

BOOK REVIEWS

Fertility Policies of Asian Countries

Edited by K. Mahadevan

New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1988. 320 pp. cloth. ISBN 0-8039-9570-9 (U.S.A.)
81-7036-110-9 (India).

Many nations in Asia have adopted population policies and promoted population control programs for a long period of time. India and China, for example, launched their earliest official programs in the 1950s. The success or failure of efforts to control the population for each country depends upon a number of complex factors. To synthesize scattered information on various experiences of population control in Asian countries, this volume is a collection of papers on fertility policies in eleven countries in the Asian region, namely, Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Iran, Kuwait, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand.

The first chapter has an opening discussion on various aspects of fertility control policy and the need for specific policies relating to child survival, status of women, old age security, and changes in the social structure and policy programs. In addition, the authors provide basic concepts, definitions, dimensions, a conceptual scheme and a multi-sectoral approach to policy in general.

The following chapters cover specific nations, focusing on the formation and development of population policies, the main characteristics of the family planning programs and the trends and changes in the demographic situations. The experiences of the countries covered in this volume can be classified into three categories, namely, those with successful programs, those which encounter difficulties, and those which are pronatalist. Each country-specific chapter examines the population control policy from the perspectives of its operation, implementation, and program promotion. The profiles of the policies of these Asian nations have certain features in common. Several essays contained in this volume reveal that in almost all countries, the population control program is integral to the health department. The administrative hierarchy involved in the implementation of the family planning

program also shows similar characteristics. For almost all countries examined, the programs lay emphasis on sterilization, condom, loop and pill, except in Pakistan, where sterilization is the least acceptable method. Exceptionally high priority is given to sterilization in India, the condom in Pakistan and the loop in Taiwan.

Unique characteristics are also found in some Asian countries, particularly Kuwait and Iran which are pro-natalist countries. The Kuwaiti government encouraged high fertility in order to replace the alien labor force with local people. For Iran, the government abolished family planning programs after the Revolution and early marriage as well as procreation have been promoted as a part of the Islamic value system. The impact of this pronatalist policy is evident as the population grew from 34 million in 1976 to 48 million in 1986, which is a major setback for Iran's future development. The experience of Australia, on the other hand, represents a unique case as it is a more developed society.

While this volume provides different experiences of many countries in Asia, it remains to be further investigated the causal factors of the success or failure of each fertility control program. This task will not be achieved through a mere descriptive analysis at the aggregate level. However, based on preliminary information from this book, causal models of factors determining the achievement of each population policy can be developed to test with empirical data. If further steps are taken in this direction, we will have a better understanding of policy mechanism in each country.

This volume is worth reading for not only scholars interested in population studies, but also those in the fields of social and preventive medicine, sociology, social work, public administration, and development studies. It is also a valuable source of reference for policy-makers, planners, and family planning administrators.

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Population Growth and Poverty in Rural South Asia

Edited by Gerry Rodgers

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The relationship between population growth and poverty is very complex and scholars often find it difficult to use empirical data to demonstrate these tangled interlinkages. This volume represents an attempt to examine various demographic components of poverty, interactions between demographic factors and poverty at the micro-level, and corresponding relationships at the macro-level. Such effort was made by bringing together empirical studies of population and poverty in four countries of South Asia, namely, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

The book covers a wide range of aspects concerning population growth and poverty. The beginning chapter is an overview of the issue and a summary of major empirical findings from the four country studies. Chapter 2 is a household level analysis based on a survey in the Indian state of Bihar, while Chapter 3 focuses on the household analysis of a national survey of Pakistan. The purpose is to assess the relationships between poverty characteristics of households and their demographic structures. In Chapter 4, several demographic indicators of agricultural labour households are examined using information from census and national surveys of India. Chapter 5 is a micro study using longitudinal data from two villages in Bangladesh to assess the changing impact of population pressure on land-holding. The last chapter deals with Nepal at the national level. The author discusses the issue within a broader context of social relations of production and examining interactions between population pressure, ecological change and patterns of social and economic inequality.

One can gain a great deal of insights from this volume regarding the relationship between population and poverty from both micro and macro perspectives. The volume also contains empirical evidence on the issue from selected nations of South Asia. More importantly, the collected essays offer a wide range of examinations on the interlinkages between demographic factors and poverty indicators. The volume stresses both the direct and indirect effects of population growth on poverty. It also emphasizes the fact that the concept of poverty has many dimensions, including consumption levels, assets, health, and education.

While there is still much more room for future investigation of this complex issue, this book represents an admiring effort to take a bold step in studying the case

of rural South Asia. The findings from this book are undoubtedly useful for similar investigations in other parts of the world where the problems of poverty and population remain evident. I would like to recommend this very important book to scholars, planners and policy-makers who are interested in the issue of population and poverty.

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