

The age structure of a population is an indicator of how far the population is helpful for socio-economic development. Usually, underdeveloped countries have such age-structures that is not much helpful for socio-economic development, give the other socio-economic features of those countries; while developed countries have such age-structures that it is helpful for socio-economic development.

It is possible to change the age structures of population? In order to find the answer to this question, we have to mention the variables that are responsible for the differences of the age structures of populations. One of these variables is the birth rate which also called human fertility or natality. A population with a high fertility (usually indicated by CBR or Crude Birth Rate) which means the number of babies born during a year in every 1000 people of all ages and both the sexes) usually tends to be rather youthful, that is the proportion of young people in such a population is generally high. A population with a low level of fertility (low CBR) tends to have a rather aged population.

That is to say, if we

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divide a population into age groups, the younger people predominate in populations of high CBR. In a population of low CBR, on the other hand, older people have a large proportion. Thus, in a population divided into four age groups, namely, 0-14 years, 15-39 years, 40-64 years and 65 years above, in a population with a high CBR, say 40 per thousand, the proportions of people in those four age groups are likely to be about 45 per cent, 34 per cent, 17 per cent and 4 per cent. On the other hand, in a population with a low CBR (say 10 per thousand) which is usually the typical CBR of developed countries) the proportion of people in those four age groups tend to be 22 per cent, 32 per cent, 31 per cent and 15 per cent. Thus in youngest age-group 0-14 years, there are 45 per cent people in under developed countries which have a high CBR, while in a population with a low CBR (which is the case in developed countries) the proportion of the people of this age group tends to be about 22 per cent. The proportion of the oldest population, namely 65 years and over, the

underdeveloped countries tends to be about 4 per cent, while the proportion of people in this age group in developed countries tends to be about 15 per cent. Let us now look into the implications of these differences of age structures between developed and underdeveloped countries from the point of view of socio-economic development. To start with the age group 0-14, it is easily seen that some of the members of this age group are children of school going age and they have to be taken care of in respect of their education. Facilities for their schooling have to be made available. These facilities have to be utilised too, so that the children of the school going age group are made ready for their future. Plans have to be prepared and implemented for the purpose. School houses, furniture, books, writing materials and other teaching materials have to be provided to the children. The costs of all these have to borne by the society as a whole or by the parents of the children as may be

feasible according to the economic system that may be prevalent. In the case of Bangladesh, planning for the purpose are made from time to time—usually at intervals of five years—and funds for the purpose of the implementation of plans procured from domestic and foreign sources. In view of the inadequate saving capacity of the people here, foreign aid is sought to a substantial extent.

Since our savings amount to about 4 per cent of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) or less and we have to invest about 11 per cent of the GDP for investment for the purpose of national development. This is too much dependence upon foreign aid and can be reduced by means of increased national saving. It seems that our saving habit is still inadequate for the purpose and the government's campaign for promoting saving habit among the people has much scope. One proof of this statement of mine is the substantially higher rates of savings in the nearly

countries. For example, in India the national saving is about 22 per cent of the GDP, in Pakistan it is about 10 per cent of the GDP, while in China it is about 40 per cent of the GDP. If our saving habit can be promoted, we can hope for an increase in the share of the GDP saved. In place of the present 4 per cent (or less) it can reasonably be expected to go up. To what extent it can be expected to go up we cannot say beforehand. Conscious consumption and wastages of all sorts for personal and social purposes could possibly be avoided to a substantial extent in order to promote savings at the household level.

If more resources can thus be procured at home for development, our dependence upon foreign aid can possibly be reduced. In site of the increase in governmental spending for education, our facilities for children's education is not at all adequate. For the age-group of population upto 14 years of age, we have about 46,000 primary schools and 2,000 junior high schools (offering tuition upto Class VIII). In addition there are less than 16,000 Madrasahs of lower level. Thus the

number of educational institutions for taking care of the education of the children below 15 year of age is less than 65,000. Since we have more than 30 million children of school-going age (5 to 14 years of age) this means that, on an average, each of these educational institutions has to take care of more than 460 students, or many of these children have to go without schooling. And that is what is going on, these days. Such is the problem presented by the type of age structure which is characterised by a large proportion of children as we have. In a population with half as many children (as in a developed country) with our population size the problem of this kind cannot arise. For example, such a country would have about 230 children per school on the basis of the calculation that we presented above.

The problems of health and nutrition of children are similar for a youthful age structure like ours. This is just one aspect of the spectrum of problems presented by a youthful population. There are other problems too. But let us stop here for the day and wait for another occasion for discussing them.