[Significance of population control](https://nation.com.pk/08-Feb-2019/significance-of-population-control%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)

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All modern day growth models invariably include a component of the strategy to check and reduce population growth. This subject has been debated for more than a century. One of the major causes of poverty in Pakistan is the alarming rate of increase in the population. At the time of partition, the area constituting current Pakistan had a population of 32 million which according to the latest census has shot up to 220 million. Pakistan’s current rate of population growth is 2.1 % which is much higher than in the countries of the region. Iran, India, Bangladesh and China have a population growth of 1.1 per cent, 1.1, 1.04 and 0.59 respectively. It is estimated that if the population growth in Pakistan continues at the same rate, it could reach the 450 million mark in another thirty years. It is indeed a ticking time-bomb.

We have been hearing tall claims by successive governments in regards to giving top priority to population control, but none of them took the issue with the seriousness it requires. Lack of awareness among the masses about population control and its role in advancing the cause of prosperity in the country, social prejudices and some skewed religious perceptions by certain vested interests are also responsible for the existing situation. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the government to take care of all these factors. The successive governments also were short on the political will due to fear of resistance by the clergy. Prime Minister Imran Khan while addressing a symposium on the population in early December last year held as a result of the initiative taken by the former Chief Justice had remarked that a strong political will was needed to tackle the issue of mushroom growth in population. He further added that education and technology would be used to control the population and all the stakeholders including religious scholars and media will have to play a role in this effort and mosques should spearhead the message. Nobody can take an issue with his observations on their face value, but the reality is that the PTI government has not initiated any programme in this regard as yet. The reforms package announced by the Finance Minister also makes no mention of any allocation for the population control programme. One would have at least expected the launch of awareness campaign through media and the pulpit which does not need any financial allocations.

Population trends and dynamics can have an enormous effect on prospects for poverty reduction and sustainable development. Poverty is influenced by – and influences – population dynamics, including population growth, age structure, and rural-urban distribution. All of this has a critical impact on a country’s development prospects and prospects for raising the living standards of the poor. Investments in better health, including reproductive health, are essential for individual security and for reducing mortality and morbidity, which in turn improve a country’s productivity and development prospects.

Access to sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, can affect population dynamics through voluntary fertility reduction and reductions in infant and maternal mortality. Improved reproductive health also helps individuals, particularly young women to break out of intergenerational cycles of poverty. When women and couples are empowered to plan whether and when to have children, women are better enabled to complete their education; women’s autonomy within their households is increased, and their earning power is improved. This strengthens their economic security and well-being and that of their families. Cumulatively, this contributes to development progress and poverty reduction.

In addition to improving general health and well-being, meeting the reproductive health and contraceptive needs of all women in the developing world more than pays for itself. According to surveys and reports conducted globally, “for every dollar invested in contraception, the cost of pregnancy-related care is reduced by $1.43.” The lifetime opportunity cost related to adolescent pregnancy – a measure of the annual income a young mother misses out on over her lifetime – ranges from 1 per cent of annual gross domestic product in a large country such as China to 30 per cent of annual gross domestic product in small economies.

Overarching demographic trends invariably shape a country’s economic growth. Developing countries with large youth populations and declining fertility rates could see their economies soar, provided they invest heavily in young people’s education and health and protect their rights. Potential economic gains could be realised through a ‘demographic dividend,’ which can occur when a country’s working-age population grows larger relative to dependent populations.

Family planning is an important part of this process because many countries have large youth populations that will almost ensure continued rapid population growth unless fertility declines, which is what offers the possibility of the demographic dividend. Where rapid population growth far outpaces economic development, countries will have a difficult time investing in the human capital needed to secure the well-being of its people and to stimulate further economic growth. This issue is especially acute for the least developed countries, many of which are facing a doubling, or even a tripling of their populations by 2050.

The rapid growth in population also has grave social consequences. It leads to increased unemployment which breeds crimes and other social evils. The governments in the less developed countries find it difficult to create required jobs for youth entering the job market as the share of the employment offered by the government is quite minimal. In Pakistan, the share of the government to the job market is in the vicinity of 7-8% and the rest is in the private domain which means that the governments have to adopt such policies which lead to the creation of more and more jobs in the private sector. It is estimated that nearly 2 million youth are entering the job market every year in Pakistan. With the current rate of population growth of 2.1 %, unemployment is going to be the biggest problem for Pakistan in the years to come. The economic outlook for Pakistan portrayed by the international lending and rating agencies is also not very encouraging. Given the preceding facts, the pledge of the PTI government to create 10 million jobs also seems wishful thinking far removed from the ground realities.

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