

K. Mahadevan (ed). *Fertility Policies in Asian Countries*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1989. 320 pp. Hardbound. Indian Rs 225.00.

The book consists of twelve papers and presents the contributors' observations regarding fertility control policies in Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Iran, Kuwait, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand. In the first paper, which provides a perspective (mostly in the Indian context) to the concerns about policy formulation for fertility control, the authors discuss various issues and place an emphasis on the multisectoral approach. The need to implement the policies for eligible couples, for female education and enhancement of female status, for strengthening the strategies for programme development and management, and for making policies relating to the elderly people, is stressed in this paper.

The paper on planned birth policies of China provides a view of the actions and the successes achieved through organised programmes in the recent years. Conceding that the programme in China was not entirely voluntary, the paper also highlights the problems and failures of the fertility control efforts through the emphasis on a single-child family, especially in the rural areas.

The success story of significant reductions in mortality and fertility in Thailand has been attributed to economic and social development as well as to fertility control programmes. The paper on Taiwan highlights the experience of a successful demographic transition to achieve a net reproduction rate of 'one'. It is interesting to note that Taiwan's fertility rate began to decrease even before the promotion of the family planning programme, but the acceleration in the decline was achieved through the programme.

Compared to the Asian countries, the demographic experience in Australia provides a contrast because deliberate limitation of fertility has been recorded for a century. This was due initially to a decline in the incidence of marriage and subsequently, in the current century, to the widespread practice of contraception. Family planning programmes in Malaysia helped to achieve a decline in marital fertility which has reduced the birth rate significantly during the recent decades.

The paper on India highlights the achievements of the family planning programmes more in terms of their contribution to a large-scale awareness about the existence of the means of fertility control and their availability than actual progress in terms of contraceptive use and reduction in fertility. The experience of significant successes achieved in Kerala in India, though an exception, provides an example of the possibility of a sharp decline in fertility. The authors of the paper have attributed the slow progress in the adoption of contraceptive use and the reduction in fertility to inadequate measures in regulating such major determinants of fertility as the value of children, old-age security, linkages between infant

mortality and fertility, low status of women, poor infrastructural facilities, and unimaginative policies. While the authors of the paper have correctly pointed to such inadequacies, the solution of these problems may not lie in as simple a measure as adequate spending by the government as the authors think. Kerala's example may provide an insight to the critical factors of serious preparedness and initiatives by the people and by the local organisations. We know that huge amounts of money cumulatively spent in family planning programmes have yielded grossly insufficient improvements in the programme systems. The authors of the paper, however, suggest that progress of the family planning programmes in India can be expedited through an imaginative, flexible, decentralised, and multisectoral approach in the new population policy. In view of the fact that the programmes have been in existence in India (and, of course, in other countries of Asia) for such a long time, it would have been better if the authors had made more specific research-based suggestions.

The paper on Kuwait gives a weak indication of the decline in fertility from 1965 to 1980. For Iran, the corresponding paper does not provide a comparable and consistent view of the fertility estimates. Further, the estimates are too old to have a realistic idea of the fertility situation of those countries in comparison to the other countries covered in the book.

The situation regarding the population policies and family planning programmes which is described in the paper on Pakistan is, in many respects, similar to the one described in the paper on India—a success in creating widespread awareness but inadequate improvement in contraceptive use and actual decline in fertility. Here also the introduction of new policies and their changes over time are the least research-based. In both India and Pakistan, there have been strong policy and planning commitments for the reduction of fertility but the results achieved are the least commensurate with the policies and the monetary inputs in the family planning programmes. The situation regarding the policies and family planning programmes described for Bangladesh in the corresponding paper also indicates widespread awareness about family planning. The survey results show relatively more progress in the contraceptive prevalence rate in comparison to Pakistan, but the authors of the paper concede that the magnitude of the population problem in Bangladesh is formidable.

The paper on Sri Lanka mentions the strength of the fertility control policies, and of the strategies which contributed to the significant decline in the birth rate. The most important factor mentioned in this context is the voluntary nature of the fertility control programme in the country. Sri Lanka's example shows how motivation and a sense of responsibility, from the programme policy-makers to the grass-roots level, are essential if significant changes in fertility behaviour are to be achieved in a relatively short time.

On the whole, the book provides a useful collection of perspectives on population policies and programmes for different countries. While the papers provide views of the population situation in different countries from which their relative positions are more or less evident, it would have been better if each paper, at least in the conclusion, had also tried to answer a set of questions to bring out more specifically the critical factors which make the country's policy-making, programme execution, and results successful or otherwise. Also, there are questions as to the reliability and validity of the quantitative and qualitative assessments of the policies and programme impact which make inter-country comparisons difficult and, sometimes, unrealistic.

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