

FAMILY PLANNING IN IRAN

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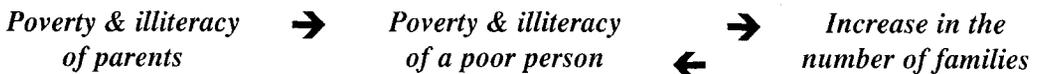
Abstract - The paper studies the demographic trends of Iran during the last five successive census periods and the way the government policies influenced the change. The paper highlights the role of religious leaders and their teachings swinging the growth rate in either direction.

The increase in population growth rate following the country's economic development and social changes reaching a level of 2.71 percent in 1966, caused some anxiety and prompted the Government of Iran to adopt a policy aimed at the reduction of growth rate during the fourth and fifth Plan period (1973-77). This, however, did not meet with much success. But with the Islamic Revolution that brought about a change in the Government, the earlier policy was reversed and population growth was encouraged with the result that the growth rate reached a level of 3.2 percent in 1986 from 2.71 percent in 1966. An alarming growth rate forced the Government to adopt family planning as a policy, which was implemented seriously, bringing down the growth rate to 1.47 percent in 1996.

INTRODUCTION

Population of a country is inalienably linked with development, as it not only provides an increased human resource but, at the same time, also causes increase in the demand for goods and services. Besides, the living style of people is certainly changing, and depending on the availability of resources, they adopt new elements of style of housing, transport, dress, health and education. If the development processes fail to meet the necessities of life, the obvious outcome is poverty. During the course of research conducted in 1993 AD, by the author of this paper, it was discovered that

one of the causes of poverty was the increase in the population size of the poor families. Majority of the people who were interrogated were aware of the fact that population increase is the principal cause of their poverty. What is interesting is that these families believed in family planning to slow down population growth, but because of illiteracy, were ignorant of the methods to be adopted. It was also found that poverty was chronic in these families and these families have been illiterate for generations. This could be diagrammatically expressed in the following manner:



THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION IN IRAN SINCE 1956

The population of Iran has been constantly on the increase and there has been excessive growth during the period 1976-86, when the growth reached 3.2 percent. The Five Year Plan (1989-1995) aimed at reducing the population growth from 3.3 to 2.3 percent. During this period, the level of literacy rose from 61.8 percent in 1986 to 79.5 percent in 1995. The unemployment declined from 14.2 percent in 1988 to 9.1 percent in the year 1996. The enrolment of students in the universities during the same period shot up from 182,000 to 967,000. The population in the age group 1-14, also recorded a decline from 3.2 percent to 1.47 percent in 1996. This was demographically a very significant phenomenon. These results were achieved following the adoption of a policy aimed at the welfare of people, by the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is seen from the given table that a

great deal of change has occurred in the character of population during the 1986-96 period of ten years, the most important change being a decline in the growth rate of population.

As can be seen from the graph (fig. 1), the growth of population was 0.6 percent before 1941, but a spurt in the growth rate led to 2.71 percent growth in 1966, culminating in the highest ever recorded growth rate in the history of Iran, i. e. 3.2 percent in 1986, and 3.9 percent if the immigrants were also added. The level of urbanisation and the number of cities were also low in 1956, growing steadily over the decades. The low growth rate and a low level of urbanisation in the first half of the twentieth century could be attributed to a higher rate of mortality in the absence of access to immunisation and proper medical care, lack of security, and the political crisis, particularly the occupation of Iran by the Allies during the First and the Second World

Population of Iran during Successive Census Counts

The year of census	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996
Total population (persons)	18,957,704	25,766,733	33,708,744	49,335,010	60,055,488
% of Urban population	31.4	38.8	47	54.3	61.3
% of Rural population	68.6	62	53	45.7	38.7
Rate of population growth	1.87	2.71	2.7	3.2	1.47
% of literacy	15.4	28.71	47.5	61.8	79.5
No. of cities in the country	199	271	373	496	612
% of unemployed active population	-	-	-	14.2	9.1
Density of population per km ²	11.5	15.6	20.4	20	36.4
% of age group 0-14 years	42.2	46.1	44.5	45.4	39.4

Sources:

1. The quarterly "Iran Shenasi", 1995, no. 4, p. 63, Iran Cultural Centre, Lahore
2. The daily "Jehan" dated 12-3-1376, no. 1594-5, p. 1-3
3. Population National Report of Iran, Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education, Tehran, 1994, pp. 3.5

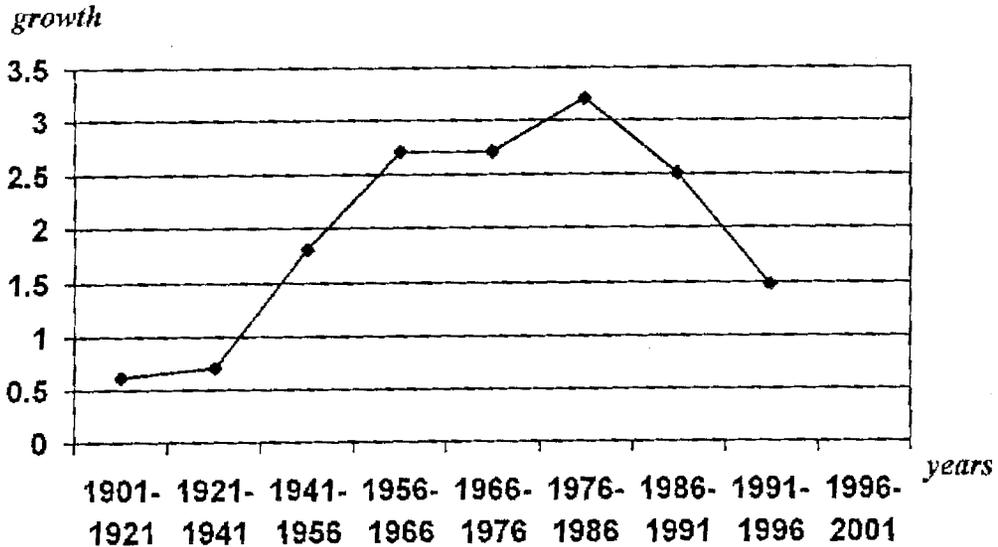


Fig. 1 : Growth Rate of Population in Iran (1901-1996)

War. The changes observed in 1966 show the influence of the 'new process of development'. During the period immediately preceding 1966, the Second and Third Reconstruction Plans were executed, and the country's economy was globalized, and especially linked with the U. S. A.. Besides, the oil revenue injected in the economy boosted the economy leading to unabated growth of population. And despite the Government policy to check the population growth, it continued growing at the rate of 2.7 percent in 1976. The main reasons for the failure of the Government in restructuring population growth rate, were the non-cooperation of the religious leaders, absence of conviction among the people about the value of the Government policy and their ignorance of the novel methods of birth control. The failure of the policy was seen more in the rural areas where 52.5 percent of the people were illiterate.

The trend of population growth in Iran intensified with the Islamic revolution in 1979. The reasons were the following:

1. Majority of religious leaders who enjoyed better social positions encouraged the growth of population.
2. Government employed in public services, members from larger families, especially in urban areas. For example, priority in the allocation of urban land was given to these families, which added to the stream of emigration from rural areas to the cities.
3. Reduction of mortality as a result of improvement of medical services and hygiene.
4. Immigration into Iran following the Iraq-Iran war and the Afghanistan crisis.
5. The governmental neglect of population crisis during the war (1980-88).

The census of 1986, which was the first, after the Islamic Republic of Iran was ushered in, showed the growth rate of population at the highest level, i. e. 3.2 percent (with immigrants 3.9 percent), which alarmed the Government and even some of the religious leaders. The

issue forced the government to adopt a new policy of family planning. The result of the family planning policy could be seen in the decline in the growth rate of population to 1.47 percent in 1996. The main reasons for the decline in growth rate of population during the decade were as under:

1. Change in the attitude of the society, and the realisation that there was a mismatch between population and employment and the understanding of the negative effect of population on development.
2. Role of the religious leaders in encouraging people to have fewer children.
3. Effect of the implementation of the national development plans after the war (1988).
4. Promotion of literacy level, and the spread of information about the methods of birth control.

DEMOGRAPHIC POLICIES OF IRAN

For acquisition of information about population policies of a state, the best source and document are the laws and programs of that state. On this basis, the laws and five years economic, social and cultural plans of Iran were taken into consideration, and simultaneously, different executive departments like, Plan and Budget Organisation, Statistical Centre of Iran, Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education were contacted and necessary information obtained*. A study of the text of Iranian plans indicates that a discussion of the population problem is included in the developments plans, and the second Reconstruction Plan of the country. In the third

Reconstruction Plan (1963-67) special attention was paid to the problems of manpower and its training for removal of the country's indigence. It is observed that in these plans the problem of population was not treated as a difficult question because the growth of population was low. However, in the fourth Reconstruction Plan (1968-72), besides dealing with socio-economic problems, special attention was paid to population. In the Fourth Reconstruction Plan of the country (1968-72), the following points were considered to be incorporated in the population policy:

1. Attending to various problems resulting from the natural growth of population and its unequal geographical dispersion in the country.
2. Taking various steps to attain a better population picture of the country. It is observed that the Fourth-Five-Year-Reconstruction-Plan was considered as the starting point for the measures to be implemented by the Government, for addressing the population problem; but the policies were forcefully adopted only in the Fifth Reconstruction Plan (1973-1977). In this plan, the following points were considered, for reducing the birth rate:
 - a) Announcement of national birth control plan and responsibility of all the general and special organisations to execute it.
 - b) Strengthening of the health and family planning units for supervision, guidance and co-ordination of birth control plans.
 - c) Removal of legal obstacles in prevention of pregnancy.

* I thank the honourable lady Andleeb in charge of Population Department and her colleagues in the Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education, who rendered all possible help and co-operation in this project of research.

- d) Execution of birth control training programs through mass media, schools, universities, and the training of old people.

The Sixth Development Plan (1978-1982) which was contemporaneous with the Islamic revolution movement could not be fully implemented, but special attention was paid to population policies. After the study of all five yearly six development plans during the period before the Islamic Revolution, one comes to the conclusion that the problem of population, from the Fourth Development Plan onward, gradually took a concrete shape. And the government was obliged to adopt stronger policies in every plan compared with the previous ones. Yet, it was unable to reduce the population growth, or obtain a better spatial model by distributing the population in the country side.

After the Islamic Revolution (1979), and due to special problems of transition, involving the collapse of the previous government, revolutionary excitement and the involvement of the people in establishing official and governmental foundations, much time was lost. Possibilities of organising a five year development plan did not exist. The country was administered within the framework of short term one-year-plans. Because of the break-out of imposed war (1980-88), and the economic boycott of Iran by America and the West, attention was diverted from this important problem of population. The plan of 1988 was not ratified by the parliament. Intellectual and ideological atmosphere to encourage the growth of population and priority of the government to provide facilities, land and house to families with numerous children, resulted in creating economic, and social problems. The results of 1986 census showed that Iran was one of the countries

which had the highest population growth in the world.

During the formation of the next Five Year Plan (1989-1993) the population problem was seriously considered, and clear policies were laid down to reverse the trend. The plan gave priority to family planning and birth control.

The people easily accepted the new policy of the government. Consequently, the population growth rate of the country was reduced from 3.2 percent to 1.47 percent (i. e. fall of 1.73 percent). This reflects the constructive role played by religion and religious leaders in solving the problem of population. The success of first development plan in restraining the population growth provided the necessary impetus, and in the second development plan (1994-1998) approved by the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the population policy became the focus of attention.

EXECUTIVE PLANS FOR POPULATION POLICIES:

For implementing population policies and limiting birth rate, which during in the first and second development plans (1989-1998) various executive plans were adopted by the government; the main ones being the following:

1. Propagation of information and instructive programmes about population problems through mass media.
2. Holding of national seminars on population during the years 1988, 1992, 1993.
3. Formation of a consultative committee on birth control in the year 1990.
4. Organisation of a general Department of Population and Family Planning in the year 1991 in the Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education.

5. Preparation and approval of population and family planning law in 1993 by the Islamic Consultative Committee. Its main articles are as under:

Article I: All privileges which were provided and enacted in the laws on the basis of number of children, will not be applied and exercised with regard to fourth child and subsequent children born after one year of the approval of this law.

Article II: Ministries of Education, Culture and Higher Education, Health, Treatment and Medical Education, Culture and Islamic Guidance will be responsible for implementing this programme.

Article III: The Radio and Television Organisation is responsible for preparing and broadcasting directly and indirectly, programmes on Radio and Television.

6. Co-ordination with international population programmes. For example active participation of Iranian Mission in the international population conference at Cairo in 1994.

EXECUTIVE STEPS TAKEN FOR BIRTH CONTROL

In order to achieve the targets of population policy following steps were taken:

1. Researches were carried out to survey the attitude of the people during the five years (1989-1993). This showed that 92 percent of the people believed in the family planning programme and 48.6 percent of the families utilised effective methods of family planning.

2. Details of family planning teaching programmes are as under:

- a) General teaching programmes including speeches, short notices, film, radio and television programmes, etc.
- b) Direct teaching programmes including talks with women.
- c) Official teaching programmes including school text books.
- d) Scientific and technical training including holding of training workshops, training courses for physicians and medical students.

3. Extensive and multiple provisions of contraception like condom, various I. U. D.'s, contraceptive pills and contraceptive surgical methods.

4. Equipment and establishment of a Birth Control Centre within the Health and Treatment Centre which were deficient in these facilities.

5. Presentation of contraceptive services through Health and Treatment centres of the country including 12000 health clinics, 4000 rural and urban Health and Treatment centres and more than 400 hospitals (these services are provided free at all government centres).

6. Utilisation of financial, technical, consultative aids of societies and international organisations and also from special institutions in the country.

7. Efforts to create positive attitude about the acceptance of small families, health benefits of birth control, and the lawfulness of birth contraceptives.

8. Constant contact with scholars, religious leaders and leaders of Friday prayers, societies, and scientific and cultural

personalities for utilising their viewpoints in training and explaining the benefit of family planning to the society.

9. Publication of articles in the newspapers and conduct of training and explanatory programmes through the media.

CONCLUSION

Iran like any other Third World country, was confronted with a rapid increase in population due to reduction in mortality. The population growth accelerated the movement of people from villages to cities. During a period of ten years ending 1960, population recorded a growth of 2.7% during the Fourth and Fifth Reconstruction Plans, before the Islamic Revolution. The Government was forced to adopt a population policy which continued up to the Sixth Plan (1978-1982). But this did not receive favourable response from the religious scholars, religious centres and the people at large. During the period of the Islamic Revolution (after 1979) certain national problems became the cause of speedy growth of population (3.2 percent including immigrants up to 3.9 percent). Besides the momentum of earlier growth till 1970, change in the government, war situation and economic boycott by the western world were other

reasons for continued population growth. Consequently, the Iranian government through its First and Second Development Plans (1988-1998) tried to overcome the galloping population problem. It adopted a clear-cut birth control policy, took support from the religious scholars, authorities and the leaders of Friday Prayers. Credible investment, drawing attention of the people, approval and implementation of definite laws, and teaching programmes succeeded to an extent and the growth rate of population fell over a period of ten years (1989-96) from 3.2 percent to 1.47 percent. The achievement was even higher than the target set. The reduction in the growth rate was so important that the government could not pay adequate attention to a more rational distribution of population in the country side. A separate inquiry needs to be made as to why the programme could not be properly implemented. However, the execution of population policies of Iran with respect to birth control and its proportionate distribution in the country can solve, only to an extent, the social, economic and cultural problems of Iran and expedite its social and cultural development. These also depend on the continuation of government's executive policies and the steps taken in future.

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