

Population Policies and Programmes in India: Reviewing the Realities

Media Dialogue on the Eve of the World Population Day

10.00 am – 1.30 pm, 10th July, 2013

Venue – India Women’s Press Corps, 5, Windsor Place, Ashoka Road, N Delhi

Population issues in India have yet again become important issues of discussion in the media as the **World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision** report includes among its notable findings that India’s population will surpass that of China around 2028. In New Delhi, the gate of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences and that of Nirman Bhawan where the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare are headquartered, have digital clocks which rapidly tick the estimated population of India at any point in time, indicating that this number continues to be an important concern for the health policy-makers. This news has found a ready resonance in the media, not only in India, but in many countries around the world.

Television commentators have also taken this opportunity to raise the issue of population ‘explosion’, a long standing debate which seems to be forever confused between opinions and evidence. Reports carrying news of this nature tend to carry stereotypical visuals of crowds, or poverty.

Programming around ‘population’ has been dominated by desire to use incentives and disincentives, such as rating government functionaries’ performance on family planning parameters. This leads to ‘targetitis’ which includes over-reporting of performance indicators and arbitrary punishments for functionaries. However a new perspective of looking at population issues emerged after the global consensus at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. The Government of India was prompt in indicating its willingness to adopt an approach which promoted reproductive rights through voluntary informed choice in the matter of contraceptive use. This was clearly reflected in the National Population Policy in 2000. Through the orders of the Hon’ble Supreme Court in 2005 (in the Ramakant Rai and others vs Union of India case) quality standards for family planning were made mandatory along with compensation to women who suffered complications or repeat pregnancies. These mechanisms were incorporated within the NRHM as well as through the Family Planning Insurance Scheme.

While the country made rapid economic progress and policy changes, school text books continued to depict population as the problem behind under-development, which perpetuates the ‘population explosion’ stereotype of the past. In the recent past states with relatively poorer development indicators like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh started aggressive Family Planning programmes. Bihar introduced a two-child norm for Municipal elections and tried to do the same for panchayat elections; MP introduced targets and a lottery scheme and Rajasthan also introduced a similar lottery scheme, giving cars, washing machines and DVD players to lucky tubectomy acceptors. In addition, large numbers of women continued to be herded into sterilization camps, sometimes held outside health facilities (as in school buildings) with insufficient facilities and hygiene. These women faced some horrific experiences as reported through the media, which brought to light many cases of gross neglect in Kaporfora (Bihar) and Malda (West Bengal) among others.

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Today India is faced with new population related challenges and realities –and it is perhaps necessary to develop a new insight into these. To mention just two crucial concerns, we need to understand how the needs of young people, who form a substantial portion of our population, can be met. We also need to appreciate the linkages between small families and the steady declines in sex ratio. It is also perhaps time to set the India China population comparison to rest taking the appropriate lessons and making our family planning programme serve the needs of our citizens.

On the 10th of July on the eve of the World Population Day, the *National Coalition on Two Child Norm and Coercive Population Policies* is organising a Media Dialogue on contemporary population issues and media responses to bring in new perspectives into these discussions, with a panel of expert speakers

The outline of the programme is as follows:

10.00 am Registration and Welcome

10.30 - Panel Presentation: Population and Family Planning: Contemporary Issues and Realities

Chair – Mr A R Nanda – Chair NCA2CN, and retired Secy, Health and Family Welfare GoI.

Speakers:

- Brinda Karat – ex- Member of Parliament (tbc)
- Keshav Desi Raju /Ms Anuradha Gupta, - MoHFW, GoI (tbc)
- Colin Gonsalves – Sr. Advocate, Supreme Court and Coordinator, Human Rights Law Network
- A K Shiva Kumar – Member NAC , (tbc)
- Abhijit Das- Convenor NCA2CN and Director, Centre for Health and Social Justice;

12.00 – Panel: Media Response to Population: Past patterns and New Imperatives

Chair – Ms Fredrika Meijer, Country Representative UNFPA

Speakers:

- Ms Mrinal Pandey (tbc)
- Ms Usha Rai – Senior Journalist
- Ms T K Rajlakshmi – Frontline

1.30 – Lunch