

Population Growth in Pakistan.

A challenge for sustainable development.

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scholars to provide explanation of family planning in religious context.

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Imagine an overloaded boat sinking with its own weight. Pakistan is facing a similar grim reality. It is the 5th most populous country in the world, with highest fertility rate in the South Asia. This population boom has led to environmental degradation, depletion of resources, unplanned urbanization, a burdened healthcare system, and an import-driven economy. Consequently, the country is facing challenges to provide sustainable energy, clean water and sanitation, healthcare facilities, quality education, and jobs' opportunities. Therefore, this population surge is a challenge for sustainable growth. To overcome this challenge, it is imperative to control population by educating people about the adverse effects of population boom, establishing healthcare units in rural areas, encouraging role of religious scholars, and providing tax subsidies to small families.

Only then, Pakistan will be able to control its rapid population growth and pave ways to sustainable growth.

Firstly, population surge has led to environmental degradation, impeding sustainable use of environment. The increasing demand of wood for buildings, offices, and houses has led to increase cutting of trees.

Due to excessive cutting of trees, presence of carbon dioxide, which is one of the Green House Gases, is increasing. Consequently, the rising temperature of the globe is affecting sustainable growth. In addition to deforestation, a huge amount of solid waste is being generated, contributing to environmental pollution. Moreover, biodiversity is at risk due to population boom.

More and more people are violating national and international laws against illegal hunting of various species. For instance, the Alexandrine parrots have start

disappearing from the plain areas of Pakistan due to illegal ~~punching~~ poaching of them.

Resultantly, sustainable development goal to protect environment and biodiversity has hindered due to rapid population growth.

Secondly, the population surge has led to unsustainable use of resources. Due to high demand of food, more and more food is being produced to meet the demands of the people. This has led to excessive cultivation of arable land and excessive usage of water. Therefore, unsustainable usage of land has decreased. Further, excessive usage and wastage of water has led to scarcity of water. Many people in the country are struggling to get clean water for drinking and sanitation. These are rising disputes over water ^{among} ~~between~~ provinces. Moreover, increase in population has led to high demand of fossil fuels, for electricity generation, transportation, and for industries. Excessive burning of fossil fuels has led to environmental problems. Consequently, increasing population has become an obstacle in the way of sustainable growth.

Thirdly, the rapid population growth has led to unplanned urbanization, impeding sustainable development. High number of people are shifting to urban centers,

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leading to congestion of urban centers and unplanned urbanization. People move to urban centers for better facilities such as jobs opportunities, quality education, and better healthcare services. However, this mass migration has led to unplanned urbanization. Residential societies are overcrowded. Green spaces have started disappearing. Traffic on roads has increased. Government is unable to provide better facilities to this growing population in the urban centers. For instance, the population of Karachi is over 15 million, ~~but~~ leading to significant problems. Further, pollution level has been increased due to high number of vehicles on the roads. In addition to traffic congestion, ~~resource~~ competition over resources has increased, leading to the high crime rate in urban centers. Resultantly, it has become a significant challenge to provide safer environment to people.

Fourthly, the population boom has led to increased inequalities among people. Government education system has faced challenge to provide equal

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opportunities to children to get quality education. These are almost 23 million out of school children in the country. The government is unable to bring those children to educational institutes. Moreover, private education system has become active and provide expensive education. It has extremely difficult for the poor class and even for the middle class to afford quality education. This has led to increase inequalities among the different classes of the country. Moreover, the population growth has led to a burdened healthcare system. There are one doctor per 1300 people in the country. Many people are struggling to have better health facilities. Moreover, this growing number of people has led to many other governance challenges. It has become difficult for the state to enforce law and order. Moreover, the crime rate has been increasing, leading to almost 2 million pending cases in the courts, awaiting for prosecution and conviction. The government is unable to provide justice to all the people. Therefore, this population

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has adverse effects on governance, leading to unsustainable practices.

Finally, to meet ~~the~~ growing demands of the people, economy of the country has become import-driven. The country is facing challenges to produce products of daily usage. That is why, it has to import the products. This has adverse effects on foreign currency reserves of the country, which are depleting rapidly. Further, as the energy demand of the country has significantly increased, import of Hydrocarbons has entangled the country into circular-debt crisis. Consequently, a significant amount of revenue collection has been ~~spending~~ ^{spent} to pay external debts. This unsustainable approach to meet the demands of the people has adverse effects on sustainable economy growth. Moreover, as a huge amount has spent to clear debts, budget allocation to critical sector such as education, health, and human development has decreased significantly. Therefore, import-driven economy has huge implications on sustainable growth of the country.

The rapid population growth has adverse effects on sustainable development of the country. Therefore, it is imperative to take following measures to address the challenge of the population growth.

Firstly, the challenge of rapid population growth can be addressed by raising awareness about adverse effects of population growth.

For this purpose social media platforms can be used to educate the people. For instance use of specific hashtags would be very effective to spread the message. Further, different educational programs can be implemented in educational institutes to explain how rapid population growth has been depleted resources, caused pollution, and burdened healthcare and education sector. It must be made clear that how various governance challenges can be addressed by having control on population growth.

Secondly, healthcare units must be established, especially in rural areas, to promote family planning and maternal healthcare. These healthcare units would guide families how to plan their families. Further, they

would provide healthcare services to improve the maternal health. By improving maternal health and reducing child mortality rates, healthcare units reduce the need for larger families to cope with high child mortality rates. Moreover, they provide access to contraception, reproductive health services, and counseling, helping individuals and couples make informed choices about family size. This leads to changes in reproductive behavior.

Thirdly, religious scholars can play a significant role in family planning by guiding the people in a way that aligns with their faith and cultural values. Religious scholars can collaborate with health organizations and government bodies to conduct public awareness campaigns about the benefits of family planning. This could include sermons, lectures, and community gatherings where they provide information and address concerns related to family planning in religious context. This would also encourage open dialogue on family planning. Moreover, many religious scholars can highlight the importance of responsible parenthood. Family planning, when done responsibly,

allows parents to better fulfill the needs of their children. Lastly, the government can provide tax relaxation to smaller families. The economic burden of raising multiple children can be significant, and tax relief could make smaller families more appealing. This would help parents to focus on providing quality education, healthcare, and other resources for their fewer children. As families realize the economic benefits of having fewer children, it could lead to a broader cultural shift where having smaller families becomes more socially and financially desirable. Therefore, government tax relaxation could serve as an effective tool for population control.

Learning from countries like Bangladesh and Iran, which have successfully reduced population growth, provides valuable insights for Pakistan, facing similar challenges.

Bangladesh's most significant action was the deployment of trained female health workers who visited homes in rural areas to provide contraceptives,

Counseling, and family planning education. This personalized, door-to-door service overcame cultural barriers and ensured accessibility for women who otherwise had limited healthcare options. In this way, Bangladesh's total fertility rate (TFR) dropped from 6.3 children per woman in the 1970s to 2.0 in 2020, according to the World Bank.

Iran serves another example to learn from. Iran implemented mandatory pre-marriage counseling and family education for couples. This policy ensured that every couple understood the importance of family planning, available contraceptive methods, and the health and economic benefits of smaller families, all aligned with religious and cultural values.

In conclusion, rapid population growth remains a formidable challenge to Pakistan's sustainable development, straining its already limited resources, environmental degradation, and hindering progress in critical sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The unchecked rise in

Population exacerbates the challenges to provide sustainable energy, clean water, quality education, and job opportunities, creating a vicious cycle that undermines sustainable development. To address this, Pakistan must adopt a multi-faceted approach, ranging from investments in education to provide incentives for smaller families. Learning from countries like Bangladesh and Iran, which have successfully curbed population growth through innovative and culturally sensitive measures, Pakistan can chart a path towards sustainable development. Only then, the country can ensure a sustainable future for generations to come.