NEW PERSPECTIVES IN POPULATION POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES**

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ABSTRACT

Population theory which evolved around 300 years ago in the West, has become a global issue. While delivering Shri Veda Prakash Memorial Oration on Population, Mrs. Wadia, with an experience of half a century in population issues, focussed her views on population growth and its consequences. In addition, she talked about sustainable development through decentralization of power, women empowerment, adolescent health, inter-sectoral co-ordination, NGOs’ participation, etc. which are major pointers in the National Population Policy-2000. Finally, in her oration, she observed a wide variation in the population growth rate between developed and developing countries.

Key-words: Patriarchal order, Strategic themes, Fifth estate.

Evolution of Population Theories

In half a century of voluntary work for promoting population policies and family planning, I have had an opportunity to see and even to take some small part in the evolution of theories and programmes on the population phenomenon which started over 300 years ago in the West and then spread all over the world.

This began from the doctrine propounded by Malthus in 1798 on population growth outstripping food supplies—valid in his time when England had the ‘teeming poor’ and severe food shortages. Population increased rapidly from the 18th century onwards and from the middle of the 19th century, Europe sent out about 60 million emigrants within a few decades to America and Oceania. By the mid-twentieth century, population in the developing countries was rapidly increasing and warnings of ‘the crowded planet’, ‘standing room only’, ‘the population bombshell’ and other alarm calls were sounded which led to

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the urgency for taking strong measures to reduce the population growth, and to promote crash programmes for family planning in order to achieve a balance between population and resources and also the environment. Population was pursued as an isolated programme until it was slowly recognized that population, development, and the environment were closely interlinked and that they formed over-arching macro factors, affecting all aspects of life.

But, even before these relationships could be fully worked out, a new aspect has been highlighted by the ICPD Conference in Cairo in 1994, which has focussed not on population as such, but on the rights of individuals, and especially of women, to make their own free and informed choices in the different aspects of life, including reproductive and sexual health. It has predicated population stabilisation on their achievement and on development. The demographic approach has been downsized and demographic goals have been disconnected from the practice of family planning which is placed in the wider context of reproductive and sexual health for women and men.

Perhaps there is some significance in the fact that this new paradigm of reproductive and sexual health and gender equality and equity has emerged in a world setting that has changed into a unipolar, free enterprise, neo-capitalist and technology-driven order where privatization and globalisation are the buzz words. It also follows the fact that there has been reduction in world population growth from 2 per cent in 1960 (with an increase of 98 million people) per year to 1.4 per cent in the year 2000 (with 78 million). Thanks in great measure to the worldwide family planning programmes and the premise that control over human fertility is now universally possible and widely practised.

**The Problem of Population**

World population has more than tripled in the 20th century to reach six billion. In India, the increase has been five-fold, and is now one billion plus. In developed countries, the question of population is being faced from the angle where slow growth or non-growth is raising new problems of ageing and labour shortages. Also, new formations of social and family relations are displacing the old patriarchal order and in this situation, reproductive and sexual health is playing a crucial part.

But in developing countries, the major concern is still on reducing population growth. Mr. Joseph Chamie, Director, UN Population Division, reports that in the 15 European Union countries in the year 2000, the natural increase in population was 3,43,000 persons in a week, whereas the increase in the same proportion took place in India in the same period.
Broader Base of Development

Population stabilisation is now bracketed with measures for development. However, the perspective on development itself is now changing. It is being viewed from a much broader standpoint, taking into account not only economic, but also the social and human aspects. The Human Development Report of 2000 asserts that social development must be regarded as a process of ‘enhancing human capabilities’ and a human rights – based approach which can help to bring together the political, civil, social and economic perspectives as integral to developmental planning. At the World Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995, there was a consensus that social development is an intrinsic part of economic development. But we can go further and say that social services for all, are the very base on which other developmental measures can be sustained. Measures for poverty elimination combined with measures for health including reproductive health and family planning, nutrition, drinking water, sanitation, education, and employment creation are the very foundations for development. Macroeconomics of production, employment, debt reduction, global competition and so on are no doubt crucial to development, but social development must proceed side by side. The human right to development is now embodied in the Vienna Declaration where it states “The Right to Development is a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights.”

A third factor that is affected by population growth is what is called the ‘carrying capacity of the planet’. But while that capacity has not been fully defined, it is clear that slowing the growth of population can put less pressure on resources and the environment and give time for raising living standards on a sustainable basis.

Re-assessing Programmes

All these changes in concepts and juxtapositions have lent a certain degree of confusion to current programmes, but they can also help us to reassess and rethink our objectives and strategies. The link between sustainable development, population stabilisation and environmental stability means that each one cannot be considered in isolation; there must be a meshing together of strategies on a holistic basis. And this aspect unveils new perspectives and challenges, difficult to meet, yet very exciting.

After fifty years of pursuing a programme for population stabilization based primarily on promoting a voluntary adoption of the small family norm by the millions of eligible couples, India can now show some successes. At least nine States and Union Territories have already achieved replacement levels of fertility and 11 States and UTs have a TFR of less than 3, though more than 2.1. However, 12 States and UTs with the largest population, still have a TFR of 3 or more. The five States of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh with nearly 44 per cent of the Indian population are still lagging behind
in controlling population growth and their population numbers will rise by 55 per cent between 1996 and 2016 to make 48 per cent of India’s total population. This poses a tremendous challenge. However, while we gear up our programmes to meet this serious situation, we must move towards a stage where we handle the factor of population not simply as a formidable statistics but as a human heritage where the struggle lies in achieving the reality of a qualitative life for all people. From this point of view, the Swaminathan Expert Group which prepared a Draft Population Policy, presents a real departure point. The Draft was presented to the Government in April 1994, nearly six months before the ICPD Conference in Cairo, and laid down the fundamentals of a viable policy. It adopted a holistic approach and gave the call for population policies which was pro poor, pro women, and pro nature, and thus highlighted the close linkages in measures to eliminate poverty and advance development with gender equality and equity, and environmental sustainability. It asserted that development which is not equitable would not be sustainable. It also recommended decentralization of planning to Panchayats who should prepare local socio-demographic plans, having firsthand, experience of the problems on the ground. The motive behind this decentralization of planning was to create a favourable environment for the proper and effective implementation of developmental works at the grassroot level.

The National Population Policy

Based on the Report of Draft Population Policy, after five long years, a new National Population Policy known as NPP 2000 has been officially issued. The Policy has outlined the immediate objective of meeting the unmet needs of contraception, supplies and health care, the medium objective of bringing down the TFR to 2.1 by the year 2010, and the long-term objective of stable population by 2045. It has outlined 14 National Socio-Economic Goals with a constellation of measures for health, education and social change. Additionally, 12 Strategic Themes are identified with detailed operational strategies set out under an Action Plan. All this makes a comprehensive Policy. In fact, it has included almost every aspect of social development.

At last, there is explicit acknowledgement of what some of us have advocated for several years, namely, that integrated approaches are needed that knit together into a common strong fabric, the strands making for better health, universal education and employment generation.

Decentralisation and Convergence

I would like to refer to some of the Strategic Themes the Policy lays down. One is decentralized planning and implementation, and the other is convergence of services at the village levels. The cross-linking of various social measures rather than each one running on parallel, vertical lines (as has been in the case so far), is the answer not only to tackle population growth but to achieve
true development. Decentralisation, with horizontal implementation at the grass-root levels can bring qualitative changes in the lives of the people.

A one-step integrated and coordinated service delivery package at the ground level meant for the community and implemented by the community is a big step. The policy takes a leaf out of the Indonesian programme in listing six services where villagers will meet every fortnight for registration of births, deaths, marriages and pregnancy; weighing children under 5 years and keeping a chart; advocacy and counselling for free family planning and supplies; preventive care with basic measures and ORS; nutrition supplements; and ensuring continued enrolment of children in schools up to 14 years. I had attended one of these sessions outside Jogyakarta some years ago and everybody from village president to policemen to peon and from grandmother to pregnant wives to children attended.

The Panchayat will appoint at least one trained health staff and community midwives and other health and anganwadi workers will be roped in. A recommendation which is particularly interesting to us in the Family Planning Association of India, is the adoption of an idea that we have introduced in a number of villages; of setting up a clean delivery room in the village itself in the Panchayat’s charge with a trained TBA available. The Policy calls it having a ‘village hut’ for this purpose.

Empowering Women

Another Strategic Theme is empowering women for improved health and nutrition. All that the Policy states in this regard is not only valid but also long overdue. Promoting an integrated reproductive and child health programme is an essential part of development. India’s record in maternal mortality is appalling, and only less so in infant and child mortality. While all the measures listed in the Strategy are vital, they are more in the nature of entitlements. Empowerment of women goes beyond these measures. Empowerment means equal or equitable power relationships. The Policy does not venture to that extent. It has left untouched the sexual and family relationships where male domination is still creating cruel inequalities. An example can be cited from the NFHS-2 which states that physical violence usually by the husband is highly prevalent. And what is horrifying is that 56 per cent of the women, who were interviewed, felt that it was justified for any of the six reasons outlined. Domestic violence which is so ingrained in Indian society (as in other societies also), is a formidable barrier against the real empowerment of women, and equitable and harmonious sexual and family relations. This is where the ICPD’s strong stand on gender equality and equity gives a clearer lead.

Gender-based violence is defined by UNFPA as “violence involving men and women, in which the female is usually the victim and which is derived from unequal power relationships between men and women. It includes battering,
rape, childhood sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, and violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment, coercion and intimidation. Such violence can harm women’s health directly or indirectly, and impact adversely on their sexual and reproductive health”. The WHO reported that 40 population-based studies in 24 countries have revealed that 20 to 50 per cent of the women interviewed had suffered physical violence from their male partners, and that at least one in five women experienced rape or attempted rape in their lifetimes.

**Adolescent Needs**

Another Strategic Theme which deals with adolescents has a more forward-looking view. India’s demographic profile is changing. According to the Registrar General’s projections, the population in the age group 0-4 years will decline from 12.8 per cent in 1996 to 9.7 per cent by 2016. The population of 0-15 years will decline from 35 per cent to 25 per cent by 2016. But on the other hand, the reproductive age group will undergo a huge increase from 519 to 800 million people.

This massive expansion in which adolescents and young adults predominate, is an immediate challenge to us. Programmes must be directly pointed to meet their needs in reproductive and sexual health. The NPP 2000 states under its operation policies in (C) Adolescents: “Ensure for adolescents access to information, counselling and services, including reproductive health services that are affordable and accessible. Strengthen primary health centres and sub-centres and provide counselling both to adolescents and also to newly-weds (who may also be adolescents). Emphasize proper spacing of children.” This is indeed a welcome step, for up to now the family planning programme has not attracted younger people and their needs have not been met, either in counselling, or spacing methods. If just this one aspect of the reproductive and sexual health programme can be given a fillip by government and NGOs, the effects will be far reaching. And most urgently, all such measures must pay full attention to the female gender which is facing cruelty and discrimination from womb to tomb.

Considering that 31 per cent of girls in the 15-19 age group are already married and account for 19 per cent of total fertility, this age group needs a very special attention but rarely gets it. Both boys and girls at these ages and even up to 20 years and more, are almost totally dominated by parental wishes (and parents themselves suffer from ignorance and mis-conceptions) and have very little knowledge, and less say in matters of marriage and child-bearing. This is a huge challenge facing us, for this is the very age group that ought to be completing schooling, learning income-generating skills, and at the same time developing an awareness and knowledge of the responsibilities of reproduction and sexual functioning. And now they face an added hazard through the menace of HIV/AIDS.
Programmes aimed at education and services for adolescents in sexual education and health are a critical input. In today’s world, with no frontiers on entertainment, fashions, modes of behaviour and lifestyles of young people through TV, advertisements and other world inter-communication; adolescents and youths fall prey to unprotected and unsafe sex. Regarding the equal rights of all individuals in political, economic and social matters, information and education on all aspects of human sexuality and individual responsibility must be a part and parcel of education. A vital educational campaign has to be mounted on prevention of HIV/AIDS giving correct information, serious but not sensational. As Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the UN reported, “India is now estimated to have more people living with HIV than any country in the world”. Preventive education hardly touches a small fraction of our young population. Nor have we enough trained people in sexual health who can educate them. So far, only a few NGOs and university departments have tackled sexual health. Their efforts need to be encouraged, expanded and made adaptable to the many strata of society and customs in India in order to improve their quality of life.

The Big Question

Now that we have a comprehensive National Population Policy before us. The big question is when it comes to implementation, are we going to be radical and resourceful, flexible and quick moving, taking initiatives at different levels, winning the people, or are we still confined to old-style modes and measures of file-pushing with numerous committees and advisory group who talk and advise, but decisions and actions lie elsewhere?

This is where the bureaucracy will have a crucial responsibility. Integration is not its favourite exercise, and the mindset all down the line is usually rigid, following hierarchical orders. If we can now change that and re-cast modes of work in implementation to bring it on to the fast track, that will be the first big step in quickly reaching our set goals in 2010 and in 2050.

Where our political leadership is concerned, many elected representatives do not keep themselves up-to-date in population matters; and some pay only lip service. They prefer to look for short cuts, and think that incentives and disincentives will deliver the goods. But such measures can have only a marginal effect, if at all, where family planning is concerned. They are difficult to administer services with fairness and as a consequence, poor people are the worst hit. When we ask people to practice family planning, we are asking them to recreate themselves. It’s not like buying toothpaste or a TV where they can take it or leave it. We have to open up situations where they really have choices and can be conscious of creating a new and better family and community lifestyle. It is not reasonable to expect people to adhere to the two-child family when their access is so limited to correct knowledge and quality services for safe motherhood, child survival and family planning. Even today, those who have 4 plus children constitute 28 per cent of eligible couples. To bring them to the two-
child level is a huge task for education, and good and accessible services. This means meeting unmet needs not only in family planning but in basic health, MCH and income generating opportunities.

**Training**

The Policy is the best statement we have got so far on our population and development challenges. The NPP 2000 has adopted new perspectives and horizons. It is obvious that the most strenuous and continuous efforts will have to be put into training, re-training and short refresher programmes for the many categories of the staff, manning the government and the non-governmental programmes. This will be a stimulating but not an easy task, since it would involve new subjects and approaches, and new attitudes towards clientele of diverse types. A new inspiration and enthusiasm are needed for working towards the comprehensive goals set. The many aspects of reproductive and sexual health cannot be handled in the old way by providing mere information and general exhortation, but require advocacy, counselling skills and personalized approaches of a higher order.

**The NGOs Sector**

The NPP 2000 has outlined an Operational Strategy for NGOs and in its very first point it strikes a rather pessimistic note for it states that, “There remain innumerable hurdles that inhibit genuine long-term collaboration between the government and non-government sectors. A forum of representatives from government, non-government organizations and the private sector may identify these hurdles and prepare guidelines that will facilitate and promote collaborative arrangements”. Its recommendation for a forum is very welcome. Such an exercise can help not only to remove inhibitions but also to set the whole area of non-governmental efforts on a higher and broader level. Many years ago, the idea had been mooted of having a Council of NGOs to help consolidate and expand this sector for promoting programmes, but the idea was later shelved on funding and other grounds.

In spite of the ‘innumerable hurdles’ referred to, the voluntary organizations have played a vital role in advocating and promoting family planning primarily to improve the health of women and children, and as an instrument for reducing the high rate of population growth. Voluntary effort in this sphere pre-dated the government programme and government has invited and received the cooperation of voluntary organizations in general. With 50 years of work, the Family Planning Association of India has become the leading organization on family planning and population matters. Not only has it developed its own activities; it has also tried to draw in other organizations to undertake programmes in this sphere. Thus, the role of voluntary organizations has been an abiding factor in the family planning programme. But it can be greatly enhanced.
The ‘innumerable hurdles’ the Policy mentions could be inhibitors both from the government as well as from the non-governmental side. I may mention that in 1979, I wrote a booklet setting out the roles that voluntary organizations could play and how other organizations of different types can be roped in to undertake the different facets of the family planning programme, and prepared a matrix to illustrate this. Much water has flown under the bridge since then and some of those ideas are now incorporated in practical programmes. We in FPAI, have pursued them assiduously. We have set up INENGODEP (Indian Network of NGOs for Development, Environment and Population) with a membership of about 2496 organisations that draws in various local organizations from all over the country to which we supply information. We have pioneered the Mother Unit Scheme. Our most effective action however, lies in the thousands of men’s and women’s Mandals that we have been able to set up, the majority being in villages, whose achievements have been quite extraordinary. The methodology we have worked out has shown the way to reach villages with visible success.

**Partnership**

The word ‘partnership’ has entered the field of government and non-governmental action. This ‘partnership’ is now acknowledged by the Government itself, but needs to be strengthened into a close, working arrangement. At the same time, NGOs have to show their own credentials of integrity, capacity, transparency and accountability, as indeed, many of them are doing. While in earlier times, organizations were mostly manned by volunteers assisted by support staff, most NGOs now have highly qualified executive staff and their numbers are increasing, whereas now volunteers are not coming forward as before, especially the young people. This needs attention by NGOs themselves. Do they want volunteers any more, or are they turning into non-profit corporations with a Board of Directors and staff-run organizations? Possibly, both types are needed. The year 2001 has been declared by UN as the year of the Volunteer. But we still do not know how this is helping to galvanise voluntary effort.

Meanwhile, the situation in many countries is demanding new heights of achievement from NGOs. Judging by their numbers, by their large attendances in thousands at UN and other international conferences, and their growing (and sometimes strident) advocacy, NGOs are now climbing into a category which I might even dare to call the Fifth Estate (the fourth being the media and the first three the instruments of governance and law in a country). But this must be taken not merely as an increase in power but in responsibility. NGOs in India must continue to show the way in bringing a true sense of devotion and service in all that they undertake.

In conclusion, we have, on the whole, a good National Population Policy before us. It is up to us all, to work strenuously to bring it to fulfillment with clear understanding, energy and dedication.