

Population And Statistics

Population growth has outpaced the growth rate of the economy in this country. As a result poverty, squalor, illiteracy and unemployment have increased. This is so despite the efforts made by official and private agencies propagating population control and extending services and facilities. There is also a visible apathy among the people with regard to adoption of contraceptive methods. Population activities are yet to be put on a proper footing.

The involvement of the government agencies, though widespread now, was in a low key in the fifties and sixties. It was largely done by private agencies like the family planning association and other affiliated agencies. It is only in the post-liberation days that a Family Planning and Population Control Division, with subordinate offices, was created by the government. Some 150,000 population workers are now engaged by the official agencies at a tremendously huge cost. Non-governmental agencies have also gone into the field with elaborate arrangements and services. Yet the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) among the eligible couples in the country is far below target.

As pointed out by the World Bank in its last report, the data generated by these agencies are far from satisfactory. So the projected reduction of population growth to 1.8 per cent from the prevailing rate of 2.6 per cent by 1990 may not be attainable. The statement of this external aid-giving agency is close to reality. Studies in the past revealed that data on adoption of population control methods were not reliable, allegedly, due to inaccurate recording, fraudulent practices resorted to by workers, supervisors, motivators and clinic personnel in respect of distribution of materials or adoption of terminal methods. The programme being based on unreliable data, the cumulative effect is bound to be disappointing unless corrective measures are adopted by appropriate authorities without delay.

The problem is connected also with its acceptance by the majority of the people who are illiterate. These people are not in a position to appreciate the small family norm. For them, a child is an indirect social insurance for old-age which is not insured by the government as done in the USA and the UK. What is needed is to present population programme in its positive aspects through, among other means, sustained motivation campaign and field work. The small family norm along with the family planning implements has to be presented to the eligible couple for an easier acceptance.

Experiences of countries like Japan which attained a zero-growth-rate of population in the fifties have to be examined for proper guidelines. The thrust of the programme there was on widening the base of education, development of skill for better earnings by the eligible couple and the exposure to a better standard of life. One may add that population activities gained wider acceptance in countries with a higher rate of literacy and better employment opportunities. May be, part of the resources now employed for population activities could well be diverted to spreading universal primary education including population education. Likewise, employment opportunities and training facilities may also be expanded for eligible couples as supplementary programmes to population activities. For this, the entire programme should be based on data that are valid, reliable, and accurate.

It may be noted that data generated by population control agencies are based on services rendered or the implements supplied. In many cases, the recording of information is left to assistants and motivators who are innocent about the necessity of accurate and reliable data. Even the forms used for recording information have yet to be standardized. As a result, one finds it difficult to compare the information obtained from even two family welfare centres not to speak of formulating safe guidelines for the future. Now that population programme is organized at the official level and assistance from aid givers and non-government agencies is available on a regular basis, there should be perceptible improvement in services. Updated methods of collecting, compiling, publishing and utilizing data on population have to be adopted not only to satisfy the demand of aid-givers but also to eliminate prevailing deficiencies of the population programme.