

The need for family planning had been urged on many pages of ISR, as the world population increased and had continued unabated. By 12 October 1999 it had reached six thousand million. This figure demonstrated to me more clearly than any other statistics that during my own lifetime, from 1916 when I was born and world population numbered two thousand million, it had tripled! I was fortunate enough to find the expert who could write authoritatively about the whole of this interdisciplinary subject.

This was Malcolm Potts who is not only the President of International Family Health, London, but is also the Bixby—endowed Professor of Population Studies in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of California, in Berkeley. He is internationally recognised as one of the few true pioneers of family planning, in which he specialised during the last 25 years, as the author of 12 books and over 200 articles.

In his contribution to ISR, called “Unmet Demand for Family Planning”, he dealt with ‘The Biology of Reproduction’, ‘Family Planning Programmes: Policies and Management’, ‘Costs’, ‘Interrelationships’, ‘The Demographic Trap’, ‘AIDS’, ‘Population and Ecology’ and ‘Issues’. As Editor I was delighted that I had finally presented to my readers a thoroughly interdisciplinary article from the best author. It was published in June 1993.

Potts concluded that during the last decades, much had been learnt about family planning but that demographic problems had worsened and an annual growth rate of 1.8% existed. As a result, by the year 2000 there would be one third more women of fertile age than in 1990 he wrote, because of the population explosion in the 1960s and 1970s. Wherever the right family planning had been available, fertility had begun to fall, but only when it met the needs of the individual and it did not violate the dignity and equality of the woman.

Currently the world is attempting to provide contraceptive services on a shoe-string, Potts continued. Of the relatively small amount of money spent on international development by rich countries, less than one percent goes to family planning. As long as this remains the policy, the growth of global populations will stabilise at a higher level than zero. Population growth rates will only decline more rapidly if family planning is universally available [see Title 390]. This is not the only problem in the world, but it deserves more than one percent of the development equation, Potts demanded.

Family planning is built around proven technologies, where well defined inputs produce predictable changes. Fertility decline is no longer a problem looking for a solution, it is a problem looking for resources, Potts concluded.