

Editorial

Rise in Population Growth and its Disadvantages

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Editor

Population as an impediment in economic development or population as a human resource? Different countries have followed varied examples and become models of development and prosperity, thus raising the living standard of their people.

We unfortunately, messed up pretty badly on the population front, too, and turned what could have been our best asset into our biggest disadvantage. Today, Pakistan is the sixth largest country of the world population is the sixth largest country of the world population wise but our social development indicators are the lowest.

We cannot feed or cloth or educate our population. Any policy initiative faces a daunting challenge of massive number of people and becomes a non starter. Like other areas, we sell this disadvantage to the world and get foreign aid in return. From the United Nations to USAID to DFID, the entire world is keen to help us get our priorities right and for decades now.

But aside from the world of figures and slogans like reproductive health, birth spacing, women empowerment.

Pakistan, world's sixth largest populated country, is still facing a high growth rate – 2.2 percent and moving quite slow in controlling the increasing population. The progress is described as 'modest'.

Among the top ten contributors to world population growth during 1995-2000, Pakistan stood third in absolute number, and was on the top in growth rate.

According to global projections, Pakistan was at number 13 with 40 million people in the 1950 while it reached at number seven in the world in 1996 with 140 million people.

United Nations' Population Division projections show Pakistan as the third largest populated country in the world by 2050 with 357 million people, leaving behind America and following India and China.

An effective population policy must address reduction in the rate and incidence of unwanted fertility, reduction in demand for big families, and large investment in adolescents.

Population planning should not be taken as a clinical issue but as a social issue. The current growth rate of Pakistan is 2.2 percent, which ideally should be in one digit. It was five percent in the 1960s. Population planning programme remained neglected in Ziaul Haq's regime. "We need to learn from Bangladesh."

Pakistan's population control framework started in 1965 with the creation of population welfare department at the federal level. This is known as the best days of the programme, from 1965 to 1969, during the era of Ayub Khan.

Religious parties protested against family planning, playing an important role in ending Khan's rule. Pakistan launched one of the first population control programmes in the late 1950s, yet it has lagged far behind other countries in effective implementation over the past five decades. It never had an effective and comprehensive family planning policy till 2002.

Based on fertility trends of the 1990s, Population Policy 2002 projected to bring down fertility rates by 2020. The National Population Policy 2010 draft, which is yet to be approved by parliament, seeks population stabilization goal through early completion of fertility transition and facilitates realization of demographic dividend by linking fertility transition process with skill promotion and employment generation policies.

The policy repositions family planning from health perspective and focuses on the attainment of Millennium Development Goal of reducing maternal mortality by two third by 2015.

Pakistan started adapting the contraceptives and related surgeries after 1994's International Conference on Population Development in Cairo. From 2002, the country created provincial level secretariats and ministries for population welfare.

The federal population ministry was devolved after the 18th Amendment in the Constitution, making population a provincial subject. However, the federal government would continue to financially support these departments and ministries by 2015.

"Policies and strategies are not very effective because people are not fully aware of the issue."

The ratio of contraceptive adoptability is 34 percent at the moment. According to him, low use of contraceptives, shyness to adopt family planning methods, want of a male baby and religious factors are some of the challenges in achieving the targets. "The subject of reproductive health and population should be included in school and college level syllabus," he suggests, adding, "In Punjab, the population welfare department is running 1500 male and female mobilization centres providing training.

Pakistan obtained demographic dividend" in the 1998 census, which means people who earn are more in number than the beneficiaries. Unfortunately, Pakistan has lost the fruits of this dividend. Population is growing at the rate of 3.2 million every year, according to official statistics.

Pakistan is losing this one-time mothers die in Pakistan every day due to pregnancy complications. "Almost 60 percent couples of Pakistan want family planning while 30 percent are able to meet this task. Pakistan's drop out ratio of couples for family planning is highest in the subcontinent due to poor services."