



Population Stabilization

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This article is based on **“What India needs for population stabilisation”** which was published in the Indian Express on 16/03/2021. It talks about the associated challenges with population stabilization.

National Population Policy, 2000 envisaged achieving a stable population for India. One of its immediate objectives is to address the unmet needs for contraception, health care infrastructure, and personnel and provide integrated service delivery for basic reproductive and child health care.

The National Population Policy 2000 affirmed a commitment to achieve replacement levels of fertility (total fertility rate of 2.1) by 2010. Most of the southern states have controlled their population. However, low socio-economic development in northern and central India has led to population explosion in these regions.

The population explosion would irreversibly impact India’s environment and natural resource base and limit the next generation’s entitlement and progress. Therefore, the government should take measures to control the population in time.

Need for Population Stabilization

- According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates, India’s population will reach 1.5 billion by 2030 and hit 1.64 billion in 2050. This would make India become the largest populous country, overtaking China.
- At present, India hosts 16% of the world’s population with only 2.45% of the global surface area and 4% water resources.
- Globally, the debate over population explosion has erupted after recent ecosystem assessments pointed to the human population’s role in driving other species into extinction and precipitating a resource crunch.

Associated Challenges With the Population Stabilization

- **Level of Education:** Lack of education in women results in their early marriages. Not only does early marriage increase the likelihood of more children, but it also puts the woman's health at risk.
 - Fertility usually declines with an increase in the education levels of women.
- **Socio-economic Factors:** The desire for larger families, particularly preference for a male child, also leads to higher birth rates.
 - One of the reasons for this son-preference is the inheritance law favoring women's rights to ancestral property is far from being implemented.
 - China is already facing a demographic catastrophe because its nearly four-decade-long one-child policy resulted in a strong son preference.
- **Inadequate Use of Contraceptive:** Women in rural areas of northern states like UP, Bihar are still giving birth to four or more children. This is because the contraceptive prevalence rate is less than 10%.
 - In many districts, women do not use modern family planning methods and rely on traditional contraception methods.
- **Emergence of Son of Soil Narrative:** Southern states that have achieved population stabilization now face the issue of the elderly will start outstripping the working-age population.
 - Initially, it was thought that younger people from the Central-Northern states might fill the growing gap in services.
 - However, with the emergence of growing resistance to people from northern states working in southern states, such prospects appear to be increasingly uncertain.
- **Politics of Population Stabilization:** The Constitution (84th Amendment) Act 2002, extended the freeze on the state-wise allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha to 2026. It was expected to serve as a motivational measure to pursue population stabilization.
 - However, this goal has not been achieved as the population in northern states continued to rise.
 - Now, in the absence of a further extension, it will be politically destabilizing.

Way Forward

- **Adopting Women-Centric Approach:** Population stabilization isn't only about controlling population growth but also entails gender parity. A balanced sex ratio is essential to secure social cohesion.
 - Therefore, the state needs a women-centric approach wherein they incentivize later marriages and childbirths, make contraception easy for women and promote women's labor force participation.

- **Switching to Modern Contraceptives:** Action to prevent unwanted pregnancies, particularly in northern states is urgently required. The over-reliance on traditional methods of contraception needs to be swiftly replaced with reliable and easy alternatives.
 - In this context, India can learn from its neighborhood. Indonesia and Bangladesh introduced injectable contraceptives right from the late 1980s.
 - Once executed properly, one jab renders protection from pregnancy for three months. ASHA workers can help immensely in this regard.
- **Emulating the Success of Southern States:** When fertility reduction in the five southern states succeeded, it overturns the conventional wisdom that literacy, education, and development are prerequisites for populations to stabilize.
 - The simple explanation is that fertility decline was achieved because southern governments proactively urged families to have only two children, followed by sterilization immediately after that.
 - Almost the entire state apparatus was marshaled to achieve this objective. The northern states need to adopt this approach.
 - Further, national and state policies emphasize male vasectomy which is much safer than female sterilization.

Conclusion

The population stabilization difference between the southern and northern states is becoming disproportionately skewed. In such a scenario, demographics will eclipse economic growth and destroy the gains from a young populace.

Thus, the long-term policy requires a stable population consistent with the requirements of sustainable economic growth, social development, and environmental protection.

Drishti Mains Question

Population explosion will lead to demographics eclipse economic growth and destroy the gains from a young populace. Discuss.
