

Book Review

Do Population Policies Matter? Fertility and Politics in Egypt, India, Kenya and Mexico, edited by Anrudh Jain, Population Council, One Dag Hammarkjold, Plaza, New York, NY 10017 USA.

Development is the best contraceptive has been the slogan of one group, convinced that the best way to attack population growth is through economic development & social change. There has then been the other group which has felt that high growth of population is an obstacle to rapid economic development and that like in any other areas of development, best available technology, both in information, education and in provision of services, must be directed at voluntary control of fertility. While in many countries state efforts have either not succeeded or have succeeded only partially, in many other countries, particularly in Asia, such as China, Korea, Indonesia, state interventions in fertility control, have brought out sharp declines in fertility and as a consequence, brought about a bonus in terms of higher per capita expenditure on education, housing etc. and improved attention to health. The debate is interesting and appears endless.

The present book by Population Council, edited by Anrudh Jain is one such attempt to have a relook at the fundamentals of this debate. As the title itself reveals this book attempts to identify the role of different groups, intellectuals, politicians, bureaucrats, service providers and the common man in the population policies and its politics!! Four developing countries; Egypt, India, Kenya and Mexico have been studied in this book. One scholar from each country has been entrusted with the task of documenting, the formulation, implementation and effectiveness of population policies overtime.

The first paper is on Egypt's population policy by Saw Edin Ibrahim and Babara Lethin Ibrahim, both well known sociologists. The paper vividly describes the emergence of Egypt's population policy, how it originated from non-Governmental Organisations starting in the early 30s and the Government's concern during 60s and from 1986 onwards. It also documents that during 1960-70 and from 1986 when Government and civil society actively and jointly

pursued the primary objective of population control, growth rate of population did decline and the apathy shown by the government and the top leaders during the 70s had resulted in a distinct increase in population growth rate. This paper is followed by a paper by Pravin Visaria and Vijayalaxmi Chari on India's population policy and family planning programme. This paper traces in detail the emergence of concerns over population growth and consequent family planning programme in India, its successes and failures. In particular the excesses committed during the Emergency resulted in a set back to family planning programmes. One cannot but agree with the authors that one of the reasons for the low acceptance of family planning programmes in India is the lack of quality of family planning services. For any reader interested in a summary of India's population policies, its successes and failures, this is one of the excellent review papers.

The third paper on Kenya's population policy by Ayorinde Ajay and John Kekvole is much more forth right in its acceptance of the critical role of the external forces. This paper clearly points out that external forces played critical roles in the formulation, evolution and implementation of the population policy by sensitizing some of the elite and bureaucrats of the challenges posed by the high population growth rate and later by providing funding for programme implementation.

The fourth paper on Mexico's population policy is also very interesting. Mexico like Kenya had a very strong pronatalist policy. Here also like Egypt and India, fertility decline has taken place while educational achievements were modest. Non Governmental Organisations continued to be influential actors in policy making process. The population control policies in Mexico since 1970 have made contraceptive available to a large share of population. Currently Mexico expects to reach the replacement level of fertility by the year 2005. The total fertility rate which was 7.0 children per woman in the 60s is currently estimated to be around 2.8. The reduction of inter regional differences in provision of education, health and family planning services seems to be the main challenges to the current family planning and reproductive health programmes. The author also points out the current dilemma faced by planners and health policy personnel. On the one hand "demographic planning is done with the expectation that programmes will meet specific growth and fertility targets. On the other hand health policies aim to provide integrated health services to larger shares of the population. Human and material resources available to achieve both the aims are insufficient. In fact even with a large governmental budget both the aims are difficult to reach".

A few words about Visaria and Vijayalaxmi Chad's paper on Indian experience seem to be in order. While the role of individuals, and NGOs in articulating concerns over population growth and need for family planning have been well documented, it is disappointing to find that the role of bureaucrats in the contribution to the ongoing debate has been left untouched. The pioneering work of Mr R A Gopaldaswamy, Registrar General and Census Commissioner of the 1951 census in pointing out the need to control the population growth by coining the term "improvident maternity" i.e. birth to women already having three or more children, is missing in the list of references. Earlier the Bengal famine enquiry committee appointed in 1944, of which Mr. R A Gopaldaswamy was a member, had a section on the dangers to the economy arising out of rapid population growth. Mr Gopalswamy's subsequent role in pushing

sterilisation has been however acknowledged. The recommendations of Bhore Committee and Mudakar Committee, representing the views of medical bureaucracy also seem to have been left out. The excellent review of population policies and programmes since independence and population concerns before independence by K Srinivasan in *Regulating Reproduction in India's population* (Sage publications 1995), seems also a omission in references.

Though the authors are right in mentioning that the external funding was not very high in India's population programme, the reviewer is of the view that western influence on the India's approach was particularly high. The book by Coale and Hoover on 'Population growth and economic development in low income countries - A case study of India's prospects' in particular was a hot topic for discussion in early 60s and this is reflected in the plan approach itself. The third plan which followed this for the first time incorporated an ambitious target to reduce birth rate to 25 by 1972. The plan itself mentioned that "the objective of stabilising the growth of population over a reasonable period must be at the very centre of planned development". The reviewer also finds it difficult to accept the authors' criticism of the use of the concept of NRR of one to stabilise the population as wishful thinking. While setting the year as 2000 or for that matter any other year, may be arbitrary, it cannot be denied that that was the first policy document which stressed the need for reduction in infant and child mortality and the need to raise expectation of life at birth. While NRR of one could be achieved at different combinations of fertility and mortality, the working group chose one that should reduce IMR to 60, expectation of life to 62 and recommended a number of programmes to achieve this, unlike the earlier goals which fixed only reduction in crude birth rate.

If India's family planning programme can be criticised on the ground that it is top down and not arising out of the demand from grassroot levels this is also the case with reference to the recent reproductive health programme launched as part of ICPD and they may also meet the same fate as that of the current family planning programme. The reviewer does not share the optimism of the authors that the new emphasis of reproductive health goals, promise of improving quality of family planning services will in turn raise the credibility and therefore the effectiveness of rural health workers. Most of the programmes are good in conception stage but bad in implementation. We only hope that this does not happen to the RCH programmes also. If the family planning programme can be criticised on the ground that it did not arise from the grassroots but was from top down. Similar criticism could also be levelled against the RCH programmes. Lack of emphasis on regional variations in India with regardable achievements and shortfalls of family planning programmes seems to be a major limitation in the review.

The chapter on 'Population Policies That Matter' by Anrudh Jain gives an overview and focusses on the contrasts and similarities in approaches followed in the four countries. In all the four countries public information campaigns including strong appeals for small family were common and the message seems to have gone to the masses. All the four countries have taken a longtime between recognition of the problem and the formulation of policy that could be implemented. Population polices that seek behavioural changes have fared well if they had the backing of a charismatic leader. This is an important finding.

Finally, the most brilliant piece of the book is the foreword by Margaret Catley: Calsen, the President of Population Council. As pointed out by her, each of the studies in this book,

details the ambivalence within governments about whether population growth was holding the pace of economic development. Population policies are top down, emerging when elites become convinced that neither human welfare nor economic development goals will be achieved by high levels of demographic growth. As pointed out by her it would be interesting to compare the out look of these four countries with the policy climate in the Asian "tigers" whose energetic population programmes in the 60s and 70s commanded widespread public adherence and acceptance. Significantly she observes that the early fertility decline in the Asian Tigers is much higher per child investments in education and health and helped to promote rapid economic growth". Unfortunately the book does not provide a comparison with such countries where policies have been extremely successful.

To sum up this book gives the excellent summary of the population policies in four countries which cannot be termed as success stories. This will be an excellent addition to any discussion on population policies.

New Delhi

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