

Editorial

Reproductive Health Services and Family Planning

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In 1968 world leaders proclaimed that individuals had a basic human right to determine the number and timing of their children. About 44 years later, modern contraception remains out of reach for millions of women and men.

The unprecedented decrease in mortality began to accelerate in the more developed parts of the world in the 19th century and expanded to the entire world in the 20th century. By one estimate life expectancy at birth increased from 30 to 67 yrs between 1800 and 2005, leading to a rapid growth of the population: from 1 billion in 1810 to over 7 billion in 2010. The theme for this year's population day will be the recognition of the right of every person to attain universal access to reproductive health services.

For Pakistan July 11 2012 will bring several questions to answer. Pakistan is one of the largest growing countries in the world. In early 1994 Pakistan's population was estimated to be 126 million. At that time it was the ninth most populous country of the world however land area wise ranked thirty-second among nations.

Thus Pakistan has 2% of the world's population living on less than 0.7% of world's land. The population growth rate is among the highest, officially estimated as 3.1% per yr but privately thought to be closer to 3.3% by planner's involved in population programs.

Pakistan's problem with militancy, a fragile economy and natural disasters such as 2011 and 2010 floods have often been discussed, but an even greater threat may be posed by sheer number of people in the country.

According to official figure, the projected population for 2015 is 191 million, up from the

current figure of 170 million, making it the 6th most populous nation on earth. By 2050 it is expected to climb to the 4th place. This is bad news for a country that has struggled to provide its people with adequate food, health care or education.

Malnutrition rates are high and are linked to 50% of infant and child death, there is only 1 doctor for every 1183 people and the literacy rate of 57% is among the lowest in south asia.

The root cause of overpopulation is unbalanced growth of population. In 3rd world country's basic awareness among common people is lacking which is the fundamental reason of overpopulation.

Poverty highly increases child mortality rate an individual citizen's poverty results in poverty of the whole country. In thickly populated countries life expectancy ratio is very low. As per the latest statistics Pakistan has 64.6 as life expectancy ratio of an individual whereas Japan has 82.3, the difference is very clear.

Family planning and population control programmes were started in 1950 and 1960 by private government institution. For yrs these in situations focused only on women as it was thought that family planning was the preserve of women therefore the audience was 100% women.

In 1947 the fertility rate was 7.5 per women in Pakistan and population growth rate was 4.5% per yr. in 1990 these were reduced to 5.1 and 2.9 but this reduction is negligible. Presently 47% of Pakistan's population is under the age of 15.

More than 50 yrs have passed, millions of dollars have been spent, multiple resources have been exhausted and Pakistan still adds 4 million people

to its population every yr. contraceptive use went from 6% in 1969 to 18% in 1995. Pakistan's average 6 children per family has barely fallen since 1960s and population density is 169/km.

Despite the grim picture we cannot afford to stop. Issues relating to family planning and reproductive health services are complex and intertwined. Solutions also need to be comprehensive and integrated.

The most important actions include: expanding family planning concept beyond family planning to reproductive health services, generating positive attitude among public and political officials, organizing an effective media campaign, improve existing service quality, involving religious leaders to endorse the programmes and the role of donor agencies to continue their responsibilities to support a struggling economy and a young nation.