

## **Lecture 31: Effectiveness of Population Policies**

### **Slide 1**

#### **DEFINING EFFECTIVENESS**

Since to implement population policy a nation state has to spend resources it is legitimate to ask whether policy is effective. In discussing effectiveness of population policies the starting point is: how does one define the effectiveness of policy? A simple definition of effectiveness may be that it is the degree to which a policy is able to achieve its desired objectives (regarding development, regional equality, long term needs of society etc.).

#### **PREREQUISITES OF EFFECTIVE POPULATION POLICY**

Now the question is: what are the prerequisites of effective population policy? It may be said that population policy will be effective if:

- Policy is stated in unambiguous and unequivocal terms
- There is good governance
- Strategies are based on good understanding of the socio-economic and cultural milieus
- There is good political support for the policy
- Adequate resources are mobilized to implement the policy
- Socio-economic development and the population policy are influencing the targets in the same direction
- Civil society is in agreement with the goals of the policy

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### DIFFICULTIES IN ASSESSING EFFECTIVENESS OF POPULATION POLICY

Evaluation of population policy is problematic. The reason is that one cannot have an experimental method to evaluate the implementation of policy. Population trends depend on policy as well as on multitude of other factors, such as the institutional context, economic conditions, culture, value of children, religious doctrines, autonomy, etc. For example, how can one separate the effect of family planning programme from the effect of modernization and development? Some other difficulties are:

- Lack of consensus regarding the major goals of the population policy
- Lack of adequate measurement of parameters of population system
- Lack of reliable data
- Conversion of statistics of family planning users into reduction in total fertility rate
- Lack of a clear theoretical understanding of population-development nexus and how the effect of policy be separated from the effect of development and modernization
- Lack of appreciation for monitoring and evaluation of population programmes

Lack of consensus regarding the major goals of the population policy is a serious problem. Therefore, even those governments that now have an officially stated policy have taken decades to arrive at the policy statement and get it approved by appropriate state bodies. Lack of data raises another level of problem. Economically less developed countries are also statistically less developed countries. They lack detailed data on family planning and population parameters. The available data may be incomplete or unreliable. Then there are technical problems too. How does one convert the data on number of users of family planning methods into measures of number of births averted and the percentage impact on the birth rate? For this one needs:

- Reliable data on family planning users by method, age, sex and duration of use;
- Rate of continuation and discontinuation by age; and
- Effectiveness of the different methods included in the programme

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To evaluate the effectiveness of population policy the evaluators need a clear definition of whether the goal of the stated policy is to reduce population growth rate (which depends on three things – fertility, mortality and migration), or fertility rate or mortality rate or all. This goal has to be clear, measurable and meaningful. Suppose the goal is to reduce fertility. Then the question is: should the government aim at reducing birth rate or total fertility rate or other measures of fertility (such as net reproduction rate)? A clear analysis is required to identify all factors on which the target indicators depend. For example, it is easier to reduce total fertility rate than birth rate because birth rate depends on both age specific fertility rates and age distribution of population. It is not in the hands of planners to change the age distribution of population. Further, reducing the population growth rate is a rather more difficult task. As discussed in earlier lectures, reduction in age specific fertility rates does not immediately reduce the growth rate of population and for several decades population would continue to grow despite reduction in total fertility rate.

Difficulty in analytical and empirical separation of the effects of population policy from those of development and modernization poses another serious problem before the planners and programme managers. The two processes may work in the same or different directions. Finally, a lack of appreciation for monitoring and evaluation of population programmes is another issue. The programme managers may not see the direct utility of evaluation studies. They too require expenditure of huge resources. In absence of these studies, however, one cannot judge how effective the population policies are.

### ARE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES MORE EFFECTIVE IN IMPLEMENTING POPULATION POLICY?

There is no doubt that developed countries are worried about low fertility, particularly because it causes aging. It not only raises proportion of the old in the total population of the country it also causes aging among the aged, i.e., increasing proportion of very old (80+) among the old (say 60+). This requires analysis of the causes of fertility decline.

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The comparison between developed and developing countries in performance in implementing population policies is not sound because they are dealing with different types of problems. McDonald (2006) avers that there are several causes of low fertility in the developed countries. Two main causes are: social liberalism or reflexive modernization; and economic deregulation or the new capitalism. The former refers to the conditions of postmodernism. Modernization (coupled with organized capitalism) with emphasis on reason, certitude of science and industrialization caused the first demographic transition and fertility declined to 2-3 children.

Reflexive modernization or postmodernization led to fulfilment of women's claims for gender equity, individualization of the individual, and lifted the lid on divorce. Simultaneously, economic deregulation made a revolutionary impact on the labour market: the end of "jobs for life"; increased demand for higher level of human capital; flexible employment; contractualization of jobs; unemployment; and uncertainties. Consequently, the reflexive modernization produced the second demographic transition in which fertility has gone below the replacement level. Will the industrially advanced, postmodern societies be able to have third demographic transition and improve fertility levels through state intervention or community action? There is no simple answer.

One can compare India and Bangladesh because they have similar policies and similar socio-economic characteristics. Both are developing countries with low income, large rural base and strong influence of religion and tradition. Both have antenatal policies. One cannot compare effectiveness of population policy between Mexico and France. In the two cases institutional mechanisms and conditions are very different.

It appears that with the end of value of children it is impossible to raise fertility unless new institutional mechanisms are developed which virtually coerce women to produce children. Merely giving them more facilities for producing children will not help. Any attempt to predict post-transitional fertility in the developed countries is in vain. It is more difficult to implement population policy effectively in the developed countries than in the developing countries. Yet, there are some who see that it is possible. For this society has to support family, particularly women.

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McDonald argues:

The solution to low fertility lies neither in the moral Right's call for a rolling back of social liberalism nor in the old Left's agenda of rolling back economic deregulation. Both waves of change have achieved many of the desirable outcomes for which they were intended. Most people prefer to live in a society that offers social freedoms and personal choices. Most prefer to work in an environment that rewards enterprise and endeavour. But most people prefer to have long-lasting intimate relationships and to have children. The solution, therefore, lies in a third wave of social change, new and substantial priority to the support of family life—especially the bearing and rearing of children. New perspectives on the family are required that recognize the vital social and personal significance of family life and that understand that family life will be played out amid the social liberalism and the new capitalism that are integral to twenty-first-century economies and societies.

To follow McDonald, the population policy in the developed, postmodern, societies, effectiveness would not be effective unless family life is supported. The question is how to do this. Another issue is what will be its repercussions for the very institutions and values that have produced the weakening of family – the freedom and individual choices.

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The developing countries have their own problems (Box 9.1). Lack of conceptual clarity and disagreement among the opinion makers, academics and planners is the biggest problem. But there are other problems too: fear of misuse of funds; lack of governance; religious or ethnic resistance; and transfer of responsibilities in the field of family planning and health to private sector, individuals or non-government organizations.

### BOX 9.1: PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS

...ICPD makes some very unrealistic demands on national governments. The implementation of a broader population policy as embedded in ICPD recommendations would require a cross-sectional approach to policymaking. Experience in policymaking with such an approach, however, has not been promising so far, either in the population field or in other fields. At least six factors would hamper implementation of such an approach in any setting. The extent to which these issues are resolved would determine the degree to which a broader population policy is implemented in a country and succeeds in reducing growth and improving individual wellbeing. These factors are:

1. Lack of conceptual clarity,
2. Disagreement among academics and intellectuals,
3. Concern about losing funds for family planning,
4. Absence of effective bureaucratic structures,
5. Lack of effective accountability mechanisms, and
6. Waning role of government

Quoted from Jain (1998b).