

maldistribution of food within countries. This is often an economic problem, since the poorest in most countries have difficulty finding the basic necessities of life, while the rich have an excess of food and other resources. In addition, political activities often determine food availability. War, payment of foreign debt, corruption, and poor management often contribute to hunger and malnutrition.

The areas of greatest need are in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa is the only major region of the world where per capita grain production has decreased over the past few decades. People in these regions are trying to use marginal lands for food production, as forests, scrubland, and grasslands are converted to agriculture. Often, this land is not able to support continued agricultural production. This leads to erosion and desertification.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM

What should be done about countries that are unable to raise enough food for their people and are unable to buy the food they need? This is not an easy question. A simple humanitarian solution to the problem is for the developed countries to supply food. Many religious and humanitarian organizations do an excellent service by taking food to those who need it and save many lives. However, the aim should always be to provide temporary help and insist that the people of the country develop mechanisms for solving their own problem. Often, emergency

food programs result in large numbers of people migrating from their rural (agricultural) areas to cities, where they are unable to support themselves. They become dependent on the food aid and stop working to raise their own food, not because they do not want to work but because they need to leave their fields to go to the food distribution centers. Many humanitarian organizations now recognize the futility of trying to feed people with gifts from the developed world. They try to provide food aid in local villages rather than in large cities and support projects that provide incentives for improving the local agricultural economy. The emphasis must be on self-sufficiency.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION CONCEPT

Clearly there is a relationship between the standard of living and the population growth rate. Countries with the highest standard of living have the lowest population growth rate, and those with the lowest standard of living have the highest population growth rate. This has led many people to suggest that countries naturally go through a series of stages called **demographic transition**.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION MODEL

The demographic transition model is based on the historical, social, and economic development of Europe and North America. In a demographic transition, the following four stages occur (see figure 7.17):

1. Initially, countries have a stable population with a high birthrate and a high death rate. Death rates often vary because of famine and epidemic disease.
2. Improved economic and social conditions (control of disease and increased food availability) bring about a period of rapid population growth as death rates fall. Birthrates remain high.
3. As countries develop an industrial economy, birthrates begin to drop because people desire smaller families and use contraceptives.
4. Eventually, birthrates and death rates again become balanced. However, the population now has *low* birthrates and *low* death rates.

This is a very comfortable model because it suggests that if a country can develop a modern industrial economy, then social, political, and economic processes will naturally cause its population to stabilize.

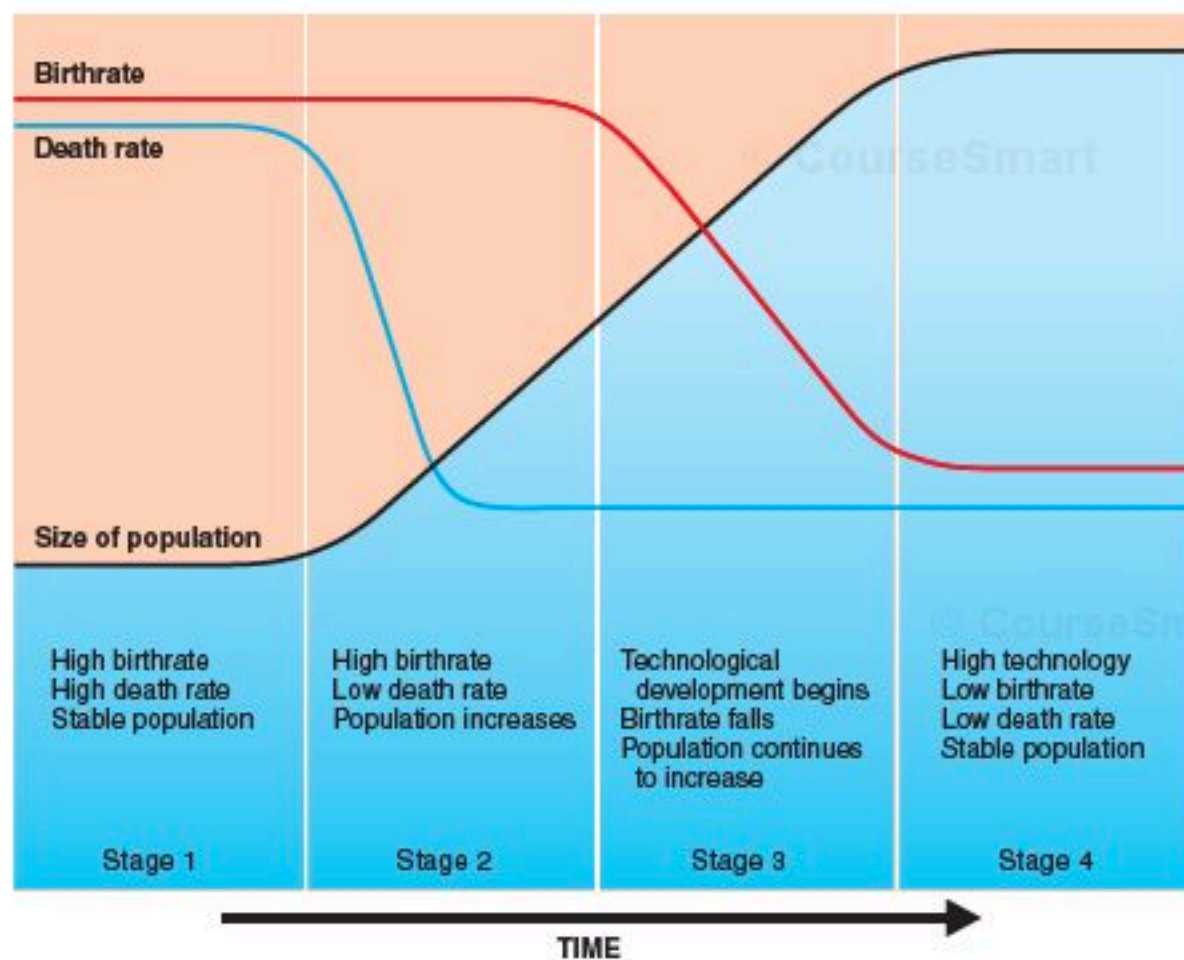


FIGURE 7.17 Demographic Transition The demographic transition model suggests that as a country develops technologically, it automatically experiences a drop in the birthrate. This certainly has been the experience of the developed countries of the world. However, the developed countries make up less than 20 percent of the world's population. It is doubtful whether the less-developed countries can achieve the kind of technological advances experienced in the developed world.