

ABSTRACT

This study provides a detailed account of demographic development in Barbados from slavery to 1970 with a particular focus on the evolution of formal population policy. The purpose of the study is to demonstrate that the apparently favourable contemporary demographic position has evolved with a few deliberate policy interventions. Where specific policy programmes were initiated e.g. in the case of emigration in the nineteenth century, the implicit objectives failed to materialise. Where policy objectives were clearly stated e.g. fertility control in the mid-twentieth century, these were superimposed on a population which had already taken independent action in the desired direction.

The analysis proceeds at two levels. On the one hand, considerable use is made of historical material to explain the circumstances which helped to shape the contemporary scene. On the other, detailed quantitative analysis of the 1946, 1960 and 1970 censuses is employed not only to elucidate recent trends in population growth but also to emphasise the existence of sound methodologies and appropriate data bases on which to formulate a comprehensive population policy.

The study shows that despite a tradition of concern with population matters, an integrated population policy has failed to emerge. No evidence of efforts to influence

population distribution exists, despite clearly identified streams of internal movement. In the area of mortality, specific policy options focussed essentially on the pursuit of appropriate administrative machinery for the delivery of medical services. The achievement of this objective coincided with the advent of financial and technological assistance from international agencies, particularly in the area of public health. Together, these two policies executed the desired downward influence on mortality levels. In the area of fertility, policy interventions occurred at two major points in history - after abolition when the concern was pro-natalist and after World War II when the concern was anti-natalist. In both instances policy objectives coincided with the actions of the population. In the area of migration, policies affecting immigration ceased to be of importance with the cessation of the slave trade. Policies affecting emigration included financial support, facilitating legislation, and negotiation of employment outlets. None of these efforts achieved the stated objectives of easing population pressure and alleviating unemployment, although emigration remains the major curb of recent growth rates.

The contemporary data suggest that future policy efforts need to be concentrated on fertility and to be backed by social and economic programmes designed to exert indirect influence on the three demographic variables and direct influence on population distribution.