Aparna Sai Ajjarapu
Ames High School
Ames, Iowa
India, Factor 13

India: Reducing Population Growth and Urbanization through Education and Public Policy Initiatives

Harboring the second largest population in the world, India symbolizes a multiplicity of diverse cultures and ethnicities. Arguably the largest democracy in the world, India has great potential in becoming a world leader in the global economy. In order for the progression of India in becoming a world power, the problem of overpopulation and urbanization must be addressed.

According to the estimates released by the United Nations in 2008, India accounts for more than 17% of the world's total population. This figure leaves India accountable for more than one billion people. With over one billion people living on less than 2.5% of the total land area on Earth, a depletion of resources is prevalent in this country. The great disproportion in land area and population leaves more than a third of the population living under the poverty line (according to a 2004-2005 survey by NSSO.)

India's population is still growing, and estimates from the United Nations predict India to become the most populous country in the world by the year 2050, surpassing China. Predictions also project India to eventually accommodate over 19% of the world's population by 2050. The pace of demographic transition in India not only affects the country as a whole, but also effects the population stabilization of the world. Action must be taken to stop further overpopulation and urbanization.

As a developing country, India has to face many economic and political hurdles when initiating population stabilization. Some of the main reasons for population explosion in India are poverty, medical and technological advancements, and immigration from poverty-stricken neighboring countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal.

India is currently facing a vicious cycle of population explosion and poverty. One of the leading factors for an increase in population is poverty. About 1/4th of the Indian population earns less than $0.40 per day and 75% of the total Indian poor reside in rural areas and are dependent on daily wages or on landless laborers and self-employed householders. The people, who have to struggle to make ends meet, produce more children because more children mean more helping and earning hands. Also, because of the high infant mortality rate in poverty stricken areas, families produce more children assuming that not all of them will be able to survive. The end result is a mounting increase in the population of India.

Religious beliefs, traditions, and cultural norms also play a major role in population increase. India's culture is rich in history and runs back far in ancient times. Because of an increased population growth, many educational facilities are scarce, or have not been established in rural areas. In this way, many people still adhere to their old religious practices and principles. For example, many Indian families feel that they are more prosperous if they produce a son. As a result, families are overproducing, resulting in offspring that they cannot afford. This results in increased poverty, a lack of resources and more importantly increased population. Old cultural norms, such as child marriages, are prevalent in rural villages in India. Child marriage allows for girls to have more offspring over their lifetime as they are married at a young age. This also leads to a population increase.

The technological and medical advancements in India have been tremendous over the years. The average life expectancy has increased from around 52 to 62 years of age. The infant mortality rate has also

decreased. Another contributing factor of population increase comes in medical advancements in birth control. Abortion is not allowed in several religions in India, so many hospitals do not provide it. However, fertility clinics that increase birth rate in India are widespread.

A relatively small but a significant factor in India's population increase can be expressed with the term *pseudo urbanization*. Pseudo urbanization is a state when a city is unable to contain its populace in terms of providing livelihood, housing and infrastructure. (Britannica Dictionary). The main cause of pseudo urbanization is the continuous immigration of rural poor from neighboring countries (Nepal, Bangladesh) into urban cities. This can lead to a population influx. Pseudo urbanization can lead to a shortage of resources.

The effects of population explosion have hampered the Indian economy tremendously. Resources are slowly depleting and becoming scarcer. The amount of resources has been insufficient in meeting the needs of the people of India. The population increase has had dire effects on the environment, in unemployment, poverty, lack of educational resources, and in the malnourishment of the people.

The improving technological advancements have proven to have been both a boon and a sin to India's prosperity. These advancements have led to a widespread opening of businesses and factories. Moreover, new factories and business are also created to provide the increasing population with jobs. The problem arises due to the large expenditure of fossil fuels and greenhouse gasses emitted by these factories. Air pollution lowers the quality of life. Deforestation is also a major problem. With the increasing population more space and energy are needed to provide for the people. In this way, many forests are cleared for fuel, and to also make way for factories, businesses, etc.

As a result of population explosion, Indian government is struggling to provide employment for its people. High job competition is present for even the lowest job offers. Unemployment and underemployment also promote corruption. With unavailable resources, people are confined to not opting for a higher education. Illiteracy furthermore leads to more unemployment. Low resources lead to food deficits, and many people suffer from malnourishment and starvation.

The over urbanization of cities also plays a major role in hampering the Indian economy. Urbanization in India concentrates most of the population in to the large technological economic centers and cities. Due to the pressure of the population to build housing, and apartments in already areas where the carrying capacity and biotic potential have been exceeded, beautiful cities are reduced to over populated slums. Urbanization leads to pollution in the environment, and unsanitary conditions. Urbanization has disturbed the equilibrium between supply and demand in the economic market.

India has implemented many policies in the past to curb the issue of population explosion, but many of these policies have proven to be ineffective. Starting from the 1900's the Indian government has continually strived to initiate many policies involving family planning, and birth control initiatives. Although these administrative measures have been encouraging and are bringing more hope in improving the conditions, these policies have only brought small changes to the population influx. There have been by no means revolutionary changes in the demographic transition of the region. The problem arises when the government introduces policies, but fails to aggressively administrate them. For there to be change the government must aggressively introduce and encourage educational facilities and programs involving family planning. The government must also encourage birth control alternatives, and eliminate the built up stereotype or symbol of these contraceptive methods being unsafe or symbolizing evil.

The history of India's explicit population policy embodies both the aspects of triumph and defeat. In the 1950's India was the first developing country to initiate the earliest national, government-sponsored family planning effort. In the 1950's India also opened up many hospitals and health care facilities that

offered birth control and contraceptive methods, but no aggressive action was taken to encourage the use of these contraceptive methods and limiting the family size. By merely "offering" these resources many of the people strayed away from utilizing them, afraid of trying something new that could possibly be dangerous.

In 1976 the Indian government adopted the National Population Policy. This policy implied that family planning programs must be integrated in aiming at improving the general welfare of the population for there to be widespread success. Aside from the population policies, many plans were put into place to control the family size in India. Many of the policies and initiatives of the Indian government were aimed at the widespread general welfare of the people, but because of such a large population, many of them failed to be implemented.

During the 1980's many of the state governments started to implement various family planning programs. Many of these programs were aimed at networking through both rural villages and urban cities. By the year of 1991, India had over 150,000 health care facilities where family planning was involved. New programs involving IUD contraceptive methods were also introduced and implemented into the birth control policies of India.

Despite the many developments in administrating policies aimed towards curbing overpopulation and urbanization in India, the 1991 consensus showed little change in the rapid rate of the population increase in India. India was still ranked first in the world in the rate of rapid population increase. Policies initiated through a centralized government proved to show little success.

Because of the wide regional differences in India, people in various states have had different views on the birth control and family planning policies. Even today, people in rural villages still adhere strongly to their ancient religious beliefs about the evils of contraceptive methods. Producing multiple offspring has become a way of life in the villages. More educational facilities must be established in these villages to improve the literacy of the villagers. This will prevent them from opting for more children.

The promotion and implementation of policies through a centralized government is widespread throughout India. With a centralized government, there is more funding and money to administrate policies and programs. The problem with this system is that many of the localized attitudes do not correspond with the National government. In this way, it takes much more time to educate and persuade people about birth control and family planning. In dealing with such a large region, with many diverse states, and a variety of people descending from different backgrounds, people have different views and attitudes about the policies. The Indian government is making its mark, and setting its foot forward with a very soft and held back attitude when implementing the policies. Because of this the government is struggling initiate policies that people agree with and want to follow.

In 1970, India declared a "state of emergency" and started the forceful sterilizations of women in poor rural villages throughout the country. Some medical workers were even awarded for their actions. These forced initiatives seemed to have hindered the populations acceptance of family planning. People started to not opt for birth control, because these aggressive actions.

The country of India needs a reform system that is more effective in targeting overpopulation and urbanization. India has exceeded its carrying capacity, and biotic potential, and resources are depleting rapidly. We must efficiently curb this population increase before it is too late.

I feel that the government must concentrate on three issues at hand to successfully stop the population explosion and urbanization:

1. Building more educational facilities and programs
2. Aggressively encouraging and persuading people about new policies and initiatives that have been issued for greater agreement from overall population
3. Building government and infrastructure, in rural villages and isolated communities dispersed throughout India, and bringing more power to the state governments

Building and constructing more educational and family planning programs, will give women the power of independence to make their own decisions about their family size. They will be able to inform people of the negative side in opting for a larger family size, and persuade them towards having a smaller family. Often in rural villages in India, women are viewed as inferior to men. By giving a woman an education, we will be able to endow them with the power to make their own decisions, and they can therefore stand up for what they want in life. Saying this, we should not only empower women with knowledge, but it is equally important to educate men about birth control policies.

Through education and awareness, we will be able to stitch people together in an unbreakable bond in working towards one cause. Strong educational programs and facilities must not only be established in large cities and metropolises, but also in rural and isolated villages. By improving the literacy rate, we will be able to also improve the employment, and the overall economy of the country.

Equal wages and equal opportunities must be established in India for both men and women. Before being able to have reproductive rights, women must have the rights to food, employment, water, justice and fair wages.

One of the problems with Indian government policy making is the lack of aggressiveness in mandating certain initiatives. For example, in the past, in working towards curbing the population increase, the Indian government has opened up many medical facilities that have offered birth control, and contraceptives. They have also opened up many family planning programs. The problems with these initiatives were that the majority of the population were not informed or educated about the available resources and programs. These reforms were never aggressively introduced or encouraged to the Indian population. This is why these policies were rendered ineffective and inefficient.

Some States in India are taking more drastic measures in curbing overpopulation. In the southern Indian state of Kerala, the government is proposing a bill called "The Women's Code Bill". According to the population research institute, if this bill is passed, it will create a two-child policy in Kerala. This policy puts laws into place that punish families who do not meet the quota of two children or else. Criminal penalties are ensued if a family goes over the quota. Families would also be fined a 2000 rupees penalty, and could be jailed up to three months. Those who spoke out against the bill would be severely punished by the government. Over quota children would also be denied of state's rights and benefits.

Similar policies have been proposed by many states in India. For example, the State of Gujarat is also proposing a two child policy. The policy would give families who meet the quota of two children benefits such as free health care, subsidized food, and free education, while families with over quota children would be stripped of these benefits. Maternity leaves and medical benefits could also be denied for pregnancies with families of two children or more.

Some women's rights advocates, and groups oppose these laws, and debate that putting a higher emphasis on family planning, and furthermore increasing free health care, and medical benefits would be more effective in curbing overpopulation as opposed to more drastic and aggressive methods.

To curb the effect of urbanization in the large cities, we must make the economy of small cities and villages viable. To do this we must build a strong infrastructure and government to bring order to these regions. We must build a network through the small and isolated villages dispersed throughout India, to allow communication between the government and these isolated regions. More power must be given to the state and local governments, in order for a more individualistic approach in administrating policies, and initiatives. Too much control of central government leads to problems in developing policies that are the widespread population agrees on.

Dr. Norman Borlaug argued that for agricultural development to be sustainable, nations would have to control the "population monster". Implementing the ideas mentioned above may not bring total peace towards the predicament of overpopulation, and urbanization in India, but I am confident that it will at least bring some positive change towards this issue. By stitching together various communities with different backgrounds, and bringing them together in working towards one connecting cause, we will definitely be able to conquer this issue of over population. With this mindset, as did Norman Borlaug, we can move millions.

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