

More than pawns in a numbers game

Wide agreement on the urgency of addressing South Africa's population growth rate dissolved into hotly contested policy and political debate on how to go about it. BEA ROBERTS reports on a recent Idasa seminar in Pretoria.



Debating the population crisis: from left, H Swanepoel, J Jordaan, G du Plessis, B Klugman and O Chimere-Dan

In a developing country like South Africa how to achieve the fine balance between limited resources and the needs of an expanding population was a critical question.

In his opening address to the seminar HSRC researcher Johan van Zyl said the present population growth (approximately 2,7 percent) outstripped the economic growth rate (below 2 percent). If enough jobs were to be created for the society, an economic growth rate of between 3 and 5 percent was needed.

Two issues were debated at some length: the need for a population policy and the need for a programme to curb population growth.

On the one hand, a picture of doom was painted by economist Johan Jordaan, who regards the population issue as South Africa's "time bomb" and propagates a two-child family to be enforced as official policy. He said economic incentives should be used to control fertility and sterilisation facilities expanded dramatically.

Sharply opposed to Jordaan was Patience Tyalimpi, a fieldworker for over 20 years with the Planned Parenthood Association, who said that the very term policy "sends a chill down my spine". She said official policy had worked against people for a long time

and argued rather that people should be cared for.

Although the present government has no official population policy, a population development programme (PDP) has been in operation for a number of years. The PDP follows a combined approach of socio-economic upliftment along with community education and information.

David Malatsi from Contralesa rejected the PDP out of hand, saying that traditional leaders would not support it until a democratic government was in place.

Dr Helen Rees of the ANC made it clear why no current programmes could succeed. Until there was a new constitution, she said, ordinary people would not trust the state. It was imperative that people felt ownership of whatever programme or policy was implemented.

Although the ANC had no clear population policy, she sketched a framework within which such policy could be worked out: the equitable distribution of resources, the designing of appropriate technology, socio-economic development, financing of small projects, and in particular the upliftment of women.

Barbara Klugman of the Women's Health Project sounded a warning, saying that it was easy to make glib statements without

putting them into practice. She challenged an earlier comment that fewer children would "free" women - free to do what? There was nothing calling women before they had access to skills training, education and jobs.

Klugman also said that giving women access to contraception was not enough if this was not followed with proper care. Women not only needed birth control, but had the right to Pap smears and treatment for infertility and sexually transmitted diseases.

Speaking from her experience of working in the rural areas, Grace Ledwaba added to this, pointing to the paternalistic attitudes of medical and paramedical staff towards rural women. She called for re-education of such personnel and reiterated that control of fertility would not improve if women were not equal participants in policies and programmes fundamentally affecting their lives.

The rural culture called for a specific approach to sex education and this could not be imposed by academics. She challenged participants at the seminar to stop theorising about the population problem and to come to the rural areas to see the harsh realities

Support across the board for a state with many

By KERRY HARRIS

A recent Idasa evening seminar entitled "One Nation, Many Faiths - Religious Freedom and a New Constitution" provoked lively debate, but also almost universal consensus on the importance of freedom of religion in a secular unitary state being enshrined in a new South African constitution.

Constitutional expert, Christof Heyns, began with an anecdote attributed to Paul Kruger which summed up how to handle situations where systems of belief clashed: two brothers had to share a farm. Kruger advised one of them to divide the land, and

to give the other first choice.

Heyns said that from this "perspective of tolerance" we would have to devise rules relating to the new South Africa where solutions would be acceptable to all, regardless of religion.

Both the chairperson of the constitutional committee of the Afrikaner Vryheidstigting and the SA Communist Party's



Raymond Suttner: "SACP recognises the importance of religion".

central committee representative defended religious freedom.

However, the common ground ended when Prof Andries Raath called the secular state a "myth" and argued that religious diversity could only be accommodated in a multi-dimensional model (an Afrikaner state would uphold religious freedom in its