

# **Role of population aspects on politics in developing countries**

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## **1. Introduction**

Population is one of the concrete basis of politics ( Leroy, 1978 ).For human resource and other planning, for the allocation of representatives and for administrative purposes including taxation and conscription, population and related information are essential. Studies of the inter relation between population and development and the use of estimates and projections of population and its characteristics for policy formulation and action programmes are well recognized. A new role which has not been well studied or documented, is the use of diverse population aspects as political tools in various forms at local, national and international levels.

This paper documents several typical situations where population and related aspects become tools in the hands of individuals, societies, countries and organizations in pursuit of their agendas to establish their view points and motives and thereby exploit the situation. The other side of the picture is where politics plays a part in population related variables and is treated in another paper ( Ramachandran, 2001 ).

## **2. Population aspects in national and international politics**

Since the end of World War II, population issues assumed great importance especially because of the observed rapid increase in population. At the national level, the newly independent developing countries noted that rapid population growth thwarted their efforts at economic and social development. But despite concern with such high growth of population, they were hesitant to embark on programmes aimed at curtailing birth rates because of the fear of entrenched religious and cultural groups and consequent political backlash . Developed countries also were careful not to be seen as promoting curtailment of fertility in developing nations for fear of being accused of trying to reduce their population and perceived power and even of practicing genocide.

Cogniscent of the developing countries' faith in the newly established United Nations, and keeping in view their reservations on family planning, a diplomatic solution arrived at was to introduce the awareness and need for population control through training in the field of demography at local settings. The ingenious strategy of establishing Demographic and Research Centres by UN in Asia and Latin America around 1956/57 and similar centres in the Arab and African regions later, paved the way for broader awareness of population issues and acceptance of family planning in the developing world.

Though training in demography was more acceptable and less threatening to developing countries, the UN Demographic Centres, in an attempt to further assuage the fears of the people, had to tread a careful path by ensuring that family planning, birth control or population control were not part of the curriculum or research. Still, in the initial years,

there were detractors for the institutions especially among the religious right in Latin America and Asia.

While UN was trying to create population awareness among developing nations, the organization itself had to contend with opposing views from Member States. For instance, during the initial years while preparing the Multilingual Demographic Dictionary, the UN was dogged by problems on conceptual, ideological and theoretical issues like definition of terms and terminology (Sauvy, 1961). It is reported that the World Health Organization of the UN could not address the important population issues for almost a decade of its existence because of the insistence of some countries that population issues are not health issues and therefore WHO should not be concerned with such aspects.(Mumford, 1996) It is known that even in the late 1960s and early 1970s, UN was deterred from seeking a stronger mandate on population issues because of the existence of an informal but determined coalition of nations cutting across the traditional cleavages in the international system, comprised of Marxist, Catholic and Capitalist nations who opposed UN involvement in population assistance. For the first time never the less , a majority could be mustered to vote for resolutions authorizing UN to play a more prominent role in population and render assistance to family planning programmes, only when couched in the guise of health, human rights and concerns other than population control. A number of countries who voted in favour of the resolution were still not ready to subscribe to a firm and clear population policy overtly aimed at reducing population growth.(Finkle,1974) Such controversies continued even at the recent International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, Cairo , 1994) when the Holy See and some Islamic and Catholic countries quibbled on terms and definitions which resulted in dilution ( and even deletion of certain aspects ) of the proposed Plan of Action.(UN, 1995).

### **3. National perceptions and priorities and international politics**

For effective study on population and its various aspects, relevant data are required. Since data collection is costly in terms of human and material resources, which developing countries lack, assistance is sought from developed countries. The agenda and motives of developed countries being not synchronized with perceptions and priorities of developing countries, it is generally noted that donors gave importance to fertility and family planning and not for health issues and population distribution considered as crucial by developing countries. Even the United Nations, under political pressure from donors, could not fully respond to national aspirations. For example, surveys carried out in the 1950s and 1960s had narrow fertility focus -concentrating on Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Family Planning, Contraceptive Prevalence and Fertility.

Only when developing countries mounted a concerted offensive, did international agencies consider to support and fund surveys like Demographic and Health surveys, Living Standards surveys etc. In fact, the real opening up of the scope of population assistance and a changed awareness of immediate needs of poor developing countries came in the mid 1970's in the wake of the World Population Conference, Bucharest in 1974 with its defiant challenge by a large number of developing nations that ' development is the best contraceptive '. After a period of more or less agonizing reappraisal of their population assistance policies, donors came eventually to accept the importance of ' development approach ' and population assistance accordingly began to include in addition to family planning and health care, support for a variety of activities of

a social development nature intended to tackle the presumed causes of high fertility.( Wolfson, 1983 ). The climate however changed by mid 1980's when in response to concerns of Vatican and the religious right in America, the Reagan Administration agreed to alter its foreign aid programme to comply with the church's teachings on birth control. Accordingly, the State Department reluctantly agreed to an outright ban on the use of any US funds by either countries or international organizations for the promotion of abortion. As a result, at the World Population Conference in Mexico in 1984, the US withdrew funding for, from among others, the worlds largest family planning organization ( IPPF ) and largest population organization ( UNFPA ). US being the largest donor, this action dealt a heavy blow on population activities, despite developing country requests and needs ( Mumford, 1996). In 1994 at International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo, again the religious right prevailed in deleting and diluting the Action Plans depriving the poor developing nations of much of needed assistance. Thus the play of politics which began from the very start of international concern with population issues, continues to cloud the atmosphere till now because of narrow considerations.

#### **4. Censuses: Controversies and conflicts**

An important source of demographic data is the census. Census ( from the Latin word meaning ' to tax ' ) originated from the need for obtaining the basis for taxation. and conscription During colonial period, the collection of poll tax, head tax and conscription for the army and labour became paramount activities and censuses became tools in their hands. Such political and often vindictive acts by the ruling powers were hated by the natives who retaliated by under reporting or hiding persons, as has been documented in some African and Asian countries. Allied to conscription is the army / military population which was hidden for security / political reasons as in the Republic of Korea in 1955 and Iran in 1966 when around half a million males ( military population ) were not reported ( Kim and Im, 1960/61 and Ali and Ramachandran, 1970 ).

Censuses also served other purposes like providing the basis for apportionment of representation on geographic / socio economic and other considerations. Especially since budgetary allocations, parliamentary seats etc. are based on population size, there is a tendency for specific ethnic / religious / language / caste / regional groups to ensure that their numbers are large and even sometimes in showing that the size of the others is much smaller, in order to reap maximum benefits for itself and deny it for others. For instance, during the 1941 census in India, there was strong competition between the two communities – Hindus and Muslims – to exaggerate their numbers as it was expected that the country would soon be partitioned on communal basis ( India, 1943). Another instance was the attempt allegedly made to exaggerate numbers of concerned linguistic groups in border districts during the 1951 Indian census when formation of linguistic provinces was anticipated.( Bose, 1967 ) Even today, representation in parliament and in legislative bodies being apportioned on the basis of population size, it is known that political parties exploit caste/ community feelings / tendencies and encourage exaggeration of numbers of specific groups to reap additional benefits.

Other instances of population rivalry / politics is that of Nigeria and Pakistan. In Nigeria, because of suspected bloating up of certain ethnic / regional groups, the 1962 census was disputed and even the new census of 1963 taken specifically to address the problem did

not receive support from some of the regions so much so that both censuses were scrapped. The disputes reached such a stage as to culminate in a civil war.( NAS, 1991) A census could be taken only after almost 40 years in 1991 ( Nigeria,1999 ).In the case of Pakistan, the 1981 census faced severe criticisms from the religious, linguistic and regional groups accusing under enumeration. The violent opposition had to be addressed by promising several compromises including freezing of assembly seats and federal aid allocation before the next census scheduled for 1991 could take place in 1998. (Blood, 1999; Husain, 2000 )

Population figures generate several criticisms and heated political debate even in the most advanced societies as in the United States, from minorities, geographical areas and communities accusing that their numbers have been grossly under reported. The last census of 1990 for instance, was admitted officially to have had an under enumeration of around 2 percent mostly comprising of ethnic/linguistic minorities, and remote area populations, which generated fear of deliberate manipulation and a feeling of frustration. To avoid such a situation, in the current census, which is underway, every effort is made to ensure complete coverage by educating the affected groups, using ethnic / linguistic specific enumerators, intense follow up etc. Especially communities are making special efforts to have every one counted as it is clear that any under enumeration will cost them not only in terms of representation in legislatures but also in federal funds.( Prewitt , 2000). One effect of this is the fact that the projected population for 2000 based on the previous census was far below the census results.

Though use of enumerators belonging to specific ethnic / linguistic / religious groups may ensure better coverage, it may also be construed as instrumental in bloating up their numbers as was alleged in the case of the linguistic groups in Mysore State in 1951 census and in Nigeria in their censuses. However, in the 1973 census of Nigeria, despite the extra caution taken by the government to include an army personnel from a different ethnic group to the enumerating team, the results were not accepted.( Arowolo and Daramoland)

Lebanon is yet another interesting case where it has not been possible to take a census since 1932 because of the fear that there may be attempts to tamper with figures which may bring out a different pattern in the delicate balance between Muslims and Christians and create political problems. ( NAS, 1974 ) .

Population size is an indicator of power- the larger the population of a group or country, the larger its perceived power and prestige. Again, per capita income is inversely related to population size and since low income countries get preference in international aid, financial grant and concessionary loans, a larger population size is advantageous. Such situations were noted for instance in some African countries. After its first census in the early 1970s, Gabon refused to accept the figures as being too small. Only after the intervention of UN, which supported the census, did the country reconcile itself to the figures. In the case of Sudan, the 1973 census was threatened to be canceled by the President as the census figures were claimed to be too small for a very large country. Other reasons for clamoring for a larger size was for power and prestige and for a lower per capita income for aid benefits. Even though there was some justification in the claim, still the omission was not as vast as claimed.( Ramachandran , 1975 )

Censuses of population are the channels by which information on the people are gathered. Since it is a government activity. one mode of protest against the regime is through non cooperation with census operations. A classic illustration of such a political tool utilized by a nation in modern times is the non cooperation declared by the national political organizations in India against the British rulers during the 1921 and 1931 censuses.

According to reports of these censuses, the non cooperation movement not only affected the census operations because of the boycott by the native enumerators and officials, but also resulted in under enumeration due to deliberate non reporting. ( India, 1933 ) A recent example of a census being caught in the web of politics is that of the Indian census scheduled for 2001. In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the very legitimacy of the census has been questioned . and even it is not clear whether the census could take place in that state.( Jaleel, 2000 )

Thus one can note that the difficulties in achieving a data base for policy are profound since collection and compilation of data is substantially influenced by how local leaders, who are generally in charge, perceive the use of the data and how politicians would like to twist figures to suit their whims and fancies. If politics plays a role in the census and other data collection, then either it may be impossible to carry out a count or at best the results would be unacceptable and of less value and therefore the scarce human and material resources spent on the efforts will be a waste.

##### **5. Politics of population control : Case of population growth and distribution**

Population control involves both growth and distribution. While high fertility contributes for increased growth rate, migration and settlement brings in differentials in distribution of population. Rapid rate of population growth in developing countries has been noted to be out stripping socio economic development, resulting in either very little improvement or at times even a deterioration in living conditions of the common people. At the local level, differential growth especially of specific groups has created rivalries and conflicts. At the international level, such growth is viewed by developed countries as a threat to stability and security. Thus, birth control or family planning is considered as essential to rein in rapid population growth. Migration control can assuage distributional imbalances but which at the international level brings in legal, political and human rights issues. Even within nations, control of free movements and ghettoisation are considered as curtailment of liberty as the classic examples of segregation, apartheid and influx control practiced in the colonies and elsewhere vividly portray.

Even though family planning is recognized as important in the management of fertility, it has not been free from political overtones. An important reason for developing country fears and uncertainties about the motives of developed countries in their approach to address population issues has been statements and publications from responsible sources. For instance, a provoking statement in a book by the American naturalist William Vogt, discussing high growth of population in poor countries and suggesting that “ US ought to refuse all aid to any country in which births are not being limited, and even medical progress ought to be slowed down in these countries.” ( Sauvy, 1961 ); conclusions by eminent demographer Notestein that, “ US and of other major powers are deeply involved in the problem of population pressure in technologically backward areas and suggesting that a goal of American policy, and that of other leading powers, with respect to such areas should be to foster a reduction of the potentialities for population growth” (Notestein, 1956) ; the perceived motives of rich and sparsely populated countries like the US, Australia and Canada who fear of having to feed needy and rapidly growing populations in developing countries, and the even more acute fear of having one day to make room for them through immigration to their vast unexploited territories, coupled with the type of support and funding on population issues, made it clear to developing

nations that the real concern of developed countries was to control population growth. For instance, in the area of international aid, President Johnson's 'dollar for birth control is worth \$95' convinced many foreigners that the US was either shopping for dubious bargains or looking for ways to reduce its already inadequate aid to Third World. Even more sinister were apparent cutbacks as aid for general programs of health. As Peru's then minister of health put it, "... the US is willing to help in a campaign for the control of births but not in one to reduce the rate of deaths" (Stycos, 1971). In the US much of black anger was aimed at the unusual attention being paid to family planning programmes while so many other pressing ills were being neglected. Such experiences gave indications that population control was the narrow focus and broader issues of health, living conditions, population distribution etc. were non issues to developed countries.

Added to the general suspicion to such international approaches, is the vehement opposition from religious / ethnic and cultural groups against family planning at the national and local levels ( some even accusing family planning as another form of genocide ). Another factor in the reluctance of certain groups in accepting family planning is the fear of possible domination or obliteration because of differential growth rates brought in by varying acceptance / successes in family planning by different ethnic / religious / linguistic ' geographic and other groups For instance, if the growth rate of an ethnic minority group is higher than that of the majority group, in course of time, the majority community will lose its position and power. In India this concern is more with the current majority community fearing that its predominance may be diluted if minorities continue to grow at higher rates. Such genuine fears may exist in other countries as well which have rapidly growing minority communities. For instance, in the United States, the rather high growth of the Hispanic population has aroused fears about English losing its predominance not only in specific geographic areas but also even in the country as a whole. Again, the opposition of mainly non Catholics in the US to the Catholic position on birth control systems stems not only from a concern over the effect of Catholic views but also because it is a factor in their higher fertility. Differential fertility has led some critics of the Catholic position to argue that ' the effect of the official Catholic position against birth control is to increase slowly but steadily the ratio of Catholics to non-Catholics in the country (Weiner, 1971 ). However, differential fertility and consequent demographic changes may be perceived in different ways depending on the groups involved. e.g. differential fertility rates among Methodists and Episcopalians may not be perceived as a matter of great importance in the US, but the differential fertility rates between Catholics and non Catholics and between whites and non whites are seen as matters of great political significance. Differential fertility rate between Negroes and whites has been a factor strengthening popular sentiment among whites for providing birth control assistance to poor, especially Negro women ( Stycos , 1971 ).and therefore it has been a sore point between the two groups. Thus family planning is opposed when multicultural groups are present, despite the fact that there is need for reining in the rapid population growth.

In both developed and developing societies, there are political controversies over government sponsored family planning programmes, partly based on the belief that various groups have as to the political effects of such policies, and partly based on the beliefs various groups have as to the motivations of those who are carrying out family planning programme. Efforts to influence fertility must additionally contend with opposition from those who fear and distrust the motives for the policy. Population programmes are likely to encounter organized resistance from racial, religious and ethnic groups whose relative status may be threatened if their fertility is reduced.(Weiner, 1971)

Criticisms leveled at family planning programme in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, India, much of Africa and other areas, reveal how closely ethnic politics and population politics are intertwined. In many developing countries especially in Latin America and Africa, population programmes have also been condemned as an instrument of 'neo colonialism' sponsored by the rich nations and aimed at the eradication of the poor and non white peoples of the third world. (Finkle, 1974) and is illustrated by the records of the Spanish in Latin American and the British and French in Africa who created artificial nations in order to divide and conquer and may now be using family planning as means of 'preventive genocide' and 'neo colonial biological imperialism' to keep these nations small. This sentiment expressed in an article penned by pan African press writer Kakanfo shows how demographic nationalism has both international and intranational implications. Referring to a statement by John D Rockefeller III, 'that resolution of the population problem by the UN could be its greatest contribution to mankind', he commented, "this contribution.... involves wiping out 2 billion potential liberation army soldiers in the systematically de developed nations of Asia, Africa, Central and South America... The most hated and bitterly opposed scheme the US government has plotted since the enslavement of Africans and the near extinction of North and South American Indians is the worldwide birth control programme ..and the population control-family planning programme of the US ruling class must be crushed because it tells people that their economic and political problems are really biological ones. The super rich, through Ford and Rockefeller money, are accused of brainwashing people into blaming their own strong creative natural powers of conceiving, bearing and bringing up children from the fact that they are denied educational opportunities, job opportunities...proportionate political power and freedom from war" (Kakanfo, 1969) Still another expression take the form of connecting increased population with increasing political power – a view strengthened by recent election to office of black mayors and other government officials.

Opposition to family planning arises from several other premises. In India, Parliamentary seats for the states are proportional to population size. Genuine concern has been expressed by those states which have achieved birth control and reduced population growth resulting in the possibility of their relative representation in the national parliament being reduced and other states which have higher birth rates, being rewarded with additional seats. To allay these fears, the recent population policy has categorically recommended that the 42<sup>nd</sup> constitutional amendment which froze the number of representatives in the Lok Sabha (parliament) on the basis of the 1971 census till 2001 should be extended until 2026 (India, 2000) which has recently been voted on in parliament

One consequence of differential population size and growth is it creates special problems in the relationship between central and subordinate units of government. When the subordinate government units govern distinct cultural regions, as in Pakistan, India, Nigeria and other multi ethnic countries, then an additional dimension is added to the tension between central and subordinate authority. A classic illustration is that of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) whose population size and growth were not recognized in sharing of political power and resulted in call for independence which when not accepted culminated in the trauma of a bitter war with huge human suffering and final separation.

Although numbers may be decreasing as a source of political power in developed countries, their importance appears to be growing in those less developed areas where political participation is high with consequent public controversy and need for public policy. The size of particular social group and particularly of an observable ethnic group, is a factor in its political power. Moreover, numbers may be a more important factor in the

politics of ethnicity than in the politics of class conflict. Hence there are those among religious, tribal, caste and racial groups who argue for a pronatal policy or view programmes to reduce fertility as politically threatening. Particularly in democratic systems, in many political situations, different ethnic groups often perceive differences in size and growth rates as factors affecting the distribution of power. Even though analysis of 1965 world poll data disclosed that the general public in most countries surveyed was aware of, and to some extent concerned about, the rapid rate of world population growth; far fewer were concerned about the growth of their own nations (Stycos, 1971). For instance, movements favouring the prevention of births in Pakistan still come up against the nationalist spirit which does not burden itself with calculations or weighty arguments; hence it has been stated in all seriousness that the question cannot be examined before the population of Pakistan has, in numbers, equalled that of India. Similarly, even though population growth in the 1960s was identified as a problem of national policy, in conjunction with a commitment to economic growth, still the vice president of the Singaporean Malaysian Islamic party argued publicly that family planning should be avoided by the Malays whose duty it was to produce more children in order to keep the Malays from being overrun by Chinese and made a minority group in their own country (Ness and Ando, nd). Such competitive attitudes and apprehensions are reported from various other countries and regions with adverse consequences for family planning efforts.

Differential reproduction and migration among socio economic and ethnic groups and the two-way relationship between political and demographic facts is especially apparent in multi cultural societies. In such situations, political decisions can be a factor in both growth rates and distribution process and these in turn have political consequences- (Saunders, 1972) Thus in these countries, the higher fertility and growth of one group can raise concerns among others. In South Africa, for example, considerable attention is given to the higher fertility rates of Bantus, coloreds and Asians, compared to that of whites. (Strauss, 1963) In New Zealand Maoris constitute less than 10 percent of the population but their higher birth rate has been of concern to the white population who fear that the country will inevitably be populated mainly by a colored race (Sinclair, 1964). Debate on race issues in Great Britain, concerns the growth in the size of the colored (mainly Indian) population which has become a strong argument for barring immigrants and for encouraging nonwhites to migrate. Different growth rates among various religious groups in Lebanon contribute to the sensitivity of the population issue and even census taking has become a highly political matter. (NAS, 1974)

In a similar vein, internal migration within multi ethnic states, creates problems, which hardly exist in more culturally homogeneous societies. Thus, some of the major problems of political development which concern political scientists - the growth of demands and the creation of political institutions to meet these demands, the problems of establishing government authority and legitimacy, and the problems of managing ethnic conflict and creating a national civic sense- are all ones which involve population variables. Any changes affecting the numbers, either from differential fertility rates or migration, can affect the balance in a federal system, e.g. the changes in ratio between Hindus and Muslims in North East India, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, ethnic groups in Nigeria and refugees and natives in Pakistan. At the international level, immigration is a sensitive issue and has resulted in serious problems, which is perceived as changing the composition of population. The natives fear that if such unchecked intrusion continues, soon they may become minorities in their own land. This has given rise in North East India for break down of law and order with loss of life and property being a constant



feature.( NAS, 1974 ) Similar concerns have been aired by the Sindhi and Baluchi population in Pakistan concerning the influx of Afghan refugees and in Sindh regarding the Mujahirs. In Nigeria, movement of Ibos to other regions and competition for economic opportunities triggered tensions which were aggravated by alleged bloating up of population in censuses The plight of North Africans in France, Turks in Germany, Indians in Surinam, Gauyana and Fiji and Chinese / Vietnamese in Australia are all well known. Even in the US, the influx of Mexican and other Hispanic population has raised the issue of the language and other questions.

Both within and between states, the population of ethnic groups has become an important element in the struggle for political power in influencing public policy decisions. As Indian politicians during the past three decades have become increasingly sophisticated about the relationships between ethnicity, population size, and voting power, they have also become increasingly concerned with changes in the composition and redistribution of population and with the ways in which such data is recorded in the census. For example, there was a hue and cry when the 1951 census of India recorded a smaller number of Tribals as compared with their strength in 1941. Whereas the government argued that the British in 1941 , for political reasons, had bloated up the tribal population, the tribals argued that the Indian government was deliberately showing a smaller number of tribals in order to deny them special privileges guaranteed in the constitution. Therefore even though there was a concerted effort to include caste in the census scheduled for 2001, it has been wisely denied for fear of creating unnecessary squabbles because of the existing caste politics and possible manipulations.

The other aspect of family planning is the type of approach to achieve results. In many cases, people perceive some of the ways family planning is operationalized as coercive and intrusive. Especially when family planning targets are set and efforts are made to achieve the targets, instances of subtle and even not so subtle pressures are applied to the people in order to attain the targets. For instance, officials are reported to use their power to get people sterilized . Incentives for clients and canvassers also bring in scope for manipulation and corruption. Padding of figures is one such. Another facet is that very young persons, older people, ineligible persons etc. may be brought in for vasectomy just to fill up targets. Then there is people being forcefully sterilized like the poor, illiterate, minorities, physically / mentally disabled, etc. Even when coercion is not part of official policy, the government's firm insistence on meeting family planning targets makes it necessary for lower administrative staff to resort to all kinds of pressure tactics that come close to compulsion. Examples of such tactics include, verbal threats, making sterilization a condition of eligibility for anti poverty programmes, depriving mothers of more than two children of maternity benefits, reserving certain kinds of health care services to persons who have been sterilized, and forbidding persons who have more than two children from contesting panchayat ( local government ) elections. ( Sen, 1998 ) Because of such practices, and in certain instances of undue excesses, the family planning programme in India got into disrepute and violent rejection. This even became a platform in a general election and resulted in the government being rejected by the electorates. Similarly, the operation of the one child policy in China is accused to have indulged in inhuman and cruel means including sex selective abortion and infanticide.

Despite the early start, family planning in India has not been able to achieve desired results even though some states have fared very well. Several factors have been mentioned for the differentials in performance between some major states . Late starters like Republic of Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, and Singapore also achieved remarkable successes. Sometimes, this is attributed to the Chinese culture , but this does not hold

much ground, as similar success has been shown in some parts of India and today even in Bangladesh.

Mauritius with a population comprising significant proportion of people of Indian origin presents a picture of a country which achieved its objectives in population control in an innovative fashion. Following the end of World War II, thanks to public health measures and especially the eradication of malaria, the country witnessed a huge spurt in its growth of population. The colonial government mounted a Royal Commission which came to the conclusion that with its limited land area, there was imminent need for a vigorous family planning programme. No action could however be initiated by the government, which was concerned about the anticipated violent opposition from especially the Catholic Church and other religious interests..

Even after independence, the country was unable to make much headway on the population front because of the fear of possible reaction from the religious groups. But, since the matter was getting quite precarious, an ingenious mechanism was devised whereby, the family planning programme was to be handled by a voluntary organization ( MFPP an affiliate of IPPF ) and by the church ( Action Familial). Whereas MFPP provided modern contraceptive methods, Action Familial followed the church accepted methods like the rhythm method, abstinence etc. Later, when it was clear that there was general acceptance of family planning by the people, the programme was integrated with the Ministry of Health. It is known that the programme is accepted as very successful and in recent years the fertility in the predominately Catholic district of Rodrigues is even lower than in the main Island of Mauritius.

However one disturbing aspect is the still large and increasing proportion of teen age births. Even though there is law stipulating minimum age at marriage, strict enforcement is hampered by some religious practices which calls for treading a cautious path so as not to annoy any particular political constituency. Therefore, it calls for family planning to reach teenagers and improve the success rate of family planning methods in addition to mounting information, education and communication among the various constituents of the population regarding the health aspects of teen age pregnancy and births.

## **6. Politics of abortion**

Abortion has been used as a method of fertility control in some countries. A classic example is that of Japan after defeat in World War II when faced with loss of territories and prospect of huge increase of population in the limited land area of the island. Some other countries which opted for abortion like China have been accused as using coercion and inhuman methods. Selective abortion could also be utilized as a programme of eliminating specific ethnic / cultural groups as reported in prewar Europe. Abortion therefore can become a tool for genocide. Thus on religious and humanitarian reasons abortion should only be a last resort and should be meticulously monitored.

Abortion issue has local, national and international dimensions. Religious / cultural opposition to questions on abortion have been part of the politics of population for a long time. In the 1980s in order to satisfy the Catholic church, the United States announced that its financial and material support should not be used by countries and agencies who do not prohibit abortion as part of family planning. Accordingly, funding for the premier

family planning organization ( IPPF ) and population organization ( UNFPA ) were cut off from US official assistance.

In the US abortion issues are also very political and at times violent. Clinics, medical personnel and organizations accused as encouraging or practicing abortion get targeted for vehement protest and often physical violence. The religious right plays an important role in the question on abortion and influence local, national and international politics through support to candidates for various elected positions.

Issues of abortion were the centre of discussions and controversies during the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo 1994. Even in many developing countries, abortion issues generate intense emotions with political consequences. For instance, even though technically the Mauritian family planning programme is considered as a success because it has been able to bring down the fertility to replacement level or even lower, one aspect, which is vital, should be brought out which makes the programme as not to be considered as fully successful. This is because the lowering of the birth rate was not through the recognized family planning methods, but through abortions, necessitated by failure of family planning. It has been estimated that abortions may be quite substantial and since it is not legal, people either resort to illegal abortion clandestinely in the country or travel to neighbouring Reunion or South Africa to obtain abortion. Illegal abortion which constitutes a sizable chunk of the total, brings in health hazard to women and increases maternal morbidity and mortality,

This being the case, legalization of abortion could have provided at least medical control on these events. Unfortunately, again religious politics makes it impossible for government to legalize abortion. Thus a purely health issue is caught up in religious politics in the country. The position of many other countries may be similar and even though faced with the problem of large-scale illegal abortion are yet unable to legalize abortion for fear of religious / cultural backlash.

## **7. Conclusions**

Population aspects have been shown to be the centre of local, national and international politics. Controversies on concepts, terms, terminology and theories on population went to such an extent as to paralyze the UN and World Health Organization in their initial crucial years. Despite these handicaps, United Nations played an important role when in the 1950s the newly independent developing countries faced the prospect of their development efforts thwarted by rapid population increase and neither the developing countries nor developed nations could openly propose population programmes. Through an ingenious and diplomatic way population awareness was introduced into developing countries by establishing Training and Research Centres in demography in the regions. Still further political maneuvers were to be taken by the institutes in order not to face opposition from cultural and other groups by designing curriculum and research which did not include family planning or population control.

National perceptions and priorities on population of developing countries being health and population distribution could not be satisfactorily addressed due to different agendas and motives of international community which focused on fertility and family planning. Censuses meant for obtaining information on population became the hot bed for controversies and even resulted in violent conflicts. In quite a few cases, censuses could not be conducted for long periods of time or in a few the effort seems to have been given up. Family planning became politicized at local level because of ethnic, linguistic,

cultural and regional competition and rivalries. At the national level, the motives and methods of government and other agendas became suspect. At international level, accusations of neocolonialism, genocide and other motives were frequent. Colonization and settlement being no more options available and with very rigid immigration controls and claims of national sovereignty, the problem of uneven population distribution involving legal and political issues seems difficult to solve. These issues hampered progress in addressing the emerging population problems of developing countries.

Abortion issues got mired in local and national manipulations and at international level in lack of donor support and withdrawal of funds. Because of political backlash, countries were caught in a position where they were unable to make appropriate decisions. Especially pressures from religious groups derailed the Cairo Plan of Action and thwarted efforts to bring in legislation to improve women's health. The final casualty are the poor, women and children.

Unless population is divorced from politics it is well nigh impossible to improve the situation in respect of population and development in the countries. Even though situation has vastly improved in Asia and to a large extent in Latin America, efforts still need to be made to improve situation in Africa. Information, Education and training in demography could assuage some of the problems. Adequate funding and support is called for.

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