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# **POPULATION CONTROL LAWS AS AGAINST MORAL DILEMMA FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

AUTHORED BY - SAI SIRIJA LELLA

## **ABSTRACT**

There lies a subtle yet obvious connection between population control, environmental protection, and ethical considerations. This intersection gives way to a multitude of challenges while making adequate legislation for the same. With a rise in awareness across the world about environmental sustainability, population dynamics comes into the picture as an important element that directly influences resource consumption, ecological balance, and climate change. This paper is set to explore the impending necessity of managing population growth as a means for environmental conservation, while also looking into the socio-cultural and moral intricacies involved in implementing such policies. It particularly examines the Indian context, tracing the evolution of the country's population control strategies from post-independence family planning initiatives to modern-day voluntary and rights-based approaches.

India, with its huge population and similar complexities, is directly related to this research. India has its own history of population control, beginning from the first Five-Year Plan in 1951. Following this, there have been multiple attempts at family planning throughout the years, that came with a set of legal dilemmas which are essential to be addressed so as to put the nation on the right track for development. In the process of addressing these challenges, India was able to shift towards more ethical, safe and voluntary methods for family planning, reproductive rights, and education. Yet, the legislative progress, however little it may be, would be of no use if the implementation of these population control measures were not effective. It is important for proper effect that the focus is not just on drafting of the laws but also on adequate implementation.

The paper also stresses the ethical factors that come into play for ensuring that population control measures respect individual autonomy. This paper expands the boundaries beyond India to an International ground, as this is not an issue that is just restricted to India but with every State. On that note, global treaties and policies such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Programme of Action of the International Conference

on Population and Development advocate for a human rights-based approach, which is the ground objective of this paper.

Extending the focus to the status of South Korea's attempt in family planning, we come across a different scenario. The three-child policy, which is set to be adopted by South Korea, would come into place to address the declining birth rates. While economically motivated, the policy raises ethical concerns about government intervention in personal reproductive choices, raising a moral dilemma all over again.

This paper stresses that the future of sustainable development lies on the ability of the nation to adequately harmonize its population control policies with human rights, cultural sensitivities, and ecological integrity

## INTRODUCTION

The intersection of population control, ethical considerations, and environmental protection underscores a complex web of policies, socio-cultural dynamics, and ethical dilemmas. Thanks to the environment-centric approach that is rapidly rising, the consequences of any law on the environment are being considered at every turn.<sup>1</sup> One such well-known factor with the most prevalent effect on the environment is population. So, addressing population growth as a means of environmental conservation brings forth multifaceted challenges and nuanced debates, blending ethical principles, and policy implementation strategies, which is crucial for the survival of beings on this planet.<sup>2</sup> From India's historical journey in population control measures to the global perspective of integrating population dynamics into sustainable development, it is important to analyze the functioning and the efficiency of the same.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, recent contradicting instances like Korea's three-child policy highlight the ethical complexities of incentivizing family sizes, triggering moral debates surrounding individual autonomy, societal pressures, and environmental implications.<sup>3</sup> Balancing these diverse facets

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<sup>1</sup> Donald A. Brown, *The Ethical Dimensions of Global Environmental Issues*, Vol. 130, No. 4, AAAS, 59-76 (2001) <sup>2</sup> J. J. Speidel, D. C. Weiss, S. A. Ethelston, & S. M. Gilbert, *Population Policies, Programmes and the Environment*.

Vol. 364(1532), *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci.* 3049–3065 (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Gabe T. Wang, *Population Control Policies and Implementations in India*, Vol. 7, No. 2, JSSW, 135-144 (2019)

<sup>3</sup> Shweta Sharma, *Backlash over reported South Korean Plan to exempt new fathers from military service*, INDEPENDENT, Mar. 27, 2023 <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/east-asia/south-korea-birth-rate-exempt-fatherb2308656.html>

within policy frameworks demands a delicate equilibrium between societal needs and ethical imperatives, setting the stage for comprehensive discourse and ethical decision-making in population-related policies worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

## PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT

Protecting the environment is essential for the well-being of the planet and all life forms that inhabit it.<sup>5</sup> Population control is a major factor in environmental protection due to its influence on resource consumption, waste generation, and overall environmental impact. Some of the important reasons for protecting the environment through population control are<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Resource Utilization and Carrying Capacity:

Earth has finite resources such as water, arable land, forests, and fossil fuels. A rapidly growing population puts immense pressure on these resources, leading to overexploitation, depletion, and scarcity. Every ecosystem has a carrying capacity, which is the maximum population size that the environment can sustainably support. Overpopulation can exceed this capacity, leading to ecological imbalance, resource depletion, and environmental degradation.

### 2. Biodiversity Conservation:

Human activities, including urbanization and expansion, encroach upon natural habitats, leading to habitat loss and fragmentation. This threatens biodiversity by reducing the available space for wildlife. As the human population expands, the demand for land, water, and resources increases, contributing to habitat destruction and endangerment of various species.

### 3. Climate Change Mitigation:

A larger population translates to increased demand for energy, transportation, and food, resulting in higher greenhouse gas emissions. Overpopulation intensifies climate change and its associated consequences like rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and disruptions to ecosystems. Implementing effective population control measures can aid in stabilizing emissions by curbing excessive consumption and reducing the strain on natural resources.

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<sup>4</sup> Henrik Andersson, Eric Brandstedt & Olle Torpman, *Review Article: The Ethics of Population Policies*, CRISPP, Feb. 10, 2021, 1-24 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13698230.2021.1886714>

<sup>5</sup> Renkou Yanjiu, *Population Control and Environment Protection*, (1), Qu G. Chinese, 43-8 (1982)

<sup>6</sup> E. W. Chu, J. R. Karr, *Environmental Impact: Concept, Consequences, Measurement*, RMLS, Oct. 31, 2016 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7157458/>

#### 4. Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development aims to meet present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs. Managing population growth is essential for achieving this balance by ensuring resources are not overexploited or depleted. A smaller, stable population allows for better resource distribution, improved access to education, healthcare, and better living standards, promoting a more sustainable and equitable society.

#### 5. Food Security and Water Conservation:

The growing population demands increased agricultural output, leading to deforestation, soil degradation, and excessive water usage for irrigation. Controlling population growth can alleviate pressure on agricultural lands and water resources. Overpopulation exacerbates water scarcity. Population control measures can reduce per capita water consumption and strain on freshwater sources, aiding in water conservation efforts.

## POPULATION CONTROL

It is a known relation of what the population does to the environment, leading to the conclusion of how important it is to take appropriate steps to tackle the same.<sup>7</sup> India too has been trying to cope with this requirement since the 1950s. Population control in India has always been a topic of significant discussion due to the country's vast population size and its associated challenges. India's population policies have evolved over time, aiming to manage the population growth rate through various laws, initiatives, and incentives.<sup>8</sup>

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The government recognized the need for population control soon after independence in 1947. The First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956)<sup>10</sup> marked the beginning of family planning programs, focusing on maternal and child health, rather than explicitly emphasizing birth control. The efforts during this period were limited in scope and impact due to various factors, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of awareness, cultural norms, and a shortage of trained

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<sup>7</sup> J. J. Speidel, D. C. Weiss, S. A. Ethelston, & S. M. Gilbert, *Population Policies, Programmes and the Environment*.

Vol. 364(1532), *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci.* 3049–3065 (2009).

<sup>8</sup> Gabe T. Wang, *Population Control Policies and Implementations in India*, Vol. 7, No. 2, *JSSW*, 135-144 (2019)

<sup>10</sup> V. K. R. V. Rao, *India's First Five-Year Plan-A Descriptive Analysis*, *PACIFIC AFFAIRS*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 3–23 (1952)

personnel.

The second phase of India's family planning initiatives witnessed a more pronounced emphasis on birth control measures. The government initiated policy changes, including the establishment of the Family Planning Program in 1965. To encourage family planning, incentives like cash rewards, free healthcare, and other benefits were introduced. However, these measures faced challenges due to poor implementation, leading to limited effectiveness. India introduced aggressive targets for sterilization, mainly vasectomies, which became a dominant method. This approach faced criticism for being coercive and resulted in instances of forced sterilization in some states.

The next era saw a controversial phase under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's leadership, known for the implementation of the Emergency in 1975.<sup>9</sup> The government adopted forceful measures to control the population growth, including the infamous forced sterilization drives, leading to widespread criticism and human rights violations. The coercive methods employed during this period received severe backlash, damaging the credibility of the family planning programs. The public outcry led to a shift in policy after the Emergency period ended.

Traditional beliefs, cultural norms, and societal perceptions regarding family size posed significant challenges to family planning efforts. The preference for male children, religious beliefs, and societal taboos hindered the acceptance of birth control measures. Limited healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas, and a lack of awareness about contraception methods contributed to the slow progress of family planning programs.

## LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The Constitution of India encourages population control through Article 47 of the Indian Constitution<sup>10</sup>, which falls under the Directive Principles of State Policy. These principles are guidelines for the state to establish social and economic justice and are non-justiciable, meaning they are not enforceable by the courts but serve as principles for governance. Article 47 specifically directs the state to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and improve public health. Population control and family planning are intrinsic to achieving these goals.

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, Carolyn Henning, *The Forced Sterilization Program Under the Indian Emergency: Results in One Settlement*, HUMAN ORGANIZATION, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 49–54 (1984)

<sup>10</sup> The Constitution Of India 1950

In line with this directive, the Indian government has introduced various laws, policies, and programs to promote family planning and control population growth. India's family planning programs, initiated in the 1950s, aimed to address population growth through measures promoting contraceptive use and reproductive health.

The state has enacted laws and policies to support family planning and reproductive health, such as the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1971) and the National Population Policy (2000, revised in 2021). These policies aim to provide accessible healthcare services, raise awareness about contraception, and promote voluntary family planning methods.

The *Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act of 1971*<sup>11</sup> decriminalized and regulated abortions in India, permitting them under specific circumstances to protect women's health and rights. The Act allows for the termination of pregnancies up to 20 weeks in cases where continuation of the pregnancy poses a risk to the woman's life or could cause grave injury to her physical or mental health. Additionally, abortions are permissible in cases of fetal abnormalities where there's a substantial risk of severe physical or mental handicap, pregnancies resulting from rape, or contraceptive failure in married women. Beyond 20 weeks, termination is allowed if it's necessary to save the woman's life. This Act aimed to provide a legal framework for safe and accessible abortion services while safeguarding women's reproductive rights and ensuring their access to medical care in sensitive situations.

The *National Population Policy (NPP)*<sup>12</sup> in India, first introduced in 2000 and later revised in 2021, outlines the government's strategies and objectives to address population-related issues while emphasizing voluntary and informed family planning. It aims to achieve a stable population by 2045, focusing on various aspects such as reproductive health services, gender equality, adolescent health, and providing universal access to comprehensive contraceptive services. The policy promotes the empowerment of women, advocates for delayed marriage and childbearing, and strives to ensure the availability of quality healthcare and family planning services across the country.

Additionally, the revised NPP of 2021 emphasizes the need to address population concerns in

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<sup>11</sup> The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 [Act 34 of 1971] (India)

<sup>12</sup> National Population Policy 2000  
<https://main.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/26953755641410949469%20%281%29.pdf>

a sustainable and inclusive manner, integrating population issues into developmental strategies while aiming to achieve greater synergy between population-related efforts and other developmental programs.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

While there have been efforts, effective implementation of family planning programs across all regions and communities remains a challenge due to issues such as lack of infrastructure, awareness, and cultural barriers. Regarding the same, India faces multifaceted challenges stemming from regional disparities in healthcare awareness and accessibility, compounded by entrenched cultural norms emphasizing larger families. Inadequate healthcare infrastructure in rural areas hampers efforts to provide comprehensive reproductive health services. Shifting societal mindsets towards smaller families encounters resistance due to deeply ingrained cultural beliefs.

Addressing population growth necessitates empowering women and ensuring gender equality, acknowledging their pivotal role in family planning. Past instances of coercive measures, such as forced sterilization, have raised ethical concerns and highlighted the imperative to strike a delicate balance between population control objectives and upholding individual rights and autonomy.

## CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

Recent policies have focused on education, awareness, healthcare improvements, and providing access to contraceptives rather than coercive methods. Efforts are being made to strengthen healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas, to provide better reproductive and maternal healthcare. While the population growth rate has decreased over the years, India continues to face challenges due to its sheer population size, requiring sustained efforts in population control.<sup>13</sup>

India's journey in population control laws and policies reflects a shift from coercive measures to voluntary approaches, emphasizing education, healthcare, and incentives.<sup>14</sup> However, challenges remain in implementation due to socio-cultural factors, regional disparities, and the

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<sup>13</sup> T. J. Samuel, *The Development of India's Policy of Population Control*, Vol. 44, No. 1, TMMFQ, 49–67 (1966)

<sup>14</sup> Renkou Yanjiu, *Population Control and Environment Protection*, (1), Qu G. Chinese, 43-8 (1982)

need for continued improvements in healthcare infrastructure. Balancing population control with ethical considerations and individual rights remains a critical aspect of India's population policies.<sup>15</sup>

## MORALITY IN THE PICTURE

Deciding between ethical needs and societal needs when drafting a policy involves a comprehensive and nuanced approach. It is of the utmost importance to understand the perspectives and needs of various stakeholders and take into account their ethical concerns, societal values, and how the policy might impact them. The establishment of an ethical framework or principles will guide the policymakers better while drafting what might severely affect sensitive matters. This could involve considering principles like justice, autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and fairness.<sup>16</sup>

Another way to inculcate morality into policy is to conduct thorough assessments to understand the potential impacts of the policy. This includes analyzing its effects on different demographic groups, socio-economic classes, the environment, and future generations as well as subjecting the policy to ethical scrutiny. Evaluating it against established ethical principles, ensures that it respects human rights, promotes fairness, and does not disproportionately harm any group. Acknowledgement of the existence of possible trade-offs between ethical principles and societal needs will lead to the realization of what is more important. Finding a balance might involve compromise, where the policy aims to address societal needs while respecting ethical considerations to the greatest extent possible. Policies that can adapt to changing societal values, technological advancements, and emerging ethical concerns are essential as flexibility allows for adjustments to maintain alignment with the evolving ethical standards.

Ultimately, drafting policies that balance ethical needs and societal needs involves a holistic approach, considering diverse perspectives, ethical principles, and the broader impact on society. Striving for a fair, inclusive, and transparent process enhances the chances of creating policies that align with both ethical considerations and societal well-being.

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<sup>15</sup> Gabe T. Wang, *Population Control Policies and Implementations in India*, Vol. 7, No. 2, JSSW, 135-144 (2019)

<sup>16</sup> Donald A. Brown, *The Ethical Dimensions of Global Environmental Issues*, Vol. 130, No. 4, AAAS, 59-76 (2001)

## INTERNATIONAL ANGLE

International law doesn't explicitly mandate population control measures as a direct means of environmental protection. Instead, it emphasizes a broader approach that links population dynamics with sustainable development and environmental conservation.

The United Nations and various international agreements recognize the complex interplay between population, development, and the environment.<sup>17</sup> Key documents such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) acknowledge the importance of addressing population issues within the context of sustainable development. Principle 8 of the Rio Declaration specifically emphasizes the need to reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, acknowledging the role of population dynamics in influencing these patterns and advocating for sustainable development strategies.

These agreements emphasize human rights, gender equality, and reproductive health as fundamental aspects. They advocate for policies that empower individuals, especially women, to make informed choices regarding family planning, access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities.<sup>18</sup>

The focus is on ensuring universal access to reproductive health services, including family planning while respecting human rights and individual autonomy. International law stresses the importance of addressing population issues within a broader framework of social and economic development, poverty eradication, and environmental sustainability.

In essence, while international law recognizes the significance of population dynamics in environmental conservation, it promotes a holistic approach that integrates population concerns into broader strategies for sustainable development, rather than advocating for strict population control measures.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Renkou Yanjiu, *Population Control and Environment Protection*, (1), Qu G. Chinese, 43-8 (1982)

<sup>18</sup> Henrik Andersson, Eric Brandstedt & Olle Torpman, *Review Article: The Ethics of Population Policies*, CRISPP, Feb. 10, 2021, 1-24 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13698230.2021.1886714>

<sup>19</sup> J. J. Speidel, D. C. Weiss, S. A. Ethelston, & S. M. Gilbert, *Population Policies, Programmes and the Environment*. Vol. 364(1532), *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*. 3049–3065 (2009).

## A DIFFERENT SITUATION

Korea's three-child policy, which was introduced in 2021, aimed to encourage families to have more children to counteract a declining birth rate.<sup>20</sup> The policy provided various incentives, including financial support, parental leave benefits, and childcare support, to encourage couples to have a third child.

The moral perspective on such policies can vary widely. Some may argue that policies encouraging larger families could be seen as positive, fostering a sense of family values and support networks. From an economic perspective, a growing population might alleviate concerns about an ageing population and workforce shortages.<sup>21</sup>

However, others might criticize such policies on several moral grounds, such as how the government policies influencing family size infringe upon individuals' rights to make personal decisions about their families. Policies incentivizing a particular number of children might interfere with personal choices regarding family size and timing.

Implementing such policies that promote larger families might create societal pressure on couples to conform to a government-endorsed norm, potentially stigmatizing those who choose not to have more children or cannot afford to do so. It might disproportionately Critics may argue that encouraging higher birth rates could exacerbate environmental issues by increasing consumption and resource demand, impacting sustainability efforts. affect women, pressuring them to bear more children, impacting their career opportunities, and potentially exacerbating gender inequalities by reinforcing traditional gender roles.

The moral debate surrounding policies like the three-child policy involves balancing societal, economic, and individual concerns. It raises questions about government intervention in family planning decisions and the ethical implications of incentivizing particular family sizes. Ultimately, the moral stance on such policies often revolves around the balance between societal needs, individual freedoms, and ethical considerations.

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<sup>20</sup> Kyung Ae Cho, *Korea's low birth rate issue and policy directions*, Vol. 27(1), KJWHN, 6-9 (2021)

<sup>21</sup> Shweta Sharma, *Backlash over reported South Korean Plan to exempt new fathers from military service*, INDEPENDENT, Mar. 27, 2023 <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/east-asia/south-korea-birth-rate-exempt-fatherb2308656.html>

## CONCLUSION

The interplay between managing population growth, ethical concerns, and safeguarding the environment creates a complex framework of policies, cultural values, and moral dilemmas. India's historical journey in population control, transitioning from forceful methods to voluntary approaches, reflects the delicate balance between societal needs and individual rights. Ongoing challenges stemming from cultural norms, regional differences, and evolving healthcare systems emphasize the need for carefully drafted ethical frameworks in shaping policies. Globally, the push for comprehensive strategies aligning population dynamics with sustainable development stresses the importance of upholding human rights, gender equality, and above all, environmental protection. Cases like Korea's three-child policy highlight the ethical complexities of governmental involvement in family planning, sparking discussions on personal autonomy, societal influences, and ecological consequences. Achieving a balanced harmony between societal demands and ethical standards becomes crucial in crafting inclusive policies that prioritize equity, openness, and the welfare of diverse communities worldwide.

