesco will be giving the maximum support and co-operation, the Committee would plan the activities on an Island-wide basis. The general thinking at the moment, is to give emphasis to accelerate the ongoing programmes and to introduce new programmes where necessary coupled with intensified publicity and propaganda - giving second place to functions as such.

In its activities for the World Population Year, Sri Lanka would welcome Unesco assistance in the following aspects:

1. Public information material on population, and lecture notes.
2. Funds for publication of such materials into the national languages.
3. Funds for publication of educational materials and publicity in match box labels etc. regarding population and family health programmes.
4. Assistance to conduct studies on the development of evaluation techniques to measure the impact of family health programmes.
5. Assistance to organize training programmes for statistical clerks in hospitals for the rendering of accurate data for evaluation purposes.

Finally, Sri Lanka, conscious of the magnitude of the problem both within and outside the country, pledges full co-operation to Unesco in its activities aimed at eradicating this problem with a view to making this planet a pleasant and happy abode for all beings.