

Global Population Growth and Nepal

HARKA GURUNG*

GLOBAL TREND

The trend of the nineteenth century thought was to postpone the danger of overpopulation from a present or nearby threat to one that might arise at some indefinite future time if population continued to increase.¹ A hundred years later to-day, rapid population growth is a problematic reality. In 1960, the world population was 3,037 million (Table 1). Nearly 70 percent of this was made up of the people from less developed regions. South Asia accounted for 28.9 percent. That we are now a humanity of 5 billion means a global population increase of 64.6 percent in 27 years.

UN assessment of 1980 estimates that the world population in 2000 will be 6,119 million or a doubling in 40 years.² The projection of increase during 1960-2000 under the medium variant is 131.7 percent for less developed regions and 136.6 percent for South Asia. However, the highest rates of increase projected for Africa and Latin America are 210.2 percent and 162.0 percent respectively. The World Bank projection of global population for 2000 A.D. has varied from 5,916 million³ to 6,357 million.⁴ The latter estimate assumes an increase of 35.5 percent during 1984-2000 (Table 2). Projected increase is highest for high-income oil exporting economies (73.7%) and lowest for the industrial market economy (7.6%). Low-income economies will have a population increase of 15.3 percent (Nepal; 18.8%) during the period 1984-2000.

Crude birth rate, total fertility rate and average annual growth rate of population will be very high for oil exporting economies and lowest in industrial market economies. The share of global population among countries grouped as economies will change only marginally. The low-income economies will continue to dominate in population size with 49.1 percent of the total projected. The share of industrial market economies will be 15.1 percent.

The inverse relationship between population growth and economic growth is evidenced as a general pattern. The World Bank listed 34 countries in 1978 and 36 countries in 1986 as low-income countries/economies. During the nine-year interval, three (Yemen A.R. Indonesia, Lesotho) were upgraded as middle-income and two (Senegal, Togo) were relegated to low-income from middle-income economy. Burkino Fasso and China are new entries among the low-income. Afghanistan, Bhutan, Chad, Kampuchea, Laos PDR, Mozambique and Vietnam have no GNP data in the WB

*Dr. Gurung is a distinguished scholar of Nepal. This article was presented in the seminar organised jointly by the National Population Commission/Nepal-CEDA on the occasion of the World Population reaching five billion.

list of basic indicators. Of the remaining 25 countries defined as low-income economies, 18 are from Africa, 6 from Asia and one from the Carribeans.

Among these, 9 rank high in increase in percent in per capita GNP, over 50.0 percent, during 1976-1984. These in intermediate range of increase, 24 to 46 percent, are seven countries including Nepal. The remaining 9 ranked low with per capita GNP increase of less than 19 percent. Of the 9 ranked high in GNP growth, 6 (Guinea, Sri Lanka, India, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Burma) had low population growth, below 21 percent during 1976-84. Of the 9 ranked low in GNP growth, 4 (Niger, Tanzania, Central A.R., Ethiopia) had high population growth, exceeding 32 percent. Nepal and Mali were in the median range both in GNP growth and population increase.

REGIONAL CONTRIBUTION

UN data show East Asia and South Asia with a share of 55.7 percent of world population in 1960. Their share increased to 58.2 percent in 1980 (Table 1). In 1965, the ESCAP countries had a total population of 1,798 million (Table 3). This was distributed as 42.4 percent in East Asia (including China), 37.0 percent in South Asia, 13.8 percent in South East Asia and 0.2 percent in the Pacific. Although average annual growth rates declined in all regions, ESCAP had a population increase of 50.8 percent during 1965-85. The total population for 1985 was 2,711 million. South Asia recorded the highest increase (59.2%) and East Asia the lowest (45.5%). The 1985 ESCAP population was distributed as 40.9 percent in East Asia, 39.1 percent in South Asia, 14.5 percent in South-East Asia and 0.2 percent in the Pacific.

Average annual growth rate of population of South Asia was 2.42 percent during 1965-75 and 2.16 percent in 1985 (Table 3). During 1965-75, this ranged from 2.0 percent (Bhutan) to 3.05 percent (Maldives). In 1985, it varied from 1.64 percent (Sri Lanka) to 3.7 percent (Maldives). As a general pattern in South Asia, countries with pre-dominantly Muslim population had higher growth rates, while Buddhist countries had the lowest. Of the 1985 population of 1,059 million in South Asia, 94.2 percent was within the seven SAARC countries. These range from 7.62 million for India (72.0%) to mere 183,000 persons for Mali among the South Asian countries. Among SAARC countries, average annual growth rate was high for Pakistan (2.9%) and Nepal (2.6%) and low for Sri Lanka (1.8%) and Bhutan (1.9%).

One of the expressions of overpopulation in South Asia is the increasing volume of international labour migration. During the period 1976-82, labour migrants to Middle East from countries in the region increased nearly ten-fold (Table 4). The increases were 118.8 times for Sri Lanka, 57 times for India, 11.2 times for Bangladesh and 2.4 times for Pakistan. Of the 507,176 such labour migrants, 47.2 percent were from India and 28.2 percent from Pakistan. The four countries claimed a total remittance of \$ 4,014 million. Such remittance as percent of merchandise export ranged from 12.7 percent (Sri Lanka) to 69.9 percent (Pakistan). The share of remittance to GDP varied from 1.1 percent for India to 8.8 percent for Pakistan.

The most pervasive image of Asia is one of teeming, ever-expanding masses of people. With six of the ten most populous countries in the world, it claims 56 percent of the world's 4.8 billion total population.⁶

THE NEPALESE CASE

Among the 37 countries listed as low-income economies⁷ for 1985, Nepal ranks 27th in territorial extent and 16th in population size. Among 163 countries with comparable per capita GNP data, Nepal has fourth place from the bottom but ranks 44th out of 184 countries in population size.⁸

The population of Nepal increased 77.3 percent in less than three decades 1952/54-81 (Table 5). There were 46.5 more persons per square kilometres in 1981 than in 1952/54. In 1952/54, regional distribution of population was 60.4 percent in mountain/hill, 28.8 percent in the tarai, 5.9 percent in inner tarai and 4.9 percent in Kathmandu valley. By 1981, the share of the tarai had increased to 40.1 percent while that of mountain/hill declined to 46.2. Density increase of additional persons per square kilometres during 1952/54-81 was 390 in Kathmandu valley, 124.3 in the tarai, 53.5 in inner tarai and 17.8 in mountain/hill region. Population increase during the above period was much higher in the lowlands: 157.6 percent in inner tarai and 146.8 percent in the tarai. The highlands made-up of the mountain and hill had an increase of 35.7 percent. Population growth was particularly high in the western lowlands, 3.5 times increase in western tarai and western inner tarai. Average annual growth rate in the last decade, 1971-81, shows increasing rate with decreasing elevation. Thus, the growth rate by region was 1.14 percent in the mountain, 1.48 percent in the hill, 2.35 percent in the capital region, 3.48 percent in inner tarai and 4.16 percent in the tarai compared to the national growth rate of 2.86 percent.

In the past, outmigration from the highlands was directed mostly outside the country (72.5% in 1952/54). Since the late 1950's, malaria control in the lowlands has opened a new frontier attracting the migrants within the country. The volume of inter-regional migrants more than doubled during the last decade. In 1981, those reported outside the country were 402,977 and inter-regional migrants within the country 1,038,862. Over 60 percent of inter-regional migrants originated in the hill and another 30.3 percent in the mountain. Most were destined to the lowlands through migration of colonization. In the last three decades (1952/54-81), the lowlands gained 4.4 million persons through natural increase, internal migration and immigration. Nepal is becoming a mountain country inhabited predominantly by lowland population.

In contrast to the rapid increase in size, the improvements in quality of population have been modest. The labour force structure still remains predominantly agricultural in a country with poor land resource. Of the total labour force (10 years age and above), 93.8 percent in 1961, 93.7 percent in 1971 and 90.4 percent in 1981 was engaged primarily in agriculture. Roughly speaking persons per cultivated hectares of land comes to 6.2 for the highlands and 4.9 for the lowlands. The literacy rate as percent of population literate to total population was 13.9 in

1971 and 23.3 percent in 1981. The low level of literacy, particularly among women (3.9% in 1971 and 12% in 1981) acts as a major impediment to dissemination of birth control measures. Thus Nepal has a low ranking in demographic indicators as compared to other SAARC countries.⁹ Nepal, along with Bhutan, has the highest crude birth rate, highest infant mortality rate and highest child death rate. Nepal has the highest total fertility rate and ranks second in crude death rate, life expectancy at birth and average annual growth rate within the SAARC region.

POLICY ISSUES

Population dynamics has three important parameters, fertility, mortality and migration. In the Nepalese case, policy formulation regarding these aspects indicate a divergent approach and different sequence. Malaria control since mid-1950's and subsequent expansion in health services, have contributed to significant decline in mortality level. Malaria eradication in the lowland also had a dramatic impact on migration pattern. Thus, the early three plans were resettlement oriented. Family planning was initiated in the mid-1960's and has been receiving increasing emphasis.

1. Birth Control

The present population policy (NPC) and major strategic thrusts (NCP) both give high priority to birth or fertility control measures. In fact, scrutiny of population activities included in the Seventh Plan tend to equate family planning with population control. The much expanded family planning services had, however, negligible impact in checking population increase due firstly, to low coverage and secondly to the neglect of the migration aspect as a concrete programme. Nepal still needs tremendous efforts to reach the comparative level of the SAARC countries in fertility control.

2. Immigration Control

NPC development plan and NCP strategy both refer to "control of the steadily increasing immigration into the country" as one of the five population policy measures. But there are no programmes and targets. In fact, official statistical sources either consider negligible or ignore the effect of net international migration on population growth.¹⁰ The 1981 census, presents an unusual situation of more foreign citizens (483,019) than the foreign born (234,039). Again nearly two-third of the foreign citizens are classified not under the potential countries but as 'others/unstated' (Table 6). On the other hand estimate based on intercensal cohort component method yields 369,033 as the volume of migration from outside the country within the last decade. This represents 2.5 percent of the total population.¹¹ Thus, any population control measure must include specific programs and targets regarding control of immigration.

3. Employment

Population growth has a direct impact on the employment status of the people. The extent of unemployment and underemployment remains an unknown quantity just as immigration statistics have been ignored. The

Table 1
World Population Increase, Medium Variant, 1960-2000

Geographic Area	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	Increase 1960-2000	Percent
<u>World Total</u>	3037	3695	4432	5242	6119	3082	101.5
More Developed Regions	945	1047	1131	1206	1272	327	34.6
Less Developed Regions	2092	2648	3301	4036	4847	2755	131.7
Africa	275	355	470	635	853	578	210.2
Latin America	216	283	364	459	566	350	162.0
Northern America	199	226	248	274	299	100	50.3
East Asia	816	991	1175	1327	1475	659	80.6
South Asia	877	1116	1404	1731	2075	1198	136.6
Europe	425	459	484	499	512	87	20.5
Oceania	16	19	23	26	30	14	87.5
USSR	214	242	265	290	310	96	14.9

Source: UN, World Population Trends and Policies, Vol. I, Table 2, Results as assessed in 1980.

Table 2
World Demography and Population Projection

Economies	No. of countries	CBR Per 1000		TFR	Average Annual Growth (%)		Projected Population (Millions)				Percent increase 1964-2000						
		1965	1984		1965-1973	1973-1984	1984	% 1990	% 2000	%							
I. Low-income	36	43	29	17	11	3.9	3.0	2.6	2.0	1.8	2364	50.4	2461	49.1	3132	49.3	15.3
	Nepal	(46)	(43)	(24)	(18)	(6.3)	(5.3)	(2.0)	(2.6)	(2.6)	(16)	(19)	(24)				(18.8)
II. Lower middle	40	45	36	18	11	4.8	3.6	2.5	2.5	2.3	688	14.7	796	15.9	994	15.6	44.5
III. Upper middle	20	37	30	12	8	4.0	2.9	2.4	2.3	1.9	497	10.6	566	11.3	679	10.7	36.6
IV. High-income Oil exporters	5	49	42	19	8	6.9	5.1	4.5	5.1	3.7	19	0.4	24	0.5	33	0.5	73.7
V. Industrial market	19	19	14	10	9	1.8	2.0	1.0	0.7	0.5	733	15.6	755	15.1	789	12.4	7.6
VI. East European non-market	8	18	19	8	11	2.3	2.1	0.8	0.8	0.6	389	8.3	406	8.1	430	6.8	10.5
Total	128										4690	100.0	5008	100.0	6357	100.0	35.5

Source: The World Bank, World Development Report 1986, Annex Tables 25 and 26.

Table 3
ESCAP Region, Size and Growth of Population, 1965-85

Group/Country	Total Population (in '000)			Average Annual Growth Rate (%)	
	1965	1975	1985	1965-75	1985
ESCAP*	1798,343	2274,234	2711,856	2.35	1.68
East Asia	761,942	969,892	1108,055	2.44	1.32
South-East Asia	248,612	317,543	392,650	2.48	2.00
Pacific	3,272	4,172	5,095	2.46	2.14
South Asia	665,428	847,379	1059,030	2.42	2.16
<u>S.A. Countries</u>					
Afghanistan	11,115	14,038	16,519	2.33	2.26
Bangladesh** M	58,373	76,581	1011,147	2.71	2.68
Bhutan** B	949	1,159	1,417	2.00	2.03
India** H	491,435	620,654	762,065	2.33	1.99
Iran M	24,676	33,344	44,632	3.01	2.83
Maldives** M	98	133	183	3.05	3.70
Nepal** H	10,343	13,000	16,482	2.29	2.31
Pakistan** M	57,211	74,734	100,380	2.67	2.71
Sri Lanka** H	11,225	13,734	16,205	2.05	1.64

* Including Australia, Japan and New Zealand.

**SAARC Countries.

Source: ESCAP, Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 1986,
 Table II.3.

Table 4
Selected South Asian Countries; Labour Migration and Remittance

	Labour Migrants to Middle East			Remittance from Labour Migrants			
	1976	1982	Increase		Total (\$ Million)	As % of Merchandise Export	As % of GDP
			Number	Times			
Bangladesh	5,559	62,186	60,641	11.2	377	53.0	3.4
India	4,200	239,545	235,345	57.0	1,600	19.9	1.1
Pakistan	41,690	142,945	101,255	2.4	1,900	69.9	8.8
Sri Lanka	526	62,500	61,974	118.8	137	12.7	3.6
Total	51,915	507,176	455,201	9.8	4,014		

Source: East-West Center, Asia-Pacific Report: Trends, Issues, Challenges 1986, Tables.

Table 5
Change in Percentage of Population and Population Density by Region, 1952/54-1981

Region	1952-54			1981			Change 1952/54-1981			
	Population	Percent	Density	Population	Percent	Density	Population (Percentage)	Density (Persons/Km ²)	Increase in Density (Persons/Km ²)	
<u>Mountain/Hill</u>										
Eastern	5,117,292	60.4	49.8	6,946,549	46.2	67.6	35.7	17.8		
Central	1,732,450	20.4	64.5	2,287,173	15.2	85.3	32.0	20.7		
Western	1,859,066	21.9	64.7	2,647,508	17.6	92.2	32.4	27.4		
	1,525,776	18.0	32.3	2,011,868	13.4	42.5	31.9	10.3		
<u>Kathmandu Valley</u>										
	415,761	4.9	462.5	766,345	5.1	852.4	84.3	390.0		
<u>Inner Tarai</u>										
	496,551	5.9	34.0	1,279,081	8.5	87.6	157.6	53.5		
Eastern	191,170	2.3	42.0	343,510	2.3	75.4	79.7	33.3		
Central	180,214	2.1	38.8	502,982	3.4	108.3	179.1	69.5		
Western	124,767	1.5	23.1	432,589	2.9	80.0	246.7	56.9		
<u>Tarai</u>										
	2,443,874	28.8	84.7	6,030,864	40.1	209.1	146.8	124.3		
Eastern	1,843,740	21.8	128.2	4,241,652	28.1	295.0	130.1	166.8		
Central	364,791	4.3	69.4	959,969	6.4	182.1	162.6	112.8		
Western	235,343	2.8	25.6	831,243	5.5	90.3	253.2	64.7		
<u>Nepal</u>										
	8,473,478	100	55.6	15,022,839	100	102.0	77.3	46.5		

In the report of 1952/54 census (Statistics Department, 1957), Sindhuli district (102,261) is included in Eastern Inner Tarai in Table 3 but excluded in Table 4. In the west, Dang and Deukhuri are listed as Western Inner Tarai in Table 3 but are included in Western Hill in Table 4. The population of Surkhet (included in Western Hill) then was 34,939.

Table 6.
Change in Foreign Born and Foreign Citizens

Country	1961				1981				Change %	
	Foreign Born		Foreign Citizen		Foreign Born		Foreign Citizen		Foreign Born	Foreign Citizen
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	%	%
1. India	324,159	96.0	76,311	69.3	222,278	95.0	116,555	24.1	-31.4	+52.7
2. China	8,061	2.4	7,484	6.8	2,481	1.1	7,678	1.6	-69.2	+ 2.6
3. All Other/ Unstated (1981)	5,400	1.6	26,266	23.7	9,280	4.0	358,586	74.2	+71.9	+1,266
Total	337,620	100.0	110,061	100.0	234,039	100.0	483,019	100.0	-30.7	+338.9

Source: Censuses of Nepal.

1981 census reports 65 percent of the total population over 10 years of age as economically active. The 1976-77 survey of employment, income and consumption on the other hand gives only 5.57 percent for rural and 5.98 percent as unemployed.¹² The same survey, however, reports unutilized working days in a year to be as high as 44.6 percent in urban and 63 percent in rural areas.

The fulfillment of the basic minimum needs actually means full employment whereby the identified sectoral needs are within the reach of all. It implies more economic activity, more jobs and job protection. It, therefore, comes as an anticlimax when the government reports that Nepalese as well as non-Nepalese workers of 120 organized institutes have been recently distributed identity cards and work permits. Globally speaking, Nepal must be the only unique country where the natives require permit for working.

FOOTNOTES

1. E.P. Hutchison, The Population Debate: The Development of Conflicting Theories up to 1900 (New York: 1967), p. 401.
2. UN, World Population Trends and Policies (New York: 1982), Vol. I, Table 2.
3. The World Bank, World Development Report, 1978 (Washington: 1978).
4. The World Bank, World Development Report, 1986 (Washington: 1986).
5. ESCAP, Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, 1986 (Bangkok: 1987), p. 104.
6. East-West Center, Asia-Pacific Report: Trends, Issues, Challenges, 1986 (Honolulu: 1986), p. 47.
7. The World Bank, The World Development Report, 1987 (Washington: 1987).
8. The World Bank, The World Population Atlas, 1986 (Washington: 1986).
9. Harka Gurung, Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Nepal, (Draft for UNICEF), March 1987, Table 6.
10. CBS, Population Monograph of Nepal (Kathmandu: 1987), p. 12-13.
11. A large-scale household (5600) survey in 1983 showed that immigrants constituted 6.9 percent of the total population in the tarai. Vide NCP, Internal and International Migration in Nepal, 5 parts (Kathmandu: 1983).
12. NPC, A Survey of Employment, Income Distribution and Consumption Patterns in Nepal (Kathmandu: 1983), p. 54 and 59.