

## An appeal before the Parliamentarians

As you are aware, our government had appointed an Expert Committee to formulate a population policy for the country. We have come to know that this document is likely to be put up before the Parliament in the current session.

~~After~~ We have managed to get copies of this document ~~stop~~ and have been shocked by its contents. It is inherently an anti poor document, as it lays the blame of poverty on the poor themselves and seeks to alienate them further by not allowing them to contest elections or to have government jobs.

This policy is also anti woman <sup>as it</sup> seeks to subject them to hazardous <sup>contraceptive</sup> technologies, and <sup>it</sup> ~~will~~ prevents them from contesting elections to Panchayat Raj Institutions for which you <sup>the government has</sup> ~~have~~ <sup>enured them</sup> ~~enured~~ <sup>women 30% reservation</sup> ~~representation~~ of 30%. Limitation of family size will only cause ~~mis~~ misuse of technologies for sex determination, which will further harm women's health and skew the sex ratio in the country.

The policy is undemocratic as it advocates the use of army and para military forces for population stabilization. So far this has been the practice only in the most undemocratic countries such as Indonesia and Rumania.

No doubt you are <sup>also</sup> already aware of the extreme ~~at~~ indignities, coercion, and manipulation ~~on~~ women and men have been subjected to in the name of family planning. ~~This~~ This policy is ~~further~~ ~~to~~ a step in this direction.

We urge upon you to ~~we~~ ~~prevent~~ do your best to prevent this policy from being adopted not only within the Parliament but also by signing the accompanying statement for submission to the President of India and to let people know that you are with them

A SUMMARISED ANALYSIS OF THE  
EXPERT COMMITTEE (M.S. SWAMINATHAN)'S  
DRAFT OF A NATIONAL POPULATION POLICY  
WITH SOME PRELIMINARY COMMENTS  
FROM WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

In its opening statements the Committee emphasises India's 'rich cultural, religious, ethnic diversity and political pluralism' and refers to the 'need for a proper gender perspective' in a population policy. The Committee claims that it has taken a pro-nature, pro-poor, and pro-women position. We however do not find these positions reflected in its recommendations.

A. The Policy Framework

The Committee states (page 5) that the "unsustainable life style" of the wealthy - nations and persons in our country - are responsible for using far more than a fair share of natural resources and causing grave threats to the environment. It acknowledges that the rich have grown richer and the poor poorer, and refers to a "failure to achieve a continuous improvement in the quality of life in harmony with nature" as causing grave problems e.g. diversion of prime farm lands to non-farm use, overuse of ground water for irrigation, pollution by biodegradable and toxic wastes (page 4). Mention is also made of the principles of self-reliance, social justice, and harmony between human population and nature as corner-stones of India's developmental policies. "The current global development path-ways are leading to a continuous increase in the gap between the incomes of the poor and the rich and to jobless economic growth, besides damaging basic life support systems of land, water, flora, fauna, and the atmosphere. Development which is not equitable will not be sustainable in the long-run" (page 1&6).

Having identified these causes, it then proceeds to put the blame for the environmental degradation on 'population and poverty' and states that access to food, education, health and work for all "will remain a illusory" without limiting population growth. Its recommendations do not contain anything to curtail consumption by the elites. The stress is entirely on containing the numbers of the poor. In a country like India where a minuscule section of the population is responsible for consumption of about nearly 3/4 of the resources we fail to understand how squeezing the poor and starved majority further is going to resolve any problems or achieve 'social justice' or 'equity'.

There is no critique of macro-economic policies that make the poor - pay the price for the growing affluence the wealthy. The Committee ignores reduction of excise duty on consumer durables, widening opportunities to launder black money, the disinvestment of public assets at ridiculous prices and raising PDS prices in the name of economy. Capital intensive technologies have been allowed free entry to the country and employment in the private sector has been shrinking in absolute terms because of freedom to close industries.

The promises of gender equity within this overall context and placing the major responsibility for demographic stabilisation on Panchayati Raj institutions while remaining silent on the macro economic policies that cripple their capacities, or the socio-cultural realities of rural India are, to say the least, utterly unrealistic.

#### B. Recommended Measures

The basic focus of the recommendations is on limiting family

size arbitrarily. The new set of disincentives recommended are aimed to silence the majority of Indians.

- i. The Committee holds up the anti-democratic and unconstitutional Panchayat Raj Acts of Haryana and Rajasthan which impose restrictions on the number of children as a qualification for contesting elections to the Panchayati Raj institutions as models for the whole nation. Given the fact that the total fertility rate in India is estimated to be around 3.6, the Committee's recommendations will disable the majority of women and men from holding any public office.
- ii. Having more than two children is also to be a disqualifier for getting employment in the organised sector.
- iii. Victims of child marriage i.e. all women married before the age of 18 or men before the age of 21 are to be debarred from employment in the organised sector. This is an extra-ordinary recommendation because the perpetrators of these crimes i.e. the families, the community and the government - which does nothing to enforce the law against such marriages - are to be 'empowered'. The Committee has made no recommendation to improve enforcement of the law.
- iv. A similar ignorance is displayed in the recommendation regarding adoption which is not permitted in the personal laws of many communities. The enabling secular Bill for adoption, alas, has been allowed to become a forgotten memory since the '70s, despite the efforts of many concerned citizens.

#### C. Status of Women

While the disincentives suggested by the Committee are very definite, it would like population control programmes to acquire a 'positive image', hence the recommendation that they should provide choice to people and should do everything to raise the status of women to make it equal to men. It is claimed that 'social empowerment mechanisms' and vigorous steps to abolish vicious forms of discrimination such as dowry, female foeticide and infanticide are necessary to enable women to increase the age at their marriage and have free access to contraception. The Committee is silent on the social approval that practices like female foeticide and infanticide have obtained from a substantial

section of the elites and the government as they help reduce population growth. Thus the Committee joins this section to regard women as variables to be manipulated to achieve population stabilisation. Are the promises of 'gender equality' designed to silence the women's organisations who have been consistent in opposing many aspects of existing policies?

**D. Recommendation regarding Panchayats**

The Committee wants Panchayats to draw up population goals based on resource availability, but makes no reference to the redistribution of land and irrigation facilities or changing cropping patterns to conform to the needs of local residents. Can a rich farmer be asked by the local Panchayat to use farm labour in preference to farm machinery? Are nationally fixed prices of farm inputs and outputs to be abandoned in favour of the Panchayats? How then are the Panchayats to achieve harmony between resources, consumption and population?

**E. Recommendation regarding the role of Army**

We are particularly alarmed that the Committee wants the Army and paramilitary forces to promote the small family norm and population stabilisation on the analogy of the Ecological Battalions currently involved in overcoming environmental degradation.

**F. Education, Research and Media**

Three decades of population education has already provided a mind set to a large section of the middle class that blames the poor for environmental degradation, poverty, unemployment and shortages. It has also played a major role in destroying the ethical values of the medical profession and

given rise to elite approval/sanction of gross violations of human rights in the name of population control. Despite this, the Committee recommends investing more resources for spreading the message around.

Population research is also to be strengthened, though it has not yielded any meaningful solutions so far. In our opinion higher investment in this field is unlikely to produce better results while resources are urgently needed for research on natural resource management and conservation.

Media messages to promote contraceptive usage are mostly no more than propaganda, reflecting literature provided by the producers and false dreams of the happy small family. The recommendation to intensify of this IEC does not reflect the views of certain published writings of members of the Committee.

#### G. Structures and Funds

One welcome change is the recommendation to disband the Family Welfare Department and introduce health planning based on local needs. But we fail to understand why another Commission for Population and Social Development is needed if its role is confined to sponsor more population research and education. If it is to play a role in social development, will it not create conflicts of authority with the Planning Commission and the Ministries of Human Resource Development and Social Welfare?

The Commission is supposed to achieve linkages between gender equity and population goals, formulate and implement policies and strategies to achieve "convergence and synergy" among on-going programmes; and ensure effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation. However its membership

does not include the ministries of agriculture, industry, labour and employment, nor does the convergence of programmes refer to the programmes for employment and empowerment of poor women initiated by various ministries. We can therefore only conclude that the 'convergence' refers to basically the programmes of the present Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. In the context of continuous failures of that Ministry to integrate these services - despite repeated directives from the Planning Commission from the 4th Five Year Plan - we are extremely sceptical of the Commission's capacity to prevent the subservience of health services to achieving population control.

Directing all foreign aid for population and social development to the Commission is likely to result in a monopolistic approach in which the needs of social development will become secondary to the achievement of demographic goals. Such a pooling of all external funds will also intensify donor pressures, with even greater tilt towards population control at the cost of social development, and the existing programmes for education, health and other social services will continue to be starved of resources.

#### H. Contraception and Biomedical Services

We welcome the stress on male contraception but are unable to agree with the recommendation to allow all contraceptives - especially those which are provider controlled - under the guise of 'informed choice'. We are surprised that the Committee did not undertake any cost benefit analysis of the appropriateness of different technologies for a poor country like India. A NORPLANT, for instance costs Rs. 2000, which is the medicine budget for an entire population under a sub-health centre. The cost of an imported injection of Depo Provera is close to US\$ 30 or Rs. 4000 per year per woman, which the majority cannot afford. If such contraceptives are

provided as a service by the health department these expensive items will compete with essential life saving drugs.

India cannot afford research on all methods of contraception just as its citizens cannot be provided with a menu card for every meal. The cafeteria approach for such sophisticated and expensive technologies is utterly inappropriate in our context, especially when recent research and action research already conducted by ICMR points to high utilisation of existing methods following improvement of quality of services. (The results of this study are still to be published).

We must emphasise that fertility in the Indian context is dependent on the total circumstances of the lives of people as shown by demographic changes which have taken place in economies which have achieved higher levels of distribution of resources guaranteeing the right to life. This is also borne out by the relative lack of co-relation between birth rate and the couple-protection rate. Hence our conclusion that contraception is not the main key to lower fertility.

#### I. Goals

The placing of socio-demographic goals at the very end of the Committee's report suggests that it is an adjunct, of distinctly lower priority. We are concerned that though the goals have been expanded beyond the fertility rate to include implementation of the minimum needs programme, universalisation of primary education, reduction in child marriage, maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate etc. the Committee has not proposed that these be monitored at the national level. The question of livelihood has been omitted altogether. In our opinion engagement in socially useful productive work for just rewards is the key to sustainability of any social development. The principle of

self-reliance rejects surviving on World Bank loans or donor charity. Besides some exploitative relationships have to end before equality and working for common social goals is possible. This is altogether absent from the Committee's report.

While we welcome the recommendation to include the child care within the Minimum Needs Programme, we must emphasise that support for minimum needs cannot cure inequality of access to resources and power.

Dear Dr. Swaminathan and all Members of the Expert National Committee on Population Policy.

On behalf of the lakhs of women we represent and millions of poor women who are currently victims of the population control policies of the Government of India we register our strong protest and objections to the overall thrusts of the recommendations of your Committee. For us working in the field of women's rights the recommendations of your Committee are NOT an issue of academic debate : they are matters of life and death and fundamental human rights.

We had hoped that the members of your Committee with the proven record of independence and integrity which many of you held would provide the women's movement with some strength and support of scientific opinion, by contextualising the whole debate on population within the wider sphere of economic and social deprivation and exploitation - hallmarks of present day India. We had therefore fully cooperated with the Committee and provided it with the information to which we had access and at your request made alternative recommendations. We had also assured many of our members that the Committee had promised to adopt a pro-women, pro-poor and pro-nature position.

We are shocked to find that our basic framework has been totally rejected and the Committee has gone even beyond what the government has so far not dared to do in the way of coercive disincentives. You have thus provided the government with a convenient cover to bring into place the most unconstitutional, anti-poor and anti-women policies.

1. The recommendation to use the number of children as a disqualification for contesting elections is both anti-democratic and unconstitutional. While women in Rajasthan and Haryana are fighting this clause you have upheld it as a model for the entire nation.
2. At a time when rising unemployment and poverty cause the gravest threat to the majority of our people, you recommend that persons with more than two children be debarred from employment in the organised sector. It appears that you are unaware that even the government was forced to retreat from its decision to curtail maternity benefits to two children, because of protests from the women's movement.
3. It is astounding that you recommend that victims of child marriage be penalised by being debarred from employment in the organised sector at a time when ground realities show that child marriage is spreading among certain sections of the population to avoid dowry.

4. Even more shocking is the Committee's proposal to utilise the Army and paramilitary forces in achieving 'population stabilisation'. We doubt whether even the most coercive regimes have ever utilised the army for this purpose.

The Committee has recommended that all types of contraceptives be provided under the guise of 'informed choice' thus giving sanction to the present policy of introducing the most hazardous provider controlled astronomically priced contraceptive technologies in the family planning programme. This cafeteria approach for such sophisticated technology is like offering a menu card to the starving millions. It shows that the crucial question of women's health and provision of safe contraception was of no concern to the Committee.

We would also add that import of such expensive technologies will cut into the budget for life saving drugs and only benefit the MNCs and their commission agents.

We find the Report extremely self-contradictory. On another occasion a member of the Committee had said "the government uses a language of the movement but negates the ethics.". Similarly while you have accepted that the elite are responsible for over-consumption and acknowledged that the gap between the poor and rich has been widening, you have made no recommendation to address these basic issues. Instead you have blamed the poor for their poverty and advocated unhindered fertility control as the panacea for the removal of India's poverty.

We hope that even at this stage some of you at least will have the courage to disassociate yourself from these recommendations.

CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT STUDIES *Anagundar*  
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ALL INDIA DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION *Bindu Karat*  
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AIDS AWARENESS GROUP

ALL INDIA PROGRESSIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

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(PREETY) Preeti

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21 October 1993

Dr. M.S. Swaminathan  
Chairperson  
Expert Group on Population Policy

Dear Dr. Swaminathan:

As members of women's organisations and participants in the women's movement we have for long been deeply concerned with the formulation and the implementation of population policy. We are extremely happy that an expert group under your guidance will be examining the matter to advise the Government of India that a population policy cannot, and should not be reduced to one of demographic control only in a democratic political system. Unfortunately the mistakes of the past has left people only this negative image of government's attitude to this critical issue.

We would like to remind the expert group that the first demands for contraception services in this country came from some women's groups. Unfortunately today women's reproductive capacity is being projected as the major threat to India's survival. Population functionaries regard women as inanimate beings whose desperate need for safe contraception can be used to force on them either sterilisation with inadequate follow up or unsafe and inadequately tested contraceptive technologies with no thought to their health.

Our concerns and apprehensions against such measures in the context of the declining quality of public health services (which in their present state are incapable of providing the necessary monitoring or follow up care to the recipients of such contraceptives) have already been communicated to the Minister for Health recently. A copy of our joint memorandum is enclosed for your information.

The draft document prepared by Dr. Pravin Visaria for discussion by your group, emphasises the demographic diversity of India (page 7-8). It is surprising that a social scientist of Dr. Visaria's stature should have overlooked the fact that this diversity can virtually be matched by the diversity in indicators of women's status worked out by several other members of his own discipline. During the last twenty five years, an enormous volume of literature has come from Indian and Western demographers, which identify backwardness of the status of women as the crucial variable that explains India's demographic diversity.

When you were the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, in your dialogues with many of us before the Plan was finalised, you had agreed that educational advance, economic

independence, and access to safe family planning and health care were essential to translate into reality the constitutional guarantees of gender equality for the large masses of our women. The Working Group on Employment of Women (1977-78) argued that economic and political empowerment of women were essential means to achieve the national objective of reducing population growth. We are surprised that the document prepared fifteen years later does not show the same sensitivity, or even the basic understanding of the link between women's effective empowerment and fertility control, but believes that population control can be achieved by coercive techniques more or less on the model of China (page 10).

Despite frequent references to 'grassroots' or 'a bottom up' approach, what has disturbed us greatly in the draft document are (a) indications of shifting responsibilities for needed health care support from the public health system to 'commercial' or 'social marketing' channels; (b) the proposed system of incentive and disincentives which would automatically disqualify a large number of women, particularly in the backward areas, from participating in the empowering provisions of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments; and (c) the fairly clear attempt to preempt the possibility of the newly constituted local self government bodies having any say in the formulation and implementation of demographic policy.

One could find many other points of criticism but our only intention now is to request the expert group to share our belief (which is backed by years of experience) that effective and informed participation by women in management and improvement of the quality of contraceptive and after care services and their general empowerment in decision making at the grassroot level through the decentralised political system that we are attempting to construct would be a far safer and certain guarantee against the population 'disaster' than the kind of top down approach that displays scant respect for human life and regards women as only reproductive machines.

Our basic suggestion to the expert group is to recommend a full national debate going right down to the grassroots with men, women and youth before any policy is finalised. A population policy in a democracy should be projected in positive terms with qualitative goals (e.g eradication of illiteracy, provision of social security/protection, health care, wider opportunities for economic and political participation etc.) rather than in the negative terms of demographic control with quantitative targets. We are really trying to say that the latter is not possible without a much larger dose of democratic participation, particularly of women.

Our third suggestion is that the expert group should recommend that population policy should not continue to be the

responsibility of one Ministry, since it is a multisectoral issue requiring both policy as well as resource and knowledge inputs from other agencies of government. Since this coordination has never been achieved in all these decades even within the Ministry of Health - despite repeated directions from the Planning Commission - (from the Fourth Plan onwards) the group should address the problems of structural rigidities and vested interests that have become obstacles to greater transparency, open debate and collaboration in policy formulation.

We express our full confidence that the group will take firm positions in protecting the democratic and human rights of the millions of women in this country, whose poverty, powerlessness, and lack of access to information and services make them victims not only of frequent pregnancies but also of unscrupulous measures at demographic control. However, we would like to state in clear terms a few positions, which for the women's movement are non-negotiable. We have arrived at these on the basis of very painful experiences acquired over the last few decades.

1. No quantitative targets - overt or covert;
2. No incentives/disincentives that seek to erode women's basic human or constitutional rights;
3. No invasive hormonal technology until the quality of health care services have improved to provide the necessary monitoring;
4. Contraceptive responsibility and contraceptive investment to be equally shared by and on men and women;
5. Full information on possible side effects, need for after care/monitoring etc. on all contraceptives to be made available to all recipients. There may be a need for some penal provision for failure to do so.

May we also make a last request to the expert group? Most of us have often been accused that as urban middle class educated women we know nothing about the plight of the millions of poor women in rural or urban areas in our country. Perhaps the expert group could enlighten such critics that all our concerns have been for those millions whom we are not supposed to know. Because each of us, thanks to our class status are in a position to obtain the information, the services and use all these technologies by paying for them.

प्रिय डा० स्वामीनाथन व अन्य सभी जनसंख्या नीति निर्धारण की  
राष्ट्रीय ~~सम~~ विशेषज्ञ समिति के सदस्यगण

आपकी समिति की रिपोर्ट की व्यापक दिशा व लक्ष्यों का हम  
अपनी लाखों सदस्यों व उन करोड़ों औरतों की ओर से विरोध  
करते हैं जो आज सरकारी जनसंख्या नियंत्रण की ही नीति की  
भुक्तभोगी हैं। हमारे लिए आपकी रफ्ट महज टीका टिप्पणी का विषय  
नहीं है बल्कि उन औरतों के जीवन - मृत्यु व ~~सम~~ भौतिक मानव अधिकारों  
के हानन का विषय है जिन्के अधिकारों के लिए हम संघर्षरत हैं।

आपकी समिति से हमें उम्मीद थी कि वह जनसंख्या के सवाल को उस  
सामाजिक व आर्थिक शोषण के अर्थ में स्वरूप देखेगी जिससे पूरा देश  
आज पुत्राहित है। साथ ही इस दायरे को अपनाकर आप हमारे आंदोलन की  
माँगों को वैज्ञानिक नींव का सहारा देंगे। क्योंकि आपकी समिति के कई  
सदस्य अपनी स्वतंत्र अग्नियुक्ति व न्याय निष्ठा के लिए प्रसिद्ध हैं। इसीलिए  
हमने आपको पूरा सहयोग दिया व आपके माँगों पर रज्ज्वात्मक सुझाव भी  
दिए। आपके कथन पर विश्वास करके हमने अपनी सदस्यों का भी  
बताया कि आप गरीबों औरतों व प्रकृति के हित में नीति बनाने  
जा रहे हैं।

हमें इस बात का बड़ा धन्यवाद लगा है कि आपने हमारे सुझावों को  
तो ~~का~~ ताक पर रख ही दिया बल्कि इस मामले में अब तक हुई सरकारी  
जोर जबर दस्ती को भी मोसों पीछे छोड़ दिया। अपने सुझावों द्वारा  
आपने सरकार को पूरी तरह से असंवैधानिक, व गरीब एवं औरत  
विरोधी नीति अपनाने के लिए वैज्ञानिक आवरण दे दिया है।

1. ~~आप~~ बच्चों की संख्या को चुनाव लड़ने के लिए शर्त बनाने का आपका ~~सुझाव~~ सुझाव सिर्फ गैर जनतांत्रिक ही नहीं असंवैधानिक भी है। राजस्थान व हरियाणा की औरतों को इसका पूरा विरोध कर रही हैं पर आपने वहाँ के कानून को देश के लिए मॉडल बताया है।

2. आज जब बढ़ती बेरोजगारी व गरीबी हमारे देश की जनता के लिए सबसे बड़ा खतरा बनी हुई है आपने कहा है कि दो से ज्यादा बच्चों वाले लोगों को संगठित क्षेत्र में नौकरी न दी जाए। ~~आप~~ लगता है कि आप इस बात से अनभिज्ञ हैं कि हाल ही में नारी आंदोलन के विरोध के फलस्वरूप सरकार भी मातृत्व अकाश सम्बंधी कानून को दो बच्चों तक सीमित रखने के लिए अपने फैसले को बदलने पर मजबूर हुई थी।

3. यह बहुत ही अजीब-गरीब बात है कि आपने बाल विवाह के से पीड़ित लोगों को नौकरियों से वंचित रहने की सजा दी है। यह भी ऐसे समय पर किया है जब देश की समस्या के कारण कई इलाकों से बाल विवाह बंद के समाचार मिल रहे हैं।

4. सबसे ज्यादा स्तब्ध करता है आपका सेना को जनसंख्या को बढ़ोत्तरी रोकने के काम में लगाना। हमें शक है कि यह नाम शायद कि दुनिया की सबसे ज्यादा जल्दाद सरकारें भी नहीं कर पाई है।

~~आप~~ आपने सुझाव दिया है कि रुद्रि अनुसार नाना प्रकार के गर्भ निरोधक उपलब्ध कराए जाएं यह कहकर आपने उभ सरकारी कदम को बल दिया है जिसके तहत आज खतरनाक, महंगे व औरतों के वश में न रहने वाले गर्भ निरोधक तेजी से देश में लाए जा रहे हैं।

गर्भनिरोधक  
आज रूढ़ि अनुसार हर प्रकार की तकनीक उपलब्ध  
कराना उतना ही बतर्क रहित है जितना हर भारतवासी को  
दोनों समय 56 लोग खिलाना आपके सुझाव से साफ जाहिर  
है कि औरतों का स्वास्थ्य व उच्च निरापद गर्भ निरोधक उपलब्ध कराना  
आपकी प्राथमिकता नहीं है। एक यह भी कहना चाहेंगे कि  
इन नई तकनीकों के खुल आयात का मतलब होगा जीवन रक्षक  
जंकरी दवाओं का बजट घटना।

आपकी रिपोर्ट में कई अंतर्विरोध हैं। एक मौके पर  
आपने कमेटी के एक सदस्य ने कहा था "सरकार नारी शोषण  
की भाषा तो अपना लेती है पर उसकी वैतनिकता नहीं"। ठीक इसी  
प्रकार आपने यह तो माना है कि अमीर अति उपभोग करते हैं, व  
अमीरों व गरीबों के बीच खाई बढ़ रही है पर आपने उपभोग कम  
करने व खाई पाटने के लिए एक भी सुझाव नहीं दिया है। ठीक  
इसके विपरीत आपने गरीबों को उनकी गरीबी के लिए दोषी ठहराया  
है व बेधड़क उर्वरता नियंत्रण के प्रोग्राम का ही निवर्ण का रास्ता  
बताया है।

इस प्रिद्दी द्वारा एक यह उम्मीद करते हैं कि कमसेकम  
आप में से कुछ सदस्य तो इन सुझावों से अपने आप को  
पुश्क करने का साहस दिखाएंगे।

सेंटर फॉर विमैनस डेवलपमेंट स्टडीज़, सैदली, अखिल भारतीय जनवादी  
महिला समिति, नेशनल फेडरेशन ऑफ इंडियन विमैन, मार्ग, इज्वाइर  
विमैनस प्रोग्राम, महिला दक्षता समिति, पुरोअामी महिला संगठन  
जोगोरी, आण, पुगनिशील महिला समिति, वाय डबल्यू सीए.

Pop Con

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# CENTRE FOR AREA STUDIES

(Urban Development and Regional Planning in the Indian Ocean Region)

DR. SHEELA PRASAD

Press Road,  
Osmania University,  
Hyderabad-500 007.  
Andhra Pradesh  
(India.)

To  
Rangana - Saheli  
NEW DELHI 110 024

7th November 1992

Dear Rangana / Saheli

As part of the general work being done by activists on the population policies and new contraceptives issue, we Sheela Prasad and Sumati Nair have decided to undertake a study on what women (chiefly rural/sub-urban) want from a family planning programme. This study will be done thro' the Centre for Area Studies, OU and will be a comparative study together with the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

We feel if we as activists want to bring about a change in the national so-called "family planning programme" apart from all the work being done by women activists, we need to know what the women at the receiving end of the programme feel or want to have. Through this research project we have set up <sup>we</sup> hope to get an idea about it. However, we do not want it to be an academic project and would like to involve and share with some of you and your groups, our ideas and, later, findings from the study. Hopefully it will help us all to jointly, at a later date, formulate a concrete policy alternative to the target oriented population control programme we now have.

In this connection, we are planning to hold a workshop with our Tanzanian colleagues <sup>from</sup> in the <sup>28-31</sup> third week of January. It will be a 4/5 day workshop

Please see the enclosed programme.

...2

We would like you to participate in this workshop for 2 days and give us your ideas/suggestions on how we could get the best out of such a research study and how we can share our findings. In case you need more information on the project please ask.

We will, of course, pay your return train fare (first class) and your stay in Hyderabad will be take care of. Do write back as soon as possible to let us know if you can come so that we can make the arrangements for accomodation etc. as early as possible.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

*Sheela Prasad*

(SHEELA PRASAD)

*Sumati Nair*

(SUMATI NAIR)

Encl: Programme of workshop

&

List of participants to be invited.

Bill - 1992 :- doesn't take into account even Swarnajayanti

Dear Sir,

We would like to register our protest against the draft population policy which is proposed to be put up before the Parliament during its current session. The course of action suggested in the document is a continuation of the old policy which in the past has only had a tunnel vision of containing the number of people by all possible means.

Protest of party people  
can't be public debate

We are appalled that the proposed population policy has been formulated by circulating the Expert Group report only among select Ministries and Departments of Government of India and no attempt was made to seek the opinion of the public on matters which affect their life so intimately.

The policy that seems to have emerged has been drafted carelessly so much so that even the goals have been left to be achieved by "....AD".

Discontinue of the Bill  
dem. public debate

We would like to remind you that the report of the Expert Group had been widely criticized for announcement of new disincentives; particularly those which involved the use of the army for population stabilization; disqualification of people from contesting Panchayat elections; from getting promotions and government jobs if they had more than two children; and punishing the victims of child marriage by denying them jobs. The proposed population policy is an improvement only in that the army has been kept out of the implementation machinery. In all other ways it has retained the most repugnant aspects of the Expert Group's recommendations. These disincentives make a mockery of the very concept of family planning, which this document purports to advocate. If this policy was to be adopted, having a third child will become akin to being insane or a criminal, which today are the only other disqualifications for holding an electoral office.

Public stand of party -  
being introduced

On the question of incentives, the stand of the Expert Group has been watered down. It is well known that incentives offered for adoption of family limitation exploit the vulnerability of the poor and bring distortions in service provision. Yet they have not been scrapped. Scrapping of incentives has been left to an unspecified time frame.

lets on the  
public stand

We would like to bring to your notice that over the past six years the fastest growing social sector expenditure has been on Family Welfare Programme. Nevertheless the proposed population policy asserts that this programme has been "underfunded". More funds to this programme will only mean less money for other Departments. This bias is completely unacceptable.

While proclaiming to be a holistic social development policy; while admitting that economic disparities have widened; and while linking consumption levels with growing pollution and ecological damage, the policy has failed to come up with any recommendations in this regard. It is worth noting that the Department of Family Welfare has usurped the functions of the Planning Commission by deciding the future course of action in the area of health, education, environment, gender relations and poverty.

It is surprising that the government has acknowledged that prime farm land is getting diverted at a rapid use for non-farm uses, but the policy has failed to elaborate on the role of state policy in doing so. We may add that farm land is also being increasingly consolidated and put to cash crop production for export as a result of the macro economic policies of the government. Leave alone setting up measures to arrest and reverse this trend, which is endangering food security, the proposed policy aims at feeding women through supplementary nutrition programmes.

Admission - Name - MOHFW - apt. & Minister  
- Lobby - Standing Committee

There is a definite problem with concepts of carrying capacity of eco-systems unless hedonistic consumption patterns are curbed. Similarly in a village divided by different and clashing interest groups, where land or other resources are used for private and not collective good, there can be no planning of a balance between human numbers and resources. The resources of a village at any rate depend on the prices its goods command which are fixed by the central government and not by the Panchayat. Hence the role of the Panchayat in arriving at this balance is simply not feasible.

We are appalled that the proposed population policy takes it upon itself to achieve gender equity through sheer enunciation of "Panchsheel for gender relations". While recognizing the problems of girls and women, the proposed population policy wants to leave it to individual men to bring about this balance. In doing so it denies the role and responsibility of the government to take corrective action through policies and programmes which has been acknowledged in various earlier government documents and position papers. It is not "gentle courtesy" but better financial allocation in the area of health that can curtail child mortality, maternal mortality etc.

On the face of it, it seems commendable that the proposed population policy recognizes that the burden of family limitation has fallen on women and that it needs to be corrected. Yet in the same breath, it introduces choice in their life through an even larger repertory of contraceptive methods of dubious distinction and high cost in a "cash starved" programme. We have made our stand clear on contraceptive technologies and have provided scientifically backed arguments against use of technologies such as the injectables, implants, chemical abortifacients and vaccines which are liable to be used coercively on women in the name of choice. It is time that the government reviewed its policies on the "cafeteria approach".

We are extremely perturbed that the government also is bent upon introducing user charges for family planning supplies in the name of quality of care and resource generation for itself. Needless to say that it will not encourage the use of any contraceptives by men but will subject women to sterilization because women's health comes last in the family priority.

All in all, we find the proposed population policy extremely inadequate for even meeting the unmet need for contraception (much touted about in international conferences), leave alone leading to empowerment of women or to sustainable development. It is a carelessly and hurriedly put together document encompassing vast areas of government action as well as people's intimate life. It has an approach of creating more hysteria about human numbers by carelessly blaming population growth for creating social strife in addition to environmental destruction.

Given an opportunity we would like to present before you an exhaustive critique of the proposed population policy.

We urge upon you to prevent this draft from being put up before the Parliament without removing its internal contradictions and anti-people measures