



# Case Study

## Population Growth in India

The Phatak family lives in a village of 600 inhabitants in India. At age 40, Indira Phatak has been pregnant five times. Four of her children have survived; they are aged 5 to 18.

When the two Phatak daughters marry a few years from now, how many children will each of them bear? The Indian government hopes that they will choose to have fewer children than their mother. About 28 million babies will be born this year in India, and the country's population is growing by 18 million annually. Unless attitudes and behavior drastically change in the next few years, India's population—currently 1 billion—could exceed 5 billion a century from now.

Three-fourths of Indians live in rural settlements that have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. For many of these people, children are an economic asset, because they help perform chores on the farm and are expected to provide for their parents in their old age. The high percentage of children who will die before they reach working age also encourages large families. One out of every 13 infants in India dies within one year of birth, and 160,000 women die annually during pregnancy and childbirth.

In recent years, India has made significant progress in diffusing modern agricultural practices, building new industry, and developing natural resources, all of which have increased national wealth. However, in a country with a rapidly expanding population, much of the newly created wealth must be used to provide food, housing, and other basic services for the additional people. With more than one-third of the population under the age of 15, the government must build schools, hospitals, and day-care centers. Therefore, the growing wealth is going primarily to provide a reasonable standard of living for an expanding population. Further, will employment be available to these 350 million children when they are old enough to work?



The government of China aggressively promotes a one-child policy on public billboards. (United Nations)

# Case Study Revisited

## India Versus China

The world's two most populous countries, China and India, will heavily influence future prospects for global overpopulation. These two countries—together encompassing more than one-third of the world's population—have adopted different policies to control population growth. In the absence of strong family-planning programs, India adds about 6 million more people each year than does China. Current projections show that India would surpass China as the world's most populous country by 2050.

### India's Population Policies

India, like most countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, remained in stage 1 of the demographic transition until the late 1940s. During the first half of the twentieth century, population increased modestly—less than 1 percent per year—and even decreased in some years because of malaria, famines, plagues, and cholera epidemics. For example, more than 16 million Indians—approximately 5 percent of the population—died of influenza in 1918 and 1919, and the population at the 1921 census was lower than that ten years earlier.

Immediately following independence from England in 1947, India's death rate declined sharply, to 20 per 1,000 by 1951, while the crude birth rate remained about 40. Consequently, the natural increase rate jumped to 2 percent per year. The demographic pattern has not changed much in India during the past 40 years. Birth and death rates have both drifted a few points lower since the 1950s, but the natural increase has consistently remained around 2 percent per year. In the half-century since independence, India's population has grown by more than one-half billion.

The government of India has launched various programs to encourage family planning, but none have been very successful. In 1952, India became the first country to embark on a national family-planning program. The government has established clinics and distributes information about alternative methods of birth control. Birth-control devices are distributed free or at subsidized prices. Abortions, legalized in 1972, have been performed at a rate of several million per year. Altogether, the government spends several hundred million dollars annually on various family-planning programs.

India's most controversial family-planning program was the establishment of camps in 1971 to perform sterilizations, surgical procedures by which people were made incapable of reproduction. A sterilized person was entitled to a payment, which has been adjusted several times but generally has been equivalent to the average monthly income in India. At the height of the program, in 1976, 8.3 million sterilizations were performed during a 6 month period, mostly on women.

The birth-control drive declined in India after 1976. Widespread opposition to the sterilization program grew in the country, because people feared that they would be forcibly sterilized. The prime minister, Indira Gandhi, was defeated in 1977, and the new government emphasized the voluntary nature of birth-control programs. The term "family planning," which the Indian people associated with the forced sterilization policy, was replaced by "family welfare" to indicate that compulsory birth control programs had been terminated. Although Mrs. Gandhi served again as prime minister from 1980 until she was assassinated in 1984, she did not emphasize family planning because of the opposition during her previous administration.

A government-sponsored family-planning program continues, but it emphasizes education, including advertisements on national radio and television networks and information distributed through local health centers. Given the cultural diversity of the Indian people, the national campaign has had only limited success. The dominant form of birth control continues to be sterilization of women, many of whom have already borne several children, rather than vasectomies of men. Effective methods have not been devised to induce recently married couples to have fewer children.

### China's Population Policies

In contrast with India, China has made substantial progress in reducing its rate of growth. Between the 1950s and 1990s, the natural increase rate was halved, from 2 to 1 percent per year. The government of the People's Republic of China has acted forcefully to reduce the number of children. The core of the government's policy is to limit families to one child.

Couples receive financial subsidies, a long maternity leave, better housing, and (in rural areas) more land if they agree to

have just one child. The government prohibits marriage for men until they are 22 and women until they are 20. To discourage births further, people receive free contraceptives, abortions, and sterilizations. A family with more than one child must pay a fine, amounting to 5 or 10 percent of its income for ten years, and job promotions may be denied. Some officials in rural villages maintain records of women's menstrual cycles to assure that no unplanned babies are born.

Another factor is female infanticide. If limited to one child, most Chinese families prefer to have a boy, in part because of cultural tradition and in part because a boy is regarded as stronger and better able to take care of aging parents. The one-child policy encouraged the killing of baby girls. In our

American culture, such a practice is abhorrent, but one of geography's great lessons is that other cultures are very, very different from our own, including their fundamental values. Because of international criticism, the Chinese government has relaxed enforcement of the one-child rule.

China is likely to maintain a much lower natural increase rate than India into the twenty-first century. Following years of intensive educational programs, as well as coercion, the Chinese people have accepted to a greater degree than the Indian people the benefits of family planning. As China moves closer to a market economy, especially in rural areas, women increasingly recognize that having fewer children opens greater opportunities to obtain a job and earn more money.