

The plight of family

Haith
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PAKISTAN'S population will double, itself in the next 35 years if it continues to grow at the given fertility rate of 4.5 per cent. In this regard, it seems that family planning policies have failed to address the main cause of the population explosion. Awareness about family planning is now not the issue. Rather, the absence of addressing the population issue in correlation with other mitigating circumstances such as environment, poverty, education, health and human resource development, to name a few, form the primary cause of the rapidly increasing population size.

The free distribution of contraceptives or TV campaigns like '*Kam bachhay khushhal gharana*' are some methods to propagate birth control, but population explosion connotes a much wider parameter of related factors.

Admittedly, increasing population is the root cause of Pakistan's several socio-economic and environmental problems, but it must be emphasized that population per se is not the problem. When addressing one single issue i.e. population, the government and associated agencies should address numerous other related issues like, education, health, poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, sanitation, wastewater treatment, law and order, crimes, etc., in order to design a more viable

solution to retard the population growth.

Pakistan was the first country in South Asia to have presented the concept of 'Family Planning'. In terms of meeting the objectives, the concept has not been very successful. The government is still undecided about ascribing a proper and appropriate name to the policies relating to controlling population. In 1952, this policy was named 'Family Planning', which was later changed to 'Family Planning Welfare'. It is now called 'Population Welfare'.

The contents of these policies have been changing concurrently. For example the policy of 1965-69 dwelled on decreasing the fertility rate. Later, a huge campaign under the slogan 'Two children are ideal' was launched without studying its pros and cons. The women's ability to bear children was the main target of the above campaigns, rather than trying to address the core issues of high fertility. A flood of contraceptives was spread throughout the country through fieldworkers, and was initiated without considering the fact that their intended target may not prefer a specific method; neither was the impact of free distribution properly studied. The criteria of success for the fieldworkers was maximum distribution of contraceptives! Despite this, only 15 per cent of the population used them.

Moreover, in Pakistan, successive family planning policies were not concerted and harmonious. They have all been working in isolation. Commercial such as 'Less children, prosperous family' are not likely to succeed especially for those living in rural areas, who depend on manpower to earn their bread and butter. Villagers need 10-12 children to work in the fields and do manual labour. They plan to produce at least

10 children because they know half of them are expected to die of childhood related illnesses. Their death is perceived as a natural calamity.

The government and related agencies failed to cover and propagate the reality that child death, in the case of Pakistan, is mainly attributable to lack of proper education, personal hygiene, contaminated drinking water and the lethal side-effects of poisonous synthetic pesticides.

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Through proper water treatment and rendering safe drinking water, research shows that infant mortality can be reduced by over 80 per cent. Villagers need to be convinced that if their capacity is four *chapattis*, they should not produce more than two children to save them from debilitating effects of malnutrition.

For effective control of population, empowerment of women, compulsory education and better health facilities are indispensable. One may think that the Chinese model of controlling population may be a good example. However, it has proven to be a failure. According to the

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by decreasing infant mortality and ensuring survival of a small family.

On the socio-political front, the solution to Pakistan's social, political and environmental problems lies in land reforms, right development policies, catering to rural development, balanced power structure, across-the-board accountability and justice. Many scholars are of the view that politicians, feudals and elite deliberately want the population to remain uneducated, fearing reprisals from them if they were made aware of their rights, which would lead them to question the authority of their leaders.

The environmental concerns emphasize that an illiterate and unhealthy population is a burden on society and in its own way also degrades the environment through poor hygiene and sanitation practices. Some other environmental affects include deforestation and poor farming practices, leading to desertification, which cumulatively slow down social development. It needs to be emphasized here that it is not only the poor and disadvantaged who contribute to the degradation of the environment. The rich, perhaps, play a greater role in environmental degradation through abuse of technology, increased combustion of fossil fuel resulting in high CO2 emissions, use of CFCs in refrigerants and the piling up of solid waste, especially plastic bags and other non-biodegradable items. At the same time, it is the very small percentage of our population that utilizes most of the natural resources, creating an imbalance both in the natural and social setups, both within the country and ultimately globally as well.

The reality being that the people in the developing countries, with three quarters of the world's popula-

tion, have less than one quarter of the world's health. Whereas, people in the richer, developed countries, with only one quarter of the world's population, consume most of world's energy and resources. At the same time these countries are responsible for three-quarters of the global pollution problems by emitting high quantities of carbon dioxide and other toxic fumes, while developing countries only account for about one quarter of all greenhouse emissions. If the same roads to prosperity are followed that were taken in the past by the developed nations, the result will be unacceptable global ecological damage. We need to implement a major paradigm shift in how we manage and use the natural resources and environment. We need to adapt a different, more conservative and less materialistic, lifestyle to ensure an equilibrium between various components of the natural system.

Our leaders have, so far, failed to realize that a healthy population is a great resource pool, and a young population a great driving tool towards economic prosperity and development. The educated youth, full of energy and vision, must be tapped as a nation-building resource. This can be done through job creation and development, possibly in the private sector, rather than the overburdened public sector. The civil society, in general, and the journalists, in particular, has an active role to play in this regard, to push the government policies towards a better understanding of the inter-relatedness between population, environment and development. If these issues are not addressed soon, our human resource will become a 'white elephant' on the exchequer, or even worse, will migrate in search of better opportunities. ■