

Demographic Evolution of India's Family Planning Programme

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1. ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF THE FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMME

India has the unique distinction of having been the first country to introduce an official programme for family planning in 1951 as an integral part of its socio-economic development plan. Since then the programme has grown steadily and today it is perhaps the second largest programme in the world, covering a huge population of about 70 crores. During its evolution, various strategies were developed for extending the reach and improving the performance of the programme.

When the Family Planning Programme was started in 1951, the approach was essentially clinical. The family planning services were made available in clinics on the expectation that people would visit them for getting advice and service. However, this approach failed to draw an adequate number of couples to the family planning clinics. Therefore, the programme strategy was changed from the clinical to the extension approach at the beginning of the Third Five Year Plan (1961-66). Unlike the clinical approach, the extension approach was meant to take the programme to the people by spreading the message and methods of family planning through an extensive network of primary health centres in rural areas, and hospitals and family welfare centres in urban areas.

The programme was strengthened in 1966 by the creation of a full-fledged Department of Family Planning in the Ministry of Health and Family Planning. Family planning services were integrated with those of health, maternal and child care with the help of specially trained multi-purpose workers. The Intra Uterine Device (IUD) was introduced during this period, but unfortunately without adequate preparation. After an initial period of encouraging response from the women during 1965 and 1966, IUD became unacceptable to a majority of women because of perceived side effects of the device that were unanticipated.

With the failure of IUD as an acceptable method of