

Module 9

Population Policy and Family Planning Programmes

Lecture 30: Population Policy

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INTRODUCTION

This module focuses on the subject of population policy. It shows the various kinds of policies which governments in different countries have and problems they encounter in implementing them.

POPULATION POLICY

Earlier lectures have shown that population is intricately linked with development. Therefore, the national governments may want to examine population dynamics with reference to development goals, identify problems, and take a corrective action. This results in population policy. Here the term population policy refers to statements of state's understanding of population trends, their causes and consequences and measures to interfere in population trends to achieve the intended goals. Most governments have a clearly stated policy on population, but some have only a broad understanding and a broad vision of population processes. Population policy may address one or more of the following issues:

- Population size
- Growth rate of population
- Regional differences in size or growth rate of population
- Fertility rate
- Mortality rate
- International migration
- Internal migration – from one region to another and rural to urban areas
- Age of marriage

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- Social differentials in fertility or mortality or other aspects of population
- Social class mobility or shift from agriculture to urban, industrial employment
- Strategies to influence the above parameters

Governments have often taken action on the front of population, even without having a clearly stated and officially accepted population policy. For example, in India it was only in year 2000 that the parliament approved policy on population when National Population Policy 2000 was issued but the government has had a long history of adopting measures to reduce fertility rate at the national and regional levels. Module 10 discusses that the Central government issued population policy statements at least two times: one in 1976 during Congress rule; and another in 1977 during Janata Party rule. In addition the policy statements of different departments and the various Five Year and Annual Plans have shown government's commitment to check the growth rate of population.

PRONATAL AND ANTINATAL POLICIES

As the second half of the twentieth century witnessed development of various theories linking population growth rate to development and environment and both developed and developing countries have undergone significant changes in their demographic profile, population policies have largely focused on whether they encourage or discourage the prevailing reproduction rates. As far as mortality rate – the other vital component of growth – is concerned everybody favours reduction in death rate and improvement in life expectancy. On migration there has not been a consensus but most countries welcome those migrants who fill certain vacuum in their labour force structure and discourage large streams of migrants for the fear of declining cultural standards and overpopulation.

Overall, the countries may be divided into three categories on the basis of population policy:

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- Countries having **no explicit policy**, i.e., no deliberate intervention in population processes;
- Countries having **pronatal policy**; and
- Countries having **antinatal policy**.

Not all countries have an officially declared population policy. There are countries which have high growth rate of population but did not deem it necessary to change the situation. Some of them want the growth rate to remain high for religious, political or other reasons. Thus those who have no policy may be satisfied with the present trends or believe that socio-economic development will change the family size in desired direction. Pronatal policy implies a policy that favours raising fertility rate. Antinatal policy implies a policy that attempts to bring down fertility rates.

Candidly, the developed countries which have a declining fertility and fear aging of population and declining growth rate favour pronatal policy, the developing countries favour the opposite. The developing countries have faced the population explosion in much of 1960s and 1970s and fear adverse effects of population on savings and capital, and culture and society. They have antinatal population policy.

The policy statements are expected to include: discussion of the present demographic scenario; their implications for development; statement of a preferred demographic scenario commensurate with the short term and long term development goals of the country; and strategies to materialize the preferred demographic scenario, often combined with time bound targets and calculations of requirements of resources. The policy statement is issued with the approval of the head of the state and is not simply a statement of goals of its intellectuals, academicians, political parties, or one particular department of government.

PARTICIPANTS IN POPULATION POLICY

Jain (1998) identifies the following nine participants in population policy.

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1. Political leaders
2. Religious groups
3. Ethnic groups
4. Feminist factions and women's groups
5. Non-governmental organizations
6. Census and survey organizations
7. International agencies which influence the national population policies
8. International conferences on population and development

Political leaders play a critical role in making of population policy. They are responsible for developing the statements of vision and mission. Yet, they would not be able to ignore popular sentiments on contraception and abortion, views of major religious groups and their doctrines, politics of ethnic communities/identities, and role and views of national and international non-government organizations. In plural countries, religious leaders can influence the policy debate in a significant manner. They wield powerful influence on the community and they may think that by declaring population policy government is intruding in their religious matters. In some countries like Bangladesh and Malaysia government has been able to obtain support of the religious leaders in population control. The religious leaders may support the idea of family planning, emphasising certain methods like condoms or even sterilization. In Bangladesh they have gone up to supporting sterilization for health of mother and child. But involving religious leaders in plural societies is fraught with risks. If government manages support from one specific cleric this may boomerang and isolate that cleric in the community. In that case whatever was achieved through secular appeals may be lost to communal frenzy. Secular appeals through media and neutral and respected persons may be more effective than involvement of religious leaders. Yet, if it possible to have a broad consensus among the different religious schools on a few aspects of the policy that can go a long way to make the population policy more effective.

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In the late 20th century women's groups (often called feminists) have become a major civil society actor exerting influence on population policy. They have raised issues about women's autonomy, contraception and abortion. Feminist groups have supported the idea of birth control as it empowers them to decide how many children they should have and whether they should produce children or work. Yet, they have raised objections to a few family planning methods included in the programmes of certain countries such as female sterilization, abortion, emergency pills and Depo-Provera (injections) on health grounds as well as social grounds. According to them several family planning methods such as Depo-Provera have been introduced in the programme without examining their adverse health impacts and informing women about the risks. Some of them who reject abortion on moral grounds say that abortion works to the advantage of the **exploitative male** and not for the female. It makes the male free from all financial, legal or social obligations associated with childbirth by eliminating the possibility of birth. Feminists maintain that the males have made the females a perpetual and re-usable sex object.

Feminists have also viewed seriously that due to patriarchy if families decide to go for sterilization they go for female sterilization rather than male sterilization though the latter is simpler and safer than the former method.

Apart from feminists groups, government needs support from other non-government organizations (NGOs) for:

- Generating public opinion
- Implementation of programme (public-private-partnership)
- Independent feedback on programme implementation through operations research
- Innovative ideas
- Resources
- Support of local communities
- Linkages with development initiatives

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Nevertheless, to support their claims all the participants in population debate depend on data, provided by national and international agencies. Population censuses provide useful data on size and growth of population which are supplemented by estimates of demographic rates by international, national and sub-national surveys. Further, the World Population Conference, held in Bucharest in 1974, and subsequent international conferences on population too have influenced the perceptions and ideas of politicians, bureaucrats, academicians and NGOs, by raising new questions, sharing experiences, providing a platform to discuss and debate various issues, and presenting scientific analysis on population processes. Such conferences have led to paradigmatic shifts in theory of population and approaches to family planning programmes. **It may be added here that the consultants, academicians and media persons too play a role in population policy by providing data, perspectives and creating a public opinion favourable to population policy.**