

Population Policy in Nepal: A Multi Sectoral Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, any policy attempting to influence demographic variables such as size, growth, distribution of population of any country can be termed as population policy. The intention of population policy is either to encourage or discourage population growth through the manipulation of demographic variables such as fertility, mortality and migration. In addition, it may also aim to systematize population distribution through the adoption of various measures pertaining to internal migration and human settlement patterns. The type of population policy adopted by any nation depends on the nature of its population problem and the extent of difficulty it poses to the socio-economic development efforts of the society. Most of the developed countries either do not have explicit population policies or if they do, they are primarily directed towards ageing and inducing population growth. On the other hand, a majority of the developing countries of the world have by now adopted population policies, which are mostly directed towards regulating rapid population growth, systematizing urban and rural settlements to achieve more balanced population distribution and containing in migration from other nations.

Since any population policy is adopted in response to rising population problem, this paper will first briefly highlight global and domestic population problem. Then present a quick overview of the historical development of population policy in Nepal, placing much greater focus on the discussion of the multi-sectoral approach adopted by HMG after 1983.

GLOBAL POPULATION GROWTH

Attaining a better quality of life through bountiful supply of food and improved employment opportunities has been a major pre-occupation of the human species since its appearance million years ago. While hunting and gathering initiated the saga of his struggles towards the goal, the invention of fire followed by domestication of animals and establishment of permanent agriculture enabled him to breakaway from the uncertain food and work situations of the past to a more assured future.

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With the introduction of agriculture, the human population began to multiply relatively rapidly. The "hunting-and-gathering culture" of 8 million people just preceding the agricultural era 10,000 years ago (i.e. 8000 B.C.) reached 300 million by 1 A.D. 800 million by 1750 and 1 billion by 1800. The average annual rate of growth of 0.036 percent between 8000 B.C. and 1 A.D., and that of 0.056 percent between 1 A.D. and 1750, jumped to 0.44 percent per annum between 1750 and 1800. This period of historically rapid population growth led Malthus to propose a dichotomy of an unwinnable race between an exponentially growing population and the linearly expanding capacity of the earth to sustain the increasing numbers. However, the rapid improvement in the standard of living of the people of now developed countries resulting from industrial revolutions gave a big jolt to the pessimistic Malthusian predictions. The countries now classified as the LDCs were experiencing slow population growth characterized by the inefficient regime of high births and deaths, and were mostly under colonial rule to receive much attention. Consequently, the population resource debate fizzled away for almost one and a half centuries.

During the first half of the Twentieth Century, the human population grew at an average annual rate of 0.79 percent and reached 2.5 billion in 1950. It has now passed the 5 billion mark following the unprecedented global growth rate of over 1.9 percent during the last three decades, mainly due to increases in the LDCs. According to UNFPA, the world population is now increasing at the rate of 150 persons per minute, 220 thousands per day and over 80 million per year. The world population is projected to reach 6.1 billion by the year 2000 and 9 billion in the latter part of the 21st century. It is expected to stabilize only after reaching 10.2 billion in the early part of the 22nd century. This unprecedented modern acceleration in population has intensely renewed the debate concerning the capacity of agricultural, environmental and resource systems to sustain the increasing masses.

The modern population acceleration has three main features. (1) Almost 90 percent of the increase in population has occurred in the LDCs, raising their population share from 67 percent in 1950 to 74 percent in 1980, (2) The population growth in most MDCs is below replacement level, and it is falling in many middle income LDCs. But the growth rates are high and even rising in many poorer nations in Africa and Asia and (3) Even though food production has surpassed population growth at the global level, but many of these poor countries have lagged behind. The current levels of farm innovation in these countries are quite low to quickly boost agricultural production and employment to satisfy the fast rising demand resulting from rapid population growth.

POPULATION IN NEPAL

The population of Nepal was 5.6 million in 1911 and changed very little during the following four decades. The death rate gradually fell from about 37 per 1000 in the 1950s to 19 in the 1980s, whereas the total fertility (6.3) rate and birth rates (43 per 1000) remained stable leading to a rapid population increase from 8.2 million in 1952/54 to 15 million in 1981. Currently, over 41 percent of the population is below 15 years of age and is growing younger due to high fertility and declining

mortality. The population doubling time has declined from 60 years to 26 years between 1911 and 1971. The population momentum built in the young age-structure is so strong that the population will reach 20.8 million by the year 2000 even if the replacement level fertility (2.5) is attained by the same year and it would stabilize only after reaching 29 million by the year 2030. If the present trend continues, the population of Nepal may exceed 26 million by the year 2000 and may not stabilize even after reaching 70 million in the next century.

The growth, density and distribution of population among the three geographical regions-mountains, hills and terai - are not uniform. The rugged and inaccessible mountain region contains over a third of the total area and 8.6 percent of the total population. The more accessible and fertile terai (plains) with 23 percent of the total area shelters 43.7 percent of the population. The mid-hills with 42 percent total accommodates 47.7 percent of the total population. The population density on cultivated land is extremely high in the mountains and hills relative to the terai.

Increased population pressure and deteriorating economy in the hills and mountains have led to increased flow of migrants from the hills and mountains to the terai. Immigration from neighbouring countries to the terai has also increased in recent years. Consequently, population growth rates are much higher (4.1 percent) in the terai and hills (1.6 percent) and mountains (1.4 percent). The population share of the terai has also increased over the years and is expected to reach 53 percent by the year 2000.

Rapid population growth, imbalanced population distribution, slow economic growth and deteriorating economic and environmental systems of the hills and mountains are the major problems facing Nepal today. Whether this mountainous, subsistent and landlocked nation can feed and employ a rapidly growing population has emerged as a key question.

POPULATION POLICY IN NEPAL

The population growth in Nepal, thus, maintained a sluggish pace through the 1940s. It began to pick up in the 1950s and started to accelerate after 1960s. Consequently, the first and the Second Five Year Development Plans of HMGs did not pay much attention to the population issues. The initiation of the Rapti Multipurpose Project to increase the settlement of people in malaria eradicated areas on a pilot scale comes close to being the only population policy adopted during these plan periods by the Government. However, the onset of the problem of population growth was realised by some private citizens as early as 1959 when the Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) was established. The FPAN initiated the process of family planning service delivery in a limited scale soon after its inception.

The government was not involved in family planning programme until 1965 (Third Plan), when it attempted to deliver FP services as part of the maternal and child health programme under the Directorate of Health Services. Under the health policy, the plan also set a long term target

of reducing infant mortality rate from 244 in 1961 to 80.2 by the year 1980, and raising the life expectancy of the people from 32 years (1961) to 42 years (1980) during the same period. It also emphasized on the need to control immigration, systematization of internal migration, establishment of small towns in regions without major urban centres to encourage urbanisation. This effort was considered inadequate to handle increasing population pressure and the Nepal Family Planning/Maternal Child Health Project (FP/MCH) was created under the Ministry of Health in 1968 to more effectively deliver FP services.

The Fourth Plan (1970-75) emphasized the need to reduce the high birth rates prevailing in the country and also set the target of increasing the number of FP clinics to 260 to strengthen and expand FP delivery services in 40 districts of the country. In 1975, the government adopted an official population policy and incorporated it in the Fifth Plan (1975-80) with the objective of regulating temporal and spatial population growth and distribution. It set a target of reducing the crude birth rate (CBR) from estimate 40 to 38 per thousand and child-infant mortality from 200 to 150 per thousand. As is clear by now that the approach to population problem upto the Fourth Plan was sectoral and the agencies mainly responsible were those concerned with health or family planning activities. The policy coverage of the Fifth Plan was much more broader relative to the previous plans but not yet quite comprehensive and multi-sectoral.

The National Commission on Population (NCP) was constituted in 1978 under the Chairmanship of the Rt. Honourable Prime Minister to better formulate and coordinate population policies and programmes in areas such as migration and citizenship, family planning, population education, and legal aspects. Before it could make any significant contribution to the policy development, the Commission was downgraded to the Population Division of the National Planning Commission (NPC) in 1980. Nonetheless, the NCP incorporated a chapter on population policy in the Sixth Plan (1980-85) building on and broadening the enunciated population policy of the Fifth Plan. The most important feature of the population policy under the Sixth Plan was to analyze the necessity to regulate rapid population growth in the context of the need of the nation to fulfil basic minimum needs of the people and raise their standard of living in a stipulated period. It also emphasized on the need of focus on the delivery of FP services on younger couples, on more densely populated regions and on high fertility rural families. It also recognized the necessity of strengthening and expanding population education and FP follow-up services. While these improvements represented appropriate steps towards the development of a comprehensive population policy and programmes, it was realised that a strong organization was needed to effectively formulated and coordinate a multi-sectoral population strategy and programmes to achieve desired population objectives. Consequently, the National Commission on Population was reconstituted in March 1982 under the Chairmanship of the Rt. Honourable Prime Minister with a fulltime Vice-Chairman and a Secretary.

NEED FOR A MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH

Rapid population growth is a national problem. It influences the achievement of stipulated objectives of all development sectors and is also influenced by changes in these socio-economic fields. For example, the aim of agricultural development is to produce enough crop and live-stock products to provide a balanced diet to the people. The pace at which this objective can be attained heavily depends on population growth. On the other hand, a well nourished population tends to have lower mortality and consequently lower fertility and lower population growth. This two-way inter-relationship between population and development sectors dictates that population programmes be intergrated with development activities to rapidly achieve the national development objectives of providing basic minimum needs to all people and raising their standard of living at the earliest possible time.

While the rationale for integrating population and development programmes probably offers sufficient justification for adopting a multi-sectoral approach to population problem, there are three other considerations that reinforce the need for such a population strategy in Nepal.

The first factor is the rugged and inaccessible topography, which makes it almost impossible for any one or two agencies to reach a majority of people with population messages and family planning services at least in this early stage of infrastructural development. The use of a vast majority of field workers engaged in various developmental activities to deliver population - development information and possibly, temporary FP methods in an integrated fashion can greatly alleviate the problem of reaching the masses scattered across the hills, mountains and other less accessible areas.

Secondly, the literacy rate in Nepal in general, and its rural areas in particular is very low. A great variation exists in the dialects spoken by the members of various communities. In such circumstances the most effective way of communicating messages to the people concerning the consequences of rapid population growth and methods available for regulating family size is a face-to-face communication. Such a communication in a broad scale is possible only through the effective mobilization of a large number of governmental as well as non-governmental workers engaged in various development activities throughout the country.

Lastly, the success of population programmes to promote small family norm leading to reduction in population growth hinges on two factors. Firstly, it depends on the ability of such programmes to create awareness among a mamajority of the people about the consequences of rapid population growth and proper ways to regulate it. Then, it depends on its capacity to promptly offer appropriate and quality family planning and MCH services to these motivated people. Without a prompt and appropriate linkage between population education, and family planning and MCH service delivery systems, the desired population targets can hardly be expected to be realised in a stipulated period.

The field workers of a number of development agencies which are or will be engaged in population education activities in the future can play a crucial role in establishing this linkage in a broad scale in two ways. First, they may begin to undertake the delivery of some appropriate temporary methods of family planning themselves in some suitable time in the future with the help of FP service delivery agencies. Secondly, they may promptly relay messages concerning the demand for family planning services that exists in areas of their operation to the appropriate service delivery agencies.

MULTI-SECTORAL POPULATION STRATEGY

As was discussed earlier, a comprehensive and multi-sectoral population strategy is necessary to arrest the ever accelerating population growth and to rapidly attain the national development objectives. Which population programmes are mistakenly perceived as family planning activities alone, be many, a comprehensive and multi-sectoral population strategy should encompass the following:

- i. population and family welfare education,
- ii. family planning (FP) and maternal child health (MCH) services, and
- iii. proper linkage with skill development and income generating development activities generally termed as "Beyond Family Planning" programmes in the population literature.

A widespread and effective population and family welfare education is crucial for creating awareness among the people about the causes and consequences of rapid population growth and ways to regulate it so that they become motivated to willingly accept the small family norm. The provision of a quality FP and MCH services increases their confidence that their child will service in addition to providing them with means to attain desired family size. Nonetheless, even the well motivated individuals with access to FP services may not change his behaviour if earning minimum subsistence depends on additional hands or economic benefits of children to their parents are quite high relative of their costs. The availability of basic necessities such as fuel, drinking water etc. in their own proximity and improvement in their socio-economic status reduces demand for larger family size. Consequently, the integration of population concerns with "beyond family planning" or skill development and income generating activities is also important.

National Population Strategy

Given the ever increasing seriousness of the population problem and predominantly sectoral approach purposes in the past, the NCP in January 1983. Consequently, with the objective of attaining minimum possible growth in future, specific periodic fertility targets were set and five strategic thrusts were specified to achieve it. The total fertility rate (TFR) of 6.3 (in 1981) is targeted to be reduced to the replacement level fertility of 2.5 by the year 2000 and the average annual rate of growth

of population is targeted to be reduced from 2.7 percent to 1.2 percent by the same year (Table 2). These targets are quite ambitious and will require a great concerted efforts from all sectors if these are really to be achieved in the next 15 years. Nonetheless, it is evident from Table 2 that the population of Nepal will have reached 20.6 million by the year 2000 adding 5.6 million more mouths to be fed in the 20 years following 1981 even upon reduction of fertility to the targeted level. However, the concern facing us immediately is to work towards achieving the set targets, for which the National Strategy has specified the following five strategic thrusts (NCP, 1983):

Table 2: Fertility Targets During 1985-2000

Year	TFR	Projected Population (millions)	Annual Growth Rate (Percent)
1985	5.8	16.3	2.2
1990	4.0	17.9	1.9
1995		19.4	1.6
2000		20.6	1.2

Source: NCP, National Population Strategy, 1983.

1. "Accord high priority for fulfillment of the current substantial unmet demand for family planning services."
2. "Integrate population programmes in all projects relating to environment, forestry, agriculture, and rural development."
3. "Emphasise programmes that help increase the status of women, female education and employment."
4. "Effect mobilization of local panchayats, class organizations and NGO's in view of the enormously important role of local communities, in all population and fertility reduction programmes."
5. "Control the steadily increasing immigration into the country."

Many of these thrusts have already been included in the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-89) along with the specific programmes based on these thrusts.

To strengthen the process of formulation, implementation and coordination of population programmes under various governmental and non-governmental organisations, six working groups, chaired by secretaries of key ministries, and comprising senior staff of NCP and senior representatives of concerned line agencies, have been already formed:

1. Working Group on Agriculture, Cooperative and Population (Chairman: Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture).

2. Working Group on Forest, Environment and Population (Chairman: Secretary, Ministry of Forest and Watershed Management).
3. Working Group on Panchayat, Class Organization, Women and Population (Chairman: Secretary, Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development).
4. Working Group on Family Planning (Chairman: Secretary, Ministry of Health).
5. Working Group on Information, Communication and Education (Chairman: Secretary, National Commission on Population).
6. Working Group on Population Education (Chairman: Secretary, Ministry of Education and Culture).

These working groups have already met a number of times in the past and will continue to do so in the future to help implement the strategy. The effective formulation, implementation and coordination of such integrated and multi-sectoral programme of long term nature requires that population planning units be institutionalized in all key development agencies. However, institutionalization of programme planning is a difficult, time consuming and expensive process and cannot be introduced in all line agencies at a time. Consequently, it has been decided by HMG that such population units will be established in the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development, and the Ministry of Forest and Watershed, Management on a priority basis. Instructions to this effect have already been sent to the concerned line ministries and they have already designated contact persons responsible for dealing with population programmes under their ministries. Fully staffed population units are expected to be established in the due course of time.

MULTI-SECTORAL POPULATION PROGRAMMES

In view of the need for a multi-sectoral approach to population problem, a number of population programmes have been already formulated and are under implementation through various governmental and non-governmental agencies such as Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Development Bank, Ministry of Education, Department of Labour, Tribhuvan University, Ministry of Health, Family Planning Association, Department of Village and Cottage Industries, Ministry of Forests and Watershed Management, Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development, Business and Professional Women's Club, Social Service National Coordination Council etc. While a discussion of all these programmes under many agencies is not possible here, a brief highlight of some such programmes is presented below.

Family planning and maternal child health services in addition to motivational activities are carried out by the Family Planning and Maternal Child Health Project, FPAN, and ICHSDP. To increase the availability of temporary contraceptive the Contraceptive Retail Sales Co. (CRS) has been established. To increase the demand for permanent family planning practices, incentives such as provision of Rs. 100/- (wage compensation) to every individual undergoing sterilization has been begun to be made since last year. Regular provision of FP services have been

introduced in the Royal Nepal Army, Nepal Police, industrial districts and corporations.

Population education components are introduced into agricultural extension, training and information activities with the objective of disseminating integrated population-agricultural messages to the farmers. Appropriate curriculum and training materials are being developed to train existing staff of the Department of Agriculture on population issues and population components have already been incorporated into the JTA training programme of the Agricultural Campus to develop necessary trained field level manpower for the future. Similar population education components are also integrated into the skill development activities of the Small Farmer Development Project of the ADBN. Population education has also been integrated into the skill development activities of the Department of Village and Cottage Industries. Some women participants trained by the department have also been provided with technical and financial assistance to initiate income generating activities.

The distribution of temporary means of FP are being introduced into the population education activities carried out by the Department of cooperatives, and the Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development.

Materials are being prepared to incorporate population issues in the text books of schools. Population education is being gradually incorporated into adult education and teachers' training programme of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The schools that make special efforts to enroll female students are going to be awarded cash prizes and shields.

To determine the practical ways of integrating population education and FP and MCH services with development activities an action-cum-research project is being implemented in the Narayani Irrigation Project and the Phewatal Watershed Management Project.

Population components are also planned to be incorporated into community forestry, forest training center, IRDPs and many environmental protection project.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While various population programmes are under implementation under various line agencies, they need to be further strengthened, expanded and fully institutionalized if they are to succeed in attaining the set population education, population development integration, and women development activities are implemented under donor support and in an ad hoc project basis. The FPMCH delivery system is yet to be fully institutionalized at the regional, district and grass root level. The involvement of NGO's and community participation in population programmes is yet at a very modest scale. Urbanisation, rural settlement, internal and international migration policies have yet to be adequately developed and implemented. Nonetheless, a multisectoral population policy and programme is now in place in Nepal. If it is implemented properly in the next 13 years by taking care of various problems that crop up in the process there is a hope that Nepal can reduce the pace of population growth in the future.

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