

Shaping India's Population Policy and Programme: Internal Factors and External Influences*

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I Introduction

India has had a population programme, earlier called 'family planning' and later family welfare, for over fifty years. For some time initially, there was no explicit population policy but the programme announcements served as implicit policy. A clear policy was introduced in 1976, followed by a substantial revision though not a total abandonment of it a year later. In 2000, after much deliberation, another policy was announced. With a broad consensus that rapid population growth is not desirable for the economic development of a country with limited resources, the programme has generally promoted fertility regulation as the basic instrument of reducing population growth. The policy and programme formulation is naturally influenced by a number of factors. Economic, social, and demographic conditions within the country could influence thinking on population issues by opinion leaders as well as policies of the government. Besides, international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, development agencies of certain countries, and non-government foundations could call for policy measures and funding agencies could impose conditions on policies and programmes for receiving financial aid; there has long been criticism of external or '*foreign influences*' on India's population policies and programmes. How have these operated in India? Specifically, to what extent, and in what manner, have internal factors and external pressures shaped India's population policy?

It needs to be noted at the outset that India's population programme is essentially a programme for fertility regulation, commonly called the 'family planning' programme, though the label was formally changed to 'family welfare'. In principle, a family planning programme may be devised with improving women's health as the principal goal, to free women from frequent and unwanted childbearing, on social and health considerations, whereas a population policy may have macro-level goals on population size and growth, on economic considerations. But when rapid population growth is perceived to be

* Text of P.R. Dubhashi Public Lecture delivered at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, on 16 February, 2009.
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