

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL
E/CONF.13/CONF
Meeting No. 14
19 August 1961

ORIGINAL VERSION
(To pay in English)

WORLD POPULATION CONFERENCE

Rome, 31 August - 10 September 1961

Prospects for future population change in Malaya

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Summary

Malaya's population which, in past decades, has increased rapidly as the result of large-scale immigration, is now increasing at the rate of about 3.5 per cent as the result of high fertility and low mortality rates. Fertility and mortality rates vary considerably among the three large communities - the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians - but all three groups are increasing rapidly in numbers.

There is little evidence to suggest that the current high fertility rates are likely to decline in the near future. Whilst there is increasing urbanisation and industrialisation in Malaya and whilst family planning movements are beginning to assume some importance in the largest cities and towns, there is as yet no sign of an appreciable decline in fertility. It seems certain that, barring wars or other disasters, the existing population will increase very considerably before the present era of rapid expansion can possibly draw to a close.

General distribution of this document is limited to the introductory summary. Participants who have been invited to take part in the meeting referred to above will also receive the full text of the paper. Other participants in the Conference will receive the full text upon request.

Pour la traduction française voir au verso.

Evolution possible de la population en Malaisie

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Résumé

La population de la Malaisie a augmenté rapidement au cours des dernières dizaines d'années du fait d'une immigration massive et augmente encore actuellement de près de 3 pour 100 par an du fait du taux élevé de fécondité et du faible taux de mortalité. Les taux de fécondité et de mortalité varient de façon appréciable entre les trois groupes ethniques principaux - les Malais, les Chinois et les Indiens - mais ces trois groupes augmentent rapidement en nombre.

Rien ne permet de conclure que le taux de fécondité, actuellement élevé, doive diminuer dans un avenir rapproché. Si l'urbanisation et l'industrialisation font des progrès en Malaisie, si la procréation planifiée commence à jouer un rôle de quelque importance dans les plus grandes villes et agglomérations, la fécondité n'a pas encore amorcé un mouvement appréciable de baisse. On peut affirmer que, à moins de guerres ou d'autres désastres, la population actuelle augmentera fortement avant que ne prenne fin la période d'expansion en cours.

²² Seule, la présente analyse d'introduction fait l'objet d'une distribution générale. Les participants qui ont été invités à assister à la séance mentionnée ci-dessus recevront en outre le texte intégral du document. Les autres participants au Congrès recevront le texte intégral sur leur demande.

Prospects for Future Population Change in Malaya

T.E. Smith

Malaya* is a new country. One hundred years ago, it was an almost empty land, with settlements at Penang, Malacca and Singapore, with scattered Malay villages along the coasts and up the rivers and with mixed populations of Malays and Chinese in such tin-mining areas as were being exploited. Life was primitive and feudal in organisation and, in most parts of the country, the preservation of law and order was dependent upon the ability of local overlords to keep rival factions under control.

Then, with the growing prosperity of the rubber and tin industries following the extension of British protection to the Malay States, very large numbers of immigrants arrived from China and India. In the earlier stages of this wave of mass migration, the migrants did not come to Malaya with the intention of staying permanently. They came - mostly penniless and illiterate - in the hope that they would make money quickly and return to their own lands as richer men. Some stayed and ultimately the wave of migration receded, leaving behind a permanently settled population of Malays, Chinese and Indians with smaller groups from countries such as Indonesia and Ceylon.

To-day Malaya is no longer an empty country. In 1947, when the last census was held, there was a population of close to 6 million,
/of whom ...

* Malaya includes both the Federation of Malaya and Singapore

of whom over 2½ million were Chinese and over 2½ millions Malays whilst some 600,000 were Indians. This 1947 population is probably seven or eight times as large as that of one hundred years ago. Although immigration is no longer a factor of numerical importance, the rate of growth of population at about 3 per cent per year is very high. Fertility and mortality rates - and hence reproduction rates - vary considerably from one community to another. For instance, Malay fertility is low and mortality high compared with Chinese fertility and mortality. Nevertheless, in 1947, the Malay Net Reproduction Rate was about 1.7, whilst the Chinese figure was as high as about 2.6. Net Reproduction Rates as high as this in a settled population can only be maintained in a prospering community with a rapidly expanding economy - and even then not for an indefinitely long period.

Malaya, then, is a country with a rapidly increasing population. The present age and sex structure is abnormal, as the following figures show:-

<u>1947 Population</u>		
<u>Age</u>	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>
10-14	428	410
15-19	272	258
20-24	228	225
25-29	223	219
30-34	220	193
35-39	234	180
40-44	209	154
45-49	173	107
50-54	137	91
55-59	81	51

(Population figures in thousands)

A number of factors have contributed to this abnormal structure. The imposition of a quota system of immigration in the 1930's and the tendency in the more distant past for male immigrants to leave their wives and children in their own homelands are the two most important single factors. A result of this age and sex structure is that the current rate of natural increase of population is not quite so large as may be expected in a few years' time if fertility and mortality figures remain steady.

Inevitably one asks the question - 'Will the population of Malaya continue its present rapid rate of increase, doubling itself every 25 years or so, until the country is faced with as difficult problems as some other densely settled Asian countries with high fertility rates face to-day?'. It can be said without hesitation that there is at present little evidence to suggest that the current high fertility rates are likely to decline in the near future or that there will be any early appreciable alteration in the present fairly low mortality rates. All that can be done is to pick out certain factors which may ultimately have a bearing on population change in Malaya.

Since 1950 there has been a considerable redistribution of population in Malaya, as the result of internal migration. The prosperity and the growth of industries in the City of Singapore and in the larger towns of the Federation of Malaya (such as Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh) have acted as a magnet and there has been a disproportionately large growth of urban population. More important, however, is the migration which has been a direct result of the disturbances in Malaya (known as the Emergency). In many parts of the country, scattered rural populations and the inhabitants of small villages have been resettled in larger communities. This resettlement has affected the Chinese more than any

/other ...

other group in Malaya. In these new communities, schools, health clinics, community centres and women's institutes have been provided. The pattern of everyday life has changed and new influences are at work.

Only in Singapore is there at present a widespread awareness of the desirability of reducing the rate of population growth. Singapore is a separate political entity and its area is so small and the density of its population so great that interest in the population position is relatively easy to invoke amongst the well-educated minority. Present indications are that the population of Singapore island - rather over one million now - will have reached a figure of two million by about 1970. Fertility appears to be slightly lower in the City of Singapore than in surrounding rural areas but this is due more to prevailing conditions in town and country than to any current widespread desire amongst town dwellers to limit the size of their families. Nevertheless there is a flourishing family planning movement in Singapore and this movement is likely to have a slowly increasing effect upon future trends in fertility in the island.

Malaya is moving rapidly towards independence. In the Federation of Malaya attention is naturally concentrated on the defeat of the country's enemies and on the attainment of political objectives. It is understandable, therefore, that few, if any, of the potential leaders of an independent Malaya have as yet shown any recognition of the desirability of reducing the rate of population growth. Nevertheless, until local leaders obtain and indicate in public that they have obtained an understanding of the problems involved, it is idle to expect that the new influences at work in town and country will be extended to embrace the ideal of the small family as a desirable concept. For, although Malaya probably has a proportionately larger middle class than is the case

/in most ...

in most Asian countries, the quality and direction of local leadership is a fundamental factor in determining the processes of social change.

The low post-war mortality rates and the virtual cessation of the former custom of aged Chinese returning to China is leading to much larger numbers of old people than Malaya has known in the past. It is accepted amongst all communities in Malaya that children should support their parents when the latter are too old to work. The knowledge that parents depend upon their grown-up children for support in later years is not likely to make for smaller families, despite the fact that improved survival rates at all ages render it no longer necessary to rear large families in order to ensure such eventual support. The social assistance schemes which the Social Welfare Department has put into operation in Singapore have gone some way towards providing other means of support for needy old people, but it is problematical what ultimate effect these and the existing trend towards large-scale provident fund schemes in both the Federation and in Singapore will have on fertility rates in Malayan conditions.

Whatever its political status in the future may be, it seems certain that Malaya's economy will continue to depend for a long time to come largely on primary products such as tin, rubber, copra, palm-oil etc. and on the production for local consumption of rice and other foodstuffs. Economic development in Malaya, although perhaps causing more disturbance to the existing social order than in Ceylon, has been similar in many respects and population trends in the two countries have also been similar in recent years. As has been mentioned, there has been a growth of industries in the larger towns in Malaya and probably some 25% of the population now live in towns containing 50,000

/inhabitants ...

inhabitants or more; but the transition from a largely agrarian population to one depending to a considerably less extent on primary production must inevitably take time.

In conclusion it can be said that, barring war, there will be no dramatic change in either fertility rates or mortality rates; that, again barring wars or other disasters, the existing population will be multiplied three, four and five-fold and perhaps more before the present era of rapid expansion in numbers draws to a close through a reduction in fertility or an increase in the mortality rates; that some, but by no means all, of the type of social and economic circumstances associated by demographers with the fall in fertility in western countries in the last and the present century have made or are beginning to make their appearance in Malaya; and finally that existing information is too indefinite to make it possible to hazard an estimate of long-term population trends. Research and yet more research on the social and economic aspects of population change are required throughout Asia.