

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH IN DEVELOPMENT: A CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVE

The possible effect that health can have on development depends very much on the fashionable review of the determinants of development — that is, primarily of economic development. As I understand it, the view which held sway in the 30s and 40s was that development's essential requirement was physical capital accumulation. Attention to disease and promotion of health might even be anti-developmental, in the sense that investment in health would lead to a reduction in the death rate, an increase in population, and a reduction in per capita income. Readers will, of course, recognise the Malthusian flavour here. However, this has changed, and expenditure on education and health which contribute to human well-being are now accepted as being properly an investment which contributes to the productive capacity of the economy, and may be more important, or at least as important as the physical capital which was once believed to hold the key to economic growth. We have now re-discovered the thesis put forward about 300 years ago by William Petty and later recognised by Chadwick and John Stuart Mill on the primacy of human capital as a development input. Incidentally, Petty was a physician! William Demas in his presentation to the Board of Governors of the Caribbean Development Bank in 1987 followed this line of reasoning, and made an eloquent case for investment in men, women and children for development. It is no longer felt that expenditure in the social sectors has to be considered as consumption because it represents a reduction of the surplus available for investment.

One of the difficulties in exploring any impact of health on development lies in the choice of method to reflect health or health status. If we focus on a particular disease, then there is no shortage of evidence of the effect that the presence or absence of disease or illness can have on development. Biblical history speaks of the plague which contributed eventually to the departure of the Israelites from Egypt; the Black Death transformed Europe; the

Dr George A.O. Alleyne is Area Director of the Health Programs Development of the Pan American Health Organisation in Washington, D.C. He delivered a lecture on a similar theme, "Health and Development in the Caribbean Context", in the Eric Williams Memorial Lecture Series in Port of Spain on April 15, 1989.