



Demos of Democracy: The Population debate

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Abstract:

Conflicts brought about by population in society include conflicts over resources and conflicts over preferences. These disagreements and how they are resolved are essential for a democratic process to be dynamic and long-lasting. The demographic debates on a national and global scale, as well as their implications for human progress, will be highlighted in this research study. This demands a more thorough investigation of population growth-related policies, approaches, and beliefs, as well as how they interact with the larger objectives of fostering wellbeing and sustainable development.

Keywords: Population. Human Development, National Population Policy, holistic, International Population Conferences

In the new millennium, nations are assessed based on the welfare of their citizens, their levels of health, nutrition, and education, their citizens' civil and political liberties, the protection of children, and the provisions made for the weak and disadvantaged. If India's large population is given the tools to live a healthy and economically productive life, it could be its greatest asset. This was the guiding theme of Governmental Population Policy (2000).ⁱ

Conflict over resources and conflict over preferences are two types of conflicts that population brings about in society. For a democratic process to be dynamic and sustainable, both these conflicts and how they are handled are crucial. This research paper will emphasize the national and worldwide population disputes and how they relate to human development.

This suggests a broader examination of policies, strategies, and ideologies surrounding population growth, and how they intersect with the broader goals of promoting well-being and sustainable development.

Human development has taken centre stage in the discussion of global development, led by the straightforward principle that "people always come first." The global development plan now includes this idea of human development, which was substantially established by UNDP. The UN's International Development Strategy now includes it as a central component. The true goal of progress is to give people more options. Although income is a very essential component of these decisions, it does not encompass all aspects of life. Additionally, crucial are independence, a healthy physical environment, health, and education.ⁱⁱ

Human development is the ongoing process of expanding individuals' opportunities. These choices are inherently boundless and evolve with time. However, regardless of the level of development, three fundamental prerequisites persist. Firstly, it entails the capability to lead a healthy long life. Secondly, it involves the acquisition of knowledge. Lastly, it encompasses having access to the means which is imperative to maintain a decent standard of living. With these foundational choices in place, a myriad of other opportunities become attainable. Additionally, individuals may seek further options, including political, economic, and social freedoms, avenues for creativity and productivity, personal self-esteem and respect, and the assurance of basic human rights. Fulfilling these choices relies on several key factors: providing equality of opportunity for all members of society, ensuring the sustainability of such opportunities for successive generations, and empowering individuals to actively engage in and reap the benefits of development processes. Central to this entire framework is the consideration of population and its quantity, which profoundly influences the quality of choices available and the

equitable distribution of resources. Striking a balance in this regard is a critical challenge in fostering sustainable and inclusive human development.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the conceptualization of human development, as delineated herein, did not materialize within a mere decade. Over the preceding half-century, a discernible evolution in the discourse surrounding population issues has transpired. It is incumbent upon us to elucidate the historical trajectory of these deliberations, which have been central to various global conferences on population and allied matters. The preeminent actors within the realm of population dynamics have endeavored to wield these conferences as diplomatic instruments for effecting policy and behavioral shifts. In pursuit of their objectives, they have diligently sought to broaden their constituency, enlisting the expertise of professionals, engaging governmental entities, and even enlisting the support of non-governmental organizations.

The inaugural World Population Conference convened by the United Nations convened in Rome in 1954, marking a pivotal event in the discourse surrounding population dynamics. The primary objective of this academic assembly was the exchange of scientific knowledge concerning population variables, their determinants, and ensuing ramifications. A fundamental resolution emerged from this gathering, emphasizing the imperative of generating comprehensive demographic data for developing nations. Furthermore, it underscored the necessity of establishing regional training centers dedicated to addressing population concerns and cultivating expertise in demographic analysis.

Subsequently, the second iteration of the World Population Conference transpired in Belgrade in 1965, jointly organized by the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) and the United Nations. Noteworthy was the preponderance of subject matter experts in attendance. Central to the discourse was a rigorous examination of fertility within the context of development planning. This conference unfolded at a juncture where scholarly inquiries into population facets of development coincided with the commencement of population initiatives bolstered by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Delegates to these conferences collectively constituted an epistemic community, united by shared expertise, perspectives, academic training, and scientific values. Their purpose extended beyond the mere exchange of scientific ideas, encompassing broader discussions pertaining to population, along with an ardent commitment to foster population research and training in the Third World.

Despite the intellectual vigour characterizing these expert deliberations, they fell short of meeting the needs and aspirations of a bloc of nations perturbed, if not alarmed, by the unprecedented pace of population expansion in the developing world. Notably, the United States, having formerly opposed any governmental endeavours utilizing American public funds to curtail population growth, underwent a paradigm shift in the mid-1960s. It emerged as the staunchest proponent of population control in response to mounting sentiment that rapid demographic proliferation posed a formidable obstacle to development. The advent of contraceptive technologies further underscored the feasibility of fertility regulation. In 1967, buoyed by a substantial voluntary contribution from the United States, the United Nations evinced a newfound willingness to adopt a more assertive role, leading to the establishment of the United Nations Population Fund. This entity was tasked with aiding nations in the pursuit of their population-related objectives.

In tandem with these developments, the attention of United Nations population conferences evolved from sheer expertise toward a more policy-oriented agenda. For donor governments and advocates of population control, the primary objective of these conferences arguably became galvanizing governments to confront their demographic challenges and providing support in lowering birthrates. Consequently, conferences transitioned into intergovernmental forums, featuring participation from government officials, scholars, policymakers, and representatives of both governmental and civil society sectors, designated by their respective governments.

Frustrated by perceived bureaucratic inefficiencies and governance shortcomings, donor nations turned their attention to the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as conduits for delivering essential goods and services to citizens. While proponents of this approach contend that civil society supplements government efforts, others, including many officials from the Third World, regard external support of NGOs not merely as a supplementary measure, but as an alternative governing mechanism.

The Third World Population Conference, orchestrated by the United Nations, convened in Bucharest in 1974. At the heart of the deliberations was a nuanced examination of the intricate interplay between population issues and development imperatives. The culminating outcome of this conference, encapsulated in the World Population

Plan of Action, articulated, among its foundational principles, an unequivocal dedication to the social, economic, and cultural advancement of nations. It posited that population dynamics and development are intrinsically intertwined, with population policies and objectives constituting integral facets of socio-economic development strategies.

Subsequently, in 1984, an International Conference on Population took place in Mexico City, serving as a review and endorsement of key facets of the 1974 Bucharest Conference agreements. This gathering sought to expand upon the World Population Plan of Action by incorporating the latest research findings and governmental data. The declaration emanating from this conference prominently featured human rights considerations for individuals and families, in addition to emphasizing vital determinants of well-being such as health, employment, and education.

Another shift in population debate was by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 1993, which focused on the interrelationship among democracy, development, and human rights.ⁱⁱⁱ The turning point in the discourse surrounding population issues occurred during the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Egypt. This watershed event marked a departure from conventional demographic-centric approaches, urging a paradigm shift towards recognizing the intricate interplay of three pivotal variables: population dynamics, developmental imperatives, and environmental sustainability. The ICPD asserted the imperative of reformulating population policies, with an emphasis on demographic dimensions, alongside the adoption of apt macroeconomic and socioeconomic strategies geared towards fostering sustainable economic growth within the framework of sustainable development, applicable to all nations.^{iv}

The ICPD, Cairo, represented a quantum leap in the evolution of thinking on population matters. It heralded a transformative shift from the erstwhile emphasis on demography and population control towards the primacy of sustainable development. Central to this reorientation was the acknowledgment of the pressing need for comprehensive reproductive healthcare and reproductive rights. The newly formulated Programme of Action underscored the inseparable nexus between population dynamics and development trajectories. It directed focus towards fulfilling the fundamental individual requirements within the framework of generally accepted human rights principles, transcending the previous fixation on demographic targets. With the overarching goal of improving the quality of life for all people, including those of future generations, this Program's adoption marked the beginning of a new phase characterized by unwavering commitment and resolve to successfully incorporate population considerations into socioeconomic development blueprints.

According to the official communique from the ICPD, the conference delegates arrived at a consensus on four key qualitative and quantitative objectives. Firstly, they articulated the aspiration for universal education, striving for primary education accessibility in all countries by 2015. Additionally, countries were urged to enhance access for women to secondary and higher education, as well as vocational and technical training. Secondly, the imperative of reducing infant and child mortality rates was underscored. The target was set for countries to endeavour to decrease these rates by one-third or to 50-70 deaths per 1000 by the year 2000. Furthermore, by 2015, all countries were urged to strive for a rate below 35 per 1,000 live births and an under-five mortality rate below 45 per 1,000. Thirdly, the objective of reducing maternal mortality rates was articulated, with the aim of halving the 1990 levels by 2000, and reducing it by half again by 2015. It was emphasized that disparities within countries, across geographic regions, and among socio-economic and ethnic groups should be narrowed. Lastly, the conference emphasized the critical importance of ensuring access to reproductive and sexual health services, inclusive of family planning. This entailed a spectrum of services encompassing family-planning counselling, prenatal and postnatal care, safe delivery practices, prevention and treatment of infertility, management of abortion-related consequences, and education and counselling on human sexuality, reproductive health, and responsible parenthood. Additionally, services related to HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, infertility, and delivery were deemed essential, while concerted efforts were called for to actively discourage female genital mutilation (FGM).

A total of 179 governments, including India, subscribed to the ICPD Programme of Action. This landmark program, along with its subsequent benchmarks and reviews, profoundly influenced the development of the eight Millennium Development Goals. The ICPD, epitomizing a quantum leap in population and development policies, bore witness to a decisive shift from an earlier emphasis on population control and demography towards sustainable development, placing reproductive health and reproductive rights at the forefront. It became evident that population considerations transcended mere statistics, centring instead on the betterment of human lives. A consensus emerged that top-down imposition of method-specific targets, coercion, incentives, and disincentives were neither requisite nor conducive. Such measures were seen as encroaching upon human rights and ultimately

impeding human development. The ICPD Programme of Action pivoted towards placing "individuals" at the epicenter of development, erecting pillars of "Human Development, Human Rights," alongside gender equity and equality.

NATIONAL POPOULATION DEBATES

India, with its diverse culture, rich history, and burgeoning economy, has long grappled with the challenges posed by its massive population. India is one of the most populous nations on Earth, home to over 1.3 billion people. Recognizing the immense implications of population growth on social, economic, and environmental sustainability, the Indian government has formulated and implemented a series of population policies over the years.

The first notable attempt to address population concerns in India came with the launch of the Family Planning Program in 1952. The primary objective of this program was to promote family planning, with a focus on educating couples about contraception methods. However, the initial phases faced considerable challenges, including cultural resistance, limited access to contraceptives, and a lack of comprehensive healthcare infrastructure.

In 1976, India took a significant step by adopting the National Population Policy. This policy marked a shift towards a more comprehensive approach, encompassing not only family planning but also healthcare, education, and women's empowerment. It acknowledged the need for equitable development, gender equality, and improved access to health services.

One of the direct outcomes and effects of American and foreign policy and strategy in India throughout the 1950s and 1960s was the system of "family planning targets" that was implemented in 1966. After the progressive phase-by-phase introduction of a "clinical" strategy (with equal dependence on conventional and natural treatments, particularly for women), an aggressive method-specific targeting and new invasive methods for women (like IUD) were implemented. The National Family Planning Programme was part of the MCH system, and MCH staff members were given monthly goals to persuade a certain number of men and women to "accept" various forms of contraception. A system of rewards and penalties, as well as contests, was incorporated for State Governments, Hospitals, Districts, and MCH personnel.

To quote Hollan (2003):

"The implementation of these policies was a response to increasing pressure by international (lending/donor) organizations (World Bank, USAID and Ford Foundation) to step up population control programs as a condition for economic development...."^v

A "paradigm shift" in how population is conceptualized was brought about by the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. This required looking at the bigger picture of reproductive health and rights in addition to maternal health and family planning. Up until the middle of the 1970s, our national policies and programs reflected the shifting international landscape, but during the Emergency, India's family planning sector suffered due to the strict application of a target-based strategy. After Cairo, it was evident that population no longer just meant numbers, fingers, and figures, but also meant people and their standard of living. It was also agreed that no coercion, threats of compulsion, or the use of incentives or disincentives was necessary. Coercion hinders human freedom and violates human rights.

National Population Policy, 2000: Conceptualization

The government's announcement of the new national population policy (1st, February 2000)began with the following sentence: "the overriding objective of economic and social development is to improve the quality of lives that people lead, to enhance their well-being, and to provide them with opportunities and choices to become productive assets in society".^{vi vii}

As of the year 2000, India, with a population of one billion (100 crore), constituted about 16 percent of the global population, all within a land area accounting for a mere 2.4 percent of the Earth's total expanse. If prevailing demographic trends persist, projections suggest that India may surpass China in 2045, emerging as the most populous nation worldwide. While the global population has tripled over the course of the century, growing from 2 billion to 6 billion, India has witnessed an almost fivefold increase, soaring from 238 million (23 crores) to an astounding one billion in the same span. The annual population growth rate in India, currently at 15.5 million,

stands as a substantial force, potentially counteracting efforts aimed at preserving the nation's natural resources and environmental integrity.

The National Population Policy (NPP), in tandem with the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), engendered a notable departure from the predominant emphasis on metrics like Total Fertility Rate (TFR) and Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR). Instead, it adopted a more comprehensive, holistic approach, distinct in nature. The NPP places a distinct emphasis on gender sensitivity and embraces a broader spectrum of health and education needs, particularly catering to the well-being of women, adolescents, and the girl child. It underscores that population stabilization extends beyond the mere accessibility and affordability of reproductive health services. It encompasses a broader canvas, encompassing the expansion of primary and secondary education, the extension of basic amenities such as sanitation, safe drinking water, and housing, as well as empowering women through enhanced access to education and employment opportunities.

The NPP underscores the government's unwavering commitment to several pivotal objectives. These include addressing unmet needs in the realm of basic reproductive and child health services, along with the requisite supplies and infrastructure. It advocates for the universal provision of free and compulsory school education up to age 14, alongside the imperative of reducing dropout rates at both primary and secondary school levels to below 20 percent for both boys and girls. The policy also targets the reduction of infant mortality rates to below 30 per 1000 live births and the lowering of maternal mortality ratios to below 100 per 100,000 live births. Additionally, it aims to achieve universal immunization of children against all vaccine-preventable diseases and promote delayed marriage for girls, ideally not earlier than age 18, and preferably after 20 years of age.

Moreover, the NPP envisions 80 percent institutional deliveries and 100 percent deliveries facilitated by trained professionals. It strives for universal access to information, counseling, and services for fertility regulation and contraception, offering a diverse array of options. The policy seeks to ensure 100 percent registration of births, deaths, marriages, and pregnancies. It also places emphasis on combating the spread of HIV/AIDS and advocates for greater integration between the management of reproductive tract infections (RTIs) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) with the National AIDS Control Organization. The policy is resolute in its commitment to preventing and controlling communicable diseases while promoting the integration of the Indian System of Medicine (ISM) in the provision of reproductive and child health services. Additionally, the NPP vigorously advocates for the promotion of small family norms to attain replacement levels of Total Fertility Rate (TFR), and advocates for convergence in the implementation of related social sector programs, thereby placing family welfare at the forefront of a people-centered approach.

At its core, the NPP hinges on four central themes: addressing unmet needs, decentralization, and convergence in implementation with other pertinent social sectors, forging commitments and collaborations with the NGO sector through public-private partnerships (PPP) to enhance the pool of diverse healthcare providers, and mainstreaming the Indian System of Medicines. This policy framework sets forth a comprehensive roadmap towards a balanced and sustainable demographic landscape for India's future.

Fears of a population explosion continue to limit the population debate in India, notwithstanding the significant change from the previous strategy represented by the ICPD agenda and the establishment of an NPP. The RCH program approach from 1997 and the NPP from 2000 did provide a fresh vision in contrast to the "target-free approach." However, it was unable to change the viewpoints of those who advocate "population control" and "top-down targets" Some state government initiatives frequently exhibit this ambivalent stance. The population strategies of a few state governments do not correspond to the global change in population thinking. These inconsistencies and tensions are reflected in the current debate, which is taking place both at the center and in the states. An illustration of such a disagreement is the introduction of the two-child norm, "It has been double-edged in its implications. The findings of a field study across five states where the two-child qualification norm has been implemented in local bodies reveals the dichotomy that exists at higher policy-making levels where this measure is seen as conducive and exemplary in view of the need to raise small families while at grassroots levels the perception is widespread that the norm is coercive in its impact."^{viii}

The implementation of the two-child norm has revealed a tendency for more privileged classes and castes to navigate around its provisions, while inadvertently placing women in vulnerable positions. This norm, in the current social milieu characterized by a strong preference for sons and a lower status for women, has the potential to inflict significant harm on women's health. One of the critical risks associated with this policy is the escalation

of sex-selective abortions, leading to a decline in the number of girl children. This phenomenon was observed in China after the government's 1979 declaration of the "one-child policy." Rather than achieving population stability, this policy gave rise to a myriad of societal and familial issues, including a skewed sex ratio, incidents of female infanticide and foeticide. As a consequence, China now contends with a surplus of 30 million unmarried men who may never find spouses. Should a similar norm be enforced in India, it is likely to exacerbate the already alarming child sex ratio, further perpetuating gender imbalances in the country. The comparison between China's one-child policy and India's approach highlights the diverse strategies nations employ to address population growth. China's strict measures yielded substantial demographic changes, but also raised ethical and social concerns. India's more lenient approach focuses on empowerment and education, allowing individuals to make informed choices about family planning.

“Thus curbing population growth cannot be a goal in itself. It is only a means to development. If development can help in stabilising the population, truly that is a much better and superior solution to one where population growth is curbed in the hope that development will automatically follow. Therefore, improvement of health and nutrition, on the other hand, can be an end itself and will lead to population stabilization. Surely this a better approach. It is high time, that we stop counting people and instead start counting on people.”^{ix}

“Take care of the people and population will take care of itself.”^x

ⁱ <https://main.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/26953755641410949469%20%281%29.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Nanda,A.R. and NIhal, *Introduction to population*, Population and Sustainable Development, IGNOU

ⁱⁱⁱ Zulficar,Mona, *From Human Rights to Progarm Reality: Vienna, Cairo, and Beijing In perspective*, See also Paper of the Working Group on Women's Rights of the NGO Forum at the World Conference on Human Rights: Vienna (June 10-12, 1993);

^{iv} Nanda,A.R., *Not Just Number Games*, Seminar 511, March 2002

ICPD-POA (1994), Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Sept. 1994, UNFPA.

^v Hollan, Cecilia van., (2003), “Birth on the Threshold – Child Birth and Modernity in South India”, University of California Press.

^{vi} Govt. of India, (2000), “National Population Policy-2000”, Department of family Welfare, Ministry of Health and family Welfare.

^{viii} The study on “Panchayati Raj and Two Child Norm:Implications and Consequences” was taken up by Mahila Chetna Manch in the states of A.P.,Haryana,M.P.,Orissa and Rajasthan

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^x Advocacy papers on Population Issues, Population Foundation of India, 2010, p.139.

