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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

populations increase relative to food supply and how such increases might be limited have not stood up well to the test of time.

In the 20th century the empirical evidence suggests that the most effective ways to reduce the growth of population are to reduce infant and child mortality, raise literacy (especially of mothers), provide broad access to pure drinking water, increase nutritional standards of peasants and low-income workers, and limit family need to depend on numerous children for survival in old age. Then, and usually only then, there is a substantial upsurge of interest in child spacing and family planning generally. Without these prior steps, providing broader access to family planning has quite limited results — as illustrated both in Kenya and Egypt.

The country studies and basic needs strategy of the International Labor Organization's World Employment Program, and the UNICEF "State of the World's Children" annual reports, give a practicable, as well as humane, approach to achieving reduced population growth. Because the positive measures needed take time to implement and because they initially cause life expectancy to rise more rapidly than birthrates fall,

there is no speedy answer — other than compulsory sterilization, which would be morally unacceptable and practicably unenforceable in Africa.

Assistance in the development of agriculture is indeed needed. But it is neither needed nor wanted as a quid pro quo for direct action in a foredoomed crusade to reduce birthrates without first increasing life expectancy, nutritional levels and economic security of the poor, especially the rural poor, of Africa.

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### Malthus Updated

The letter entitled "Malthus and Africa," from Willa F. Finley in Casablanca (*IHT*, Jan. 3), is a particularly unfortunate example of Lord Keynes's thesis about present proposals being dominated by the ghosts of defunct political economists. Thomas Malthus was not wrong that there were, and are, dangers of starvation. However, his concepts of how