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Managing the Crisis of Overpopulation in Pakistan: Need for Effective Population Management

Ajwa Hijazi¹

Abstract

Population growth has a crucial impact on the development and prosperity of any country. Like many other countries, Pakistan is also witnessing an ever-increasing population growth rate that has an adverse impact on various socio-economic indicators such as poverty, unemployment, urbanization and the provision of health and education facilities. Given its catastrophic impact on national development, this research is focused on studying the effects of rapid population growth on Pakistan. It sheds light on the interrelation between exponential population growth and socio-economic development. Furthermore, it elucidates the impact of population growth on the country's national security. It is pertinent to employ population management techniques to halt the negative effect of rapid population growth on service delivery and find ways to enhance the quality of life of the existing human capital. To attain this objective, the government should focus on a practical population management approach that encompasses collaborative strategies of various departments along with people-centric governance, which must be output-oriented.

Keywords: Population, Socio-economic Development, Fertility Rate, Family Planning, Population Management.

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Introduction

The issue of population growth has always been central to the discourse on development around the world. Existing literature on overpopulation shows that a country's population growth significantly impacts its socio-economic situation and overall social stability. Given resource constraints in any country, excessive population growth puts pressure on policymakers. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the rate and trends of population growth to devise relevant policies based on the country's developmental goals.²

Currently, the world's population is around 8.2 billion, and is expected to reach 9.7 billion in 2050.³ However, there are significant variations in the overall population growth trend in various world regions.⁴ The largest share of the global population growth is expected to be contributed by a few populous countries. From 2020 to 2050, more than half of the increase in the global population will be attributed to nine countries which include India, the United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Tanzania.⁵

Rapid population increase is also an imminent crisis in Pakistan, which has seen exponential population growth over the past several decades. According to the "7th Population and Housing Census-2023", Pakistan's population was 247.5 million. Pakistan, along with some other states, is at the risk of facing the fallout of overpopulation.⁶ Overpopulation is the "situation in which the number of people living in geographical area surpasses the carrying ability of the environment, causing a range of negative impacts."⁷

Pakistan, the world's fifth-most populated country, has a significant

² National Library of Medicine, "Major Trends in Population Growth Around the World," Accessed March 22, 2024,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8393076/>.

³ United Nations, "Population," Accessed March 24, 2024

<https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/population>.

⁴ National Library of Medicine, "Major Trends in Population Growth Around the World," Accessed March 24, 2024,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8393076/>.

⁵ National Library of Medicine, "Major Trends in Population Growth Around the World," March 24, 2024.

⁶ Ramsha Qamar, "Pakistan's Rising Population Crisis," *Institute of Strategic Studies*, September 6, 2022,

https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/IB-Ramsha_Qamar_Sept_6_2022.pdf.

⁷ Kokab Jabeen, "Confronting Pakistan's Overpopulation Issue for Long-Term Solutions," *Pakistan Postgraduate Medical Journal* 34, no. 4 (2023), 171-172, <https://doi.org/10.51642/ppmj.v34i04.681>.

mismatch between its population growth and productivity, which is causing social security issues.⁸ Pakistan, like its neighboring countries, China and India, has a large population, but it has less geographical space and resources to feed and accommodate it.

Pakistan faces an array of threats, including regional contestation, hostile neighbors, political instability, a destabilized economy etcetera.⁹ Amidst these issues, the ongoing overpopulation scenario presents a multifaceted challenge for Pakistan. The multitude of crises Pakistan faces is exacerbated by excessive population growth, which also negatively impacts the various socio-economic indicators.

There is an abundance of literature on population issues, focusing only on the positive impact of population growth. We often hear the jargon of youth bulge, but that gives an incomplete picture to the relevant policymakers and stakeholders.¹⁰ The pressure of overpopulation with inadequate resources is a primary factor in high unemployment, decreasing per capita income, impacting the outcome of health and education initiatives and straining shared resources.¹¹ Besides utilizing the available resources and infrastructure, the alarming demographic expansion also seriously hinders economic growth.¹² As a consequence of overpopulation, these prevailing issues necessitate Pakistan to devise appropriate and effective population management strategies.

In this context, this research paper elucidates the effects of Pakistan's current population growth rate and its impact on various socio-economic indicators. It concludes by emphasizing the need for effective population management strategies.

⁸ Rahim Sadigov, "Rapid Growth of the World Population and Its Socioeconomic Results," *The Scientific World Journal* (2022),1-8, <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/8110229>.

⁹ Rahim Sadigov, "Rapid Growth of the World Population and Its Socioeconomic Results," *The Scientific World Journal* (2022).

¹⁰ Mengistu M. Maja and Samuel F. Ayano, "The Impact of Population Growth on Natural Resources and Farmers' Capacity to Adapt to Climate Change in Low-Income Countries," *Earth System and Environment* 5,no.2 (2021),271-283, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41748-021-00209-6>.

¹¹ Pakistan Population Situation Analysis, report (Islamabad: Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives,2020), https://pakistan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/pakistan_psa_2020_final_report.pdf.

¹² Dr. Sumaira Gul, "Unfolding Demographics: Pakistan's Populayion Growth and Resource Ressonance," *Friday Times*, August 9,2023, <https://thefridaytimes.com/09-Aug-2023/unfolding-demographics-pakistan-s-population-growth-and-resource-resonance>.

Research Methodology

This research paper uses the qualitative research method, employing primary and secondary sources of data collection. Using this methodology, the research paper examines the effects of Pakistan's current population growth rate and its impact on various socio-economic indicators that directly affect its national security.

For primary data collection, an unstructured discussion was conducted with professionals from health, education and economic backgrounds to seek informed opinions. These discussions were held in March and April 2024, using virtual and one-on-one formats.

Secondary sources have been consulted, such as books, newspaper articles, podcasts, journal articles, documentaries, dissertations and reports.

Population Growth Rate in Pakistan Since 1998

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), annual population growth is the “average rate of change of size of population, of any country, given territory, etc., during a definite period.”¹³

After independence, the first official census in Pakistan occurred in 1951¹⁴ while the most recent census was conducted in 2023. From 1951 to 2023, Pakistan's population increased from 34 million to 241.49 million.¹⁵ Moreover, since 1951, Pakistan's annual population growth rate has been above 2 percent.

To comprehend the current state of overpopulation in Pakistan, the subsequent population growth trend in recent years needs to be illuminated. In the past 25 years, Pakistan has conducted three censuses.

¹³ World Health Organisation, “The Global Health Observatory,” Assessed April 01,2024, <https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-metadata-registry/imr-details/1120>.

¹⁴ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, “Population Census,” April 01,2024, <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/population-census>.

¹⁵ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, “Announcement of Result of 7th Population and Housing Census-2023,” press release, August 5,2023, <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2023/Press%20Release.pdf>.

Table 1 Total population and population growth rate since 1998

Year of Census	Total Population	Growth rate (%)
1998	132 million	2.69
2017	208 million	2.4
2023	241.49 million	2.55

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Population Census.

Since the 1998 census, Pakistan’s population has increased with an annual growth rate of more than 2 percent, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (including the erstwhile FATA) and Balochistan having the fastest rate.¹⁶ From 2017 to 2023, Pakistan’s population increased by more than 16 percent, with around 35 million more people added to the demographic landscape.¹⁷ According to the recent digital census, Pakistan’s population is growing at a rate of 2.55 percent, which is alarming for the country's overall socio-economic prosperity.¹⁸ The current trend of Pakistan’s population growth depicts that the country’s population will double in the next three decades. Given the prevailing trajectory of population expansion, Pakistan can become the third most populous nation by 2053, outranking the United States of America.¹⁹

Factors Contributing to the Population Growth

There are multiple factors behind Pakistan’s explosive population growth. One of the primary factors is the High Fertility Rate (HFR), which is the average number of children that women have in their lifetime.²⁰ Despite the recent decline in the global fertility rate, Pakistan is witnessing a relatively high fertility rate in the region. Since 2005, Pakistan’s fertility rate has remained stagnant at 3.6 percent, which is much higher than many countries, including

¹⁶ Zafar Khan Safdar, “No more a myth: the country of 400 million people,” *Pakistan Today*, January 21, 2024, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2024/01/21/no-more-a-myth-the-country-of-400-million-people/>.

¹⁷ Sana Jamal, “Pakistan’s population soars to 241 million,” *Gulf News*, August 06, 2023, <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/pakistans-population-soars-to-241-million-1.97390516>.

¹⁸ Dr. Sumaira Gul, “Unfolding Demographics: Pakistan’s Population Growth and Resource Resonance,” *Friday Times*, August 9, 2023, <https://thefridaytimes.com/09-Aug-2023/unfolding-demographics-pakistan-s-population-growth-and-resource-resonance>.

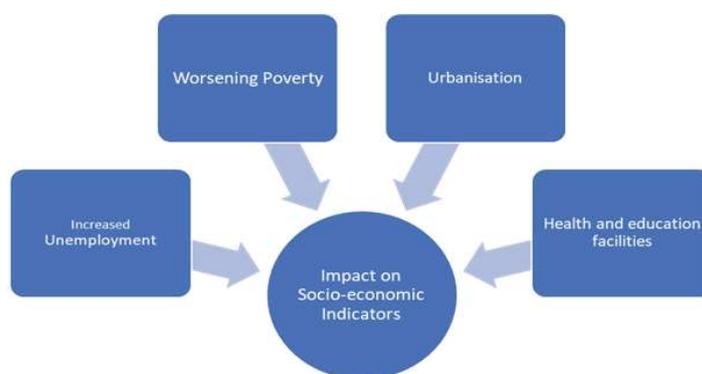
¹⁹ “The population bomb is ticking,” *DAWN*, July 11, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1764122>.

²⁰ Insee, “Fertility Rate,” Accessed 4, April, 2024, <https://www.insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c1872>.

Saudi Arabia and Iran.²¹ To attain stationary population growth, the fertility rate should be 1.9 percent.²² In Pakistan, women face complex challenges related to fertility, as birth choices are not made by women and are instead determined by specific social and cultural factors that hamper them from making informed reproductive choices and controlling the size of their families.²³

Another vital issue contributing to population growth is the gap between high birth and death rates. The country's current birth rate stands at an estimated 27.7 births per 1000 people while the death rate is around 7 deaths per 1000 people.²⁴ Moreover, Pakistan has historically faced a high infant mortality rate due to inadequate health and sanitation facilities. This has led to families bearing more children, increasing the probability of more children surviving childhood. Over time, there has been improvement in healthcare and post-natal facilities, but the high rate of infant mortality still impacts the population growth trends in the country.²⁵ Furthermore, the lack of access to proper education and awareness regarding family planning coupled with specific social, cultural and religious beliefs has influenced the country's overall population growth, which is increasing rapidly.

Impact of Population Growth on the Socio-Economic Indicators



Source: Author's compilation after review of the literature

²¹ Ikram Junedi, "Pakistan's stagnant fertility rate a matter of concern: experts," *DAWN*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1780307>.

²² Zubieda Mustafa, "Growing millions," *DAWN*, November 3, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1786011>.

²³ "Controlling Pakistan's Increasing Population Growth: Impacts and Challenges," *Imarat Institute of Policy Studies*, December 30, 2021, <https://iips.com.pk/controlling-pakistans-increasing-population-growth-impacts-and-challenges/>.

²⁴ "Controlling Pakistan's Increasing Population Growth: Impacts and Challenges," December 30, 2021.

²⁵ Abdulrehman Nawaz and Waleed Mehmood, "Beyond the Brink : Pakistan's Population Explosion," *T-Magazine*, July 23, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2427592/beyond-the-brink-pakistans-population-explosion>.

Population growth is a significant factor affecting the various levels of human development and economic growth. One of the substantial impacts of overpopulation is on the country's socio-economic condition. Overpopulation is a phenomenon encompassing the interplay of social and economic factors. This paper discusses the impact of population growth on specific socio-economic indicators.

i. Poverty Level

When a country's population grows, it constrains the flow of resources and consequently the presence of insufficient resources intensifies the deprivations of the growing population.

One of the primary impacts of overpopulation in any country can be grasped through its poverty levels. The explosive growth of population paves the way for the vicious cycle of poverty in developing countries. In Pakistan, lower-income families tend to have more children for an increased workforce, increasing household expenses.²⁶ In larger families, most of the household income is spent on raising children. Therefore, families have less money to invest or save in business related activities (called capital formation). Low investments and savings lead to a lower per capita income. As families spend more, there is increased demand for goods. The presence of increased demand and less spending further raises inflation, ultimately impacting the cost of living.²⁷

According to the World Bank, in the fiscal year 2023, Pakistan's poverty level reached a staggering 39.4 percent because of slower economic growth and higher inflation. Of the total population, 95 million Pakistanis are living below the poverty line, which is defined as an income level of USD 3.65 per day.²⁸ This figure, combined with the constant number of more than 2 percent of the population growth rate, reflects Pakistan's dismal state of affairs regarding poverty.

²⁶ Zahra Niazi, Research Assistant, Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies, Islamabad, in discussion with the author (March 31, 2024).

²⁷ Zafar Khan Safdar, "No more a myth: the country of 400 million people," *Pakistan Today*, January 21, 2024, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2024/01/21/no-more-a-myth-the-country-of-400-million-people/>.

²⁸ Ali Ahmad, "Poverty headcount in Pakistan reached 39.4% in FY23, projects World Bank," *Business Recorder*, October 3, 2023, <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40266239>.

ii. Unemployment

The rising unemployment rate and the soaring population have impacted the overall national output in the broader socio-economic context.²⁹ According to the International Labor Organization's employment outlook report on Pakistan, the number of unemployed people was expected to be more than 5.6 million in 2023, an increase of 1.5 million since 2021.³⁰ It shows that Pakistan's employment rate has decreased amid the growing population over the previous years. The age structure is a vital aspect of the country's population dynamic. Despite having 64 percent youth population, Pakistan still needs to capitalize on it.³¹ Pakistan has almost half of its youth population without education, training or employment. This will eventually impact their capabilities to contribute positively to the country's development. The job market is saturating amid rising inflation and an increasing population. Consequently, Pakistan is losing the opportunity to harness the untapped potential of its young and skilled population to the fullest.³²

iii. Rapid Urbanization

This rapid rate of urbanization has been the salient feature of Pakistan's demographic landscape. According to the United Nations Development Program, Pakistan has the highest rate of urbanization in South Asia, with 36.4 percent of its population living in urban areas. The total population share of the metropolitan areas increased from 17 percent in 1951 to 41.7 percent in 2021, with the annual rate of the change being 2.79 percent.³³ The UN Population Division estimated that by 2025, more than half of the Pakistan's population would reside in urban areas.³⁴

Over the years, the growing population has been concentrated in urban areas due to two main factors: rural-urban migration and natural population

²⁹ Nayab Minhaj and Muhammad Imran, "Impact of Population Growth and Unemployment on Pakistan Economy," *RADs Journal of Business Management* 3, no.2 (2021):194-200

³⁰ International Labor Organization, "ILO Forecasts Pakistan's Unemployment", Accessed April 10, 2024,

<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/ilo-forecasts-pakistan-unemployment-15-million-2021>.

³¹ International Labor Organization, "ILO Forecasts Pakistan's Unemployment", April 10, 2024

³² Rehan Zahid, "Youth Unemployment in Pakistan – Policy Brief," *Imarat Institute of Policy Studies*, December 21, 2023,

<https://iips.com.pk/youth-unemployment-in-pakistan-policy-brief/>.

³³ Zafar Khan Saddar, "Causes and consequences of urbanization in Pakistan," *Pakistan Observer*, April 2024,

<https://pakobserver.net/causes-and-consequences-of-urbanization-in-pakistan/>.

³⁴ Ignacio Artaza, *Urbanisation in Pakistan*, *Express Tribune*, 05 June 2019.

growth. The rapid and unplanned population expansion significantly impacts the provision of social services, including urban infrastructure. One result of this is that urban infrastructure cannot support the growing population. For instance, unplanned urbanization further causes the overcrowding of the slums of the major cities. In Karachi, the informal settlements (katchi abadis) are called urban slums and they have grown twice as fast as Karachi's annual urban growth rate. The population density in these low-income settlements exceeds the allowable limit.³⁵ This creates urban poverty and impacts the provision of services, such as the public transport system, roads, drinking water, sanitation and other services, directly affecting people's quality of life.³⁶ Furthermore, the individuals hailing from these areas face economic and social exclusion and are trapped in 'cyclical poverty.'³⁷

According to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), the urban areas in the country's major cities are facing a shortfall of around 10 million houses compared to the actual demand. In Punjab alone, there is a shortfall of 2.3 million housing units.³⁸

Implementing sustainable urban planning and enhanced metropolitan governance to ensure the continuous provision of basic facilities is necessary to manage the interplay of rapid population growth and increased urbanization.

iv. Healthcare and Education Facilities

One of the inevitable impacts of rapid population growth is the state's incapacity to provide healthcare and education facilities to the people.

Pakistan's healthcare system faces plenty of challenges due to the burden of an excessive population. There is a significant shortage of doctors, nurses and paramedical staff. According to 2021 data from Pakistan Medical

³⁵ Syed Hasan, "Sustainable Urbanisation in Pakistan and Lahore: Challenges and Way Forward," (paper, 23rd ASEF Summer University, 2021) https://asef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ASEFSU23-Background-Paper_Sustainable-Urbanisation-in-Pakistan.pdf.

³⁶ Fiza Farhan, "Population control — Pakistan's greatest challenge," *Express Tribune*, November 12, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2445919/population-control-pakistans-greatest-challenge>.

³⁷ Syed Hasan, "Sustainable Urbanisation in Pakistan and Lahore: Challenges and Way Forward," (paper, 23rd ASEF Summer University, 2021) https://asef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ASEFSU23-Background-Paper_Sustainable-Urbanisation-in-Pakistan.pdf.

³⁸ Hina Shiekh, "The Precarious Housing Situation in Pakistan," *Consortium for Development Policy Research*, <https://cdpr.org.pk/the-precarious-housing-situation-in-pakistan/>.

Council (PMC) and Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC), the doctor-population ratio is 1.09/1,000. Moreover, the nurse/midwife/Lady Health Visitor population ratio stood at 0.59/1000. Insufficient number of health professionals is a primary challenge in attaining the minimum recommended essential Human Resources for Health (HRH) for Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in the country.³⁹ Moreover, the lack of governmental investment in the Public Health Sector (PHS) is the key reason for the shortage of medicines, health infrastructure and skilled health professionals.⁴⁰ The budget allocation for the health sector is not in line with the WHO guidelines (6 percent of the GDP). However, for Pakistan, where the population is increasing at over 2 percent per annum, the allocated health budget was 1 percent of the GDP in 2021 and 1.4 percent in 2022.⁴¹

Every year, the increase in population by three to four million overburdens the education sector like other public services. For the fiscal year 2022-23, Pakistan's education budget was 1.7 percent of its GDP, the lowest in the region.⁴² It is also below the international norm of a minimum of 4 percent of the GDP.⁴³ Due to a rapidly growing population and insufficient budgetary allocations, Pakistan has the second highest number of out-of-school children in the region.⁴⁴ According to the Pakistan Institute of Education's (PIE) report for 2021-2022, the figure for out-of-school children has reached 26.2 million.⁴⁵ Even though there has been marginal improvement in school enrollment, the

³⁹ Health Planning, System Strengthening and Information Analysis Unit (HPSIU), "Pakistan: 2021 Monitoring Universal Health Coverage", report (Islamabad: Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, 2021) [/https://phkh.nhsrsc.pk/sites/default/files/202208/Universal%20Health%20Coverage%20Monitoring%20Report%20Pakistan%202021.pdf](https://phkh.nhsrsc.pk/sites/default/files/202208/Universal%20Health%20Coverage%20Monitoring%20Report%20Pakistan%202021.pdf).

⁴⁰ Umbreen Fatima, Nutrition Supervisor, GOP, Multan in discussion with the author, (April 20, 2024)

⁴¹ Ikram Junedi, "Budget 2023-24: Paltry increase in health spending despite unsatisfactory indicators," *DAWN*, June 10, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1758892>.

⁴² Tahir Amin, "Rs97.098bn earmarked for education affairs, services," *Business Recorder*, June 10, 2023, <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40247012>.

⁴³ Dr. Ayesha Razzaque, "Inside the federal education budget," *News International*, June 20, 2022, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/967537-inside-the-federal-education-budget>.

⁴⁴ UNICEF Pakistan, "Education," Accessed April 12, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>.

⁴⁵ Ahmed Subhan, "Pakistan's out-of-school children figures clock in at 26 million," *News International*, January 21, 2024, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1150032-pakistan-s-out-of-school-children-figures-clock-in-at-26-million>.

exponential population growth rate has outpaced the number of out-of-school children.⁴⁶ This is the overview of just one aspect of the education sector. Nonetheless, with the pace of current population growth, Pakistan's public education sector infrastructure is also far behind the required metrics of accessibility and quality.

Population Growth and National Security

Concern regarding the linkage between population growth and national security has been prevalent since the advent of modern nation states.⁴⁷ The exponential population growth, as evident in Pakistan, poses implications for the country's human security, which is fundamentally linked to national security. Given the gravity of the issue, Pakistan's National Security Policy (2022-26) recognized human security as one of the key components of national security. Furthermore, the policy also highlighted the need for population management to attain sustainable development and overall security.⁴⁸

As mentioned earlier, the impact of population growth on the country's socio-economic landscape is directly related to the well-being of its citizens. The unchecked population growth can hamper a state's capacity to ensure adequate social service delivery to its people, thereby impacting the country's national security. The abundance of the population amidst the strain on the country's socio-economic landscape can be a breeding ground for instability.⁴⁹ The scarcity of resources can create competition within the population to attain the essential public services that are important for survival.

Moreover, one of the significant aspects of Pakistan's rapidly growing population is the youth bulge. 65 percent of the total population is below the age of 30. Of these, one out of three is between the ages of 15 and 29.⁵⁰ In this

⁴⁶ Saima Shabbir, "Pakistan out-of-school children exceed 26 million amid population growth, economic hardships," *Arab News*, January 21, 2024, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2445636/pakistan>.

⁴⁷ Jennifer D. Sciubba and Seongjoon Hwang, "Population and National Security", in *International Handbook of Population Policies*, ed. John F. May, Jack Golstone (London: Springer, 2022), 743.

⁴⁸ National Security Division, "National Security Policy of Pakistan 2022-2026", Accessed July 20, 2024, <https://www.nsd.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/NSP%20summary.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Umer Farooq, "Does Population Growth Imperil National Security?", *Friday Times*, November 13, 2023, <https://thefridaytimes.com/13-Nov-2023/does-population-growth-imperil-national-security#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20UNDP%20report,major%20urban%20centers%20are%20concerned>.

⁵⁰ Adil Najam, "Pakistan's Moment of Youth", *DAWN*, May 5, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1831567>.

regard, Pakistan needs to take immediate measures to ensure that the youth bulge gets equal opportunities for education and employment.

The Need for Effective Population Management

Given the consequences of population explosion on various indicators of the country's socio-economic development, it is necessary to highlight the need for effective population management.

Many population-related programs were launched by several developing countries from the 1950s to 1980s.⁵¹ Pakistan was one of the first countries in the region to adopt the family planning program in the 1960s. Over the years, the government has launched various policies and programs but these have not manifested desirable results and have not been able to lower the fertility rate. In recent years, the significant turning point in Pakistan's response to the alarming population growth came in July 2018, when the Supreme Court took notice of the issue. This resulted in a number of policy actions being taken in the subsequent years.⁵² The Supreme Court established a task force to make recommendations on population management, which were later endorsed by the Council of Common Interests (CCI).

Table 2: Major Population-related Initiatives after 2018

Year	Initiative	Mandate
2019	National Action Plan (NAP) on Population (2019-2024)	Based on the recommendations by CCI on eight identified areas
2020	Parliamentary Forum on Population	It was established to raise parliamentary awareness about the need to manage population growth
2021	National Narrative on Population	It calls for balancing resources and the population growth rate. Religious, political and civil society stakeholders approved it

Source: Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies, *Addressing the Challenge of Overpopulation in Pakistan*, April 5, 2022.

⁵¹ Warren C. Robinson and John A. Ross, *The Global Family Planning Revolution* (Washington: The World Bank, 2007)

⁵² Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies, "Addressing the Challenge of Overpopulation in Pakistan," April 5, 2022, <https://casstt.com/addressing-the-challenge-of-overpopulation-in-pakistan/>.

The prominent aspect of the initiative mentioned above is the National Action Plan (2019-2024) for implementing the recommendations given by CCI (after the Supreme Court’s order). Those approved recommendations included two primary aims:⁵³

Table 3: Two Significant Sets of Aims in CCI Recommendations on Population Management

Target Year	Aims
By 2025	Achieve the 1.5% population growth rate by controlling the birth rate Increasing the Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) to 50% and decreasing the fertility rate to 2.8 children per woman
By 2030	Achieve the 1.1% population growth rate by enhancing CPR to 60% and decreasing fertility to 2.2 children per woman

Despite these initiatives, Pakistan’s population growth rate stood at 2.55% in 2023 and the CPR remained stationary between 30% and 35%.⁵⁴ Additionally, in 2024, the overall birth rate was 3.32%. Furthermore, the country faces challenges in advancing the quality of its human capital. In this context, there is an immediate need to focus on effective population management techniques that can help achieve desirable and sustainable results.

Whole-of-Government Approach

The continuous increase of the population growth rate mandates that the state adopt a whole-of-government approach. This approach refers to the collaborative actions taken by the different ministries and departments. The failure of the NAP on Population to lower the growth rate is testimony to the structural issues in its implementation. To enhance the operational capabilities

⁵³ Ministry of National Health Services and Coordination, “Pakistan Action Plan for Implementation of CCI”, Accessed April 14, 2024. <https://phkh.nhsrhc.pk/sites/default/files/2020-12/Pakistan%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Implementation%20of%20CCI%20Recommendations%202019-24.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Mujahid Abdullah, Faiq Bilal, Romesa Khan, et.al, “Raising the contraceptive prevalence rate to 50% by 2025 in Pakistan: an analysis of number of users and service delivery channels,” *Health Research Policy and Systems* 21, no.4(2023):2-8

of various programs, there is a need to improve the overall collaboration between the related departments.

Enhanced Institutional Collaboration

The merger of the Health Department and the Population Welfare Department at the provincial level can increase the prospects for more localized initiatives. For example, the Lady Health Workers Program can be integrated into the Population Welfare Department. The Lady Health Workers Program was established in 1994 as a community service program to tackle the specific issues requiring proximal communication with women at the local level. The campaign of counseling women on the importance of family planning played a vital role in some Muslim countries. In Bangladesh, female field workers were employed to extensively proliferate family planning and reproductive health services at the household level. It increased its CPR from 8% in 1975 to 62% in 2014, reducing its fertility rate from 6.7 to 2.2 during the same time.⁵⁵ However, this did not receive the required attention from the stakeholders in Pakistan even after the dilution of LHWs' tasks in the 2000s to support various health programs.⁵⁶

According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18 (PDHS), there was significant inequality in the use of modern birth control techniques between the women of rural and urban areas. In this context, one of the pertinent recommendations by the stakeholders concerns the joint engagements of community-based health workers, such as Family Welfare Assistants (FWAs) with Lady Health Workers (LHW). The more effective joint execution of their awareness operations in rural areas can help ensure the enhanced proliferation of reproductive health services in rural areas.

Garnering the Support of Religious Scholars

Over the past several decades, one of the strongest oppositions to the initiatives regarding population management came from religious scholars. There have been campaigns that any population management program is a

⁵⁵ Md Nuruzamman, "Bangladesh must shift focus from population control to population management," *Daily Star*, May 6, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/bangladesh-shift-focus-population-management-3603036>.

⁵⁶ UNFPA, "Slow progress of Family Planning in Pakistan and possible Learnings from the successful experiences of Iran, Turkey and Bangladesh," Accessed April 24, 2024, https://pakistan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/low_uptake_of_fp_pk_-_v9.pdf.

‘foreign sponsored agenda to keep Muslim societies underpopulated.’⁵⁷ However, the continuous engagement of successive governments with religious scholars has dispelled the severity of the anti-family planning campaigns. However, many sections of society are still embroiled in the religious and cultural barriers. In this regard, the due support of religious scholars for governmental initiatives has been given importance by the policymakers. In December 2023, Punjab government decided to utilize the services of Khatibs and religious scholars in the 4400 union councils of the province to disseminate the message of healthy reproductive choices. There is a requirement to replicate this formula in other provinces to achieve the broader goal of sustainable population growth.

Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes (CCT)

The Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes (CCT) focus on reducing poverty by conditioning the monetary exchange with the receiver’s action and behavioral change to promote healthcare, education etcetera.⁵⁸ Many countries, including Pakistan, have employed CCT in various domains. For instance, Pakistan launched Waseela-e-Sehat and Ehsaas Nashonuma, which were health and nutritional cash transfer programs.⁵⁹ Similarly, under the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Sindh could initiate a targeted CCT scheme to incentivize reproductive health services. The CCT scheme could link the provision of a fixed amount of cash with the condition of beneficiaries getting counseling on family planning. This would help attain the government’s broader goal of increasing the CPR rate.

Conducive Social Environment

There is a need to emphasize the importance of family planning and reproductive choices to bring about the societal change.⁶⁰ There are prevalent social attitudes that compel women to constantly have more children without any consideration of their own and the children’s health. Pakistan’s maternal

⁵⁷ Umer Farooq, “The Role of Religion in the Failures of Family Planning,” *Friday Times*, November 27, 2023, <https://thefridaytimes.com/27-Nov-2023/the-role-of-religion-in-the-failures-of-family-planning>.

⁵⁸ Sheliza Ladhani, KC.Sitter, “Conditional cash transfers: A critical review.” *Development Policy Review* 38, no. 1 (2020): 28-41.

⁵⁹ Ehsas 2047, “Ehsas Nashonuma”, Accessed July 22, 2024, <https://www.ehsaas2047.com/nashonuma>.

⁶⁰ Naeem Uz Zffar, Saman Rai, panel discussion moderated by Durre Nayab, *PIDE EconFest*, April 13, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-xoJjQhKm4>.

mortality and infant mortality rates are the highest in South Asia. The maternal mortality rate stood at 186/100,000 in 2023 while the infant mortality rate stood at 57/1000 in 2022.

The National Narrative on Population envisioned a society where, by the end of 2030, all citizens would enjoy the fundamental right to decide the number of their children responsibly. Previously, there has been a narrative on the population that was not well-received as they urged people only to have two children, which was considered an infringement of their privacy.⁶¹ The latest narrative on the population focuses on the necessity of a balance between family size and resources without forcing them to restrict to a certain number of children.

Enhancing Broader Community Engagement

Integrated community outreach programs on a broader level are further needed to ensure a conducive environment for population management in Pakistan. A comprehensive community engagement program can be devised at the district level and its intensity and extent of reach can be molded as per the population statistics of the area. There have been several community programs by the health departments and various NGOs, e.g., the Rural Support Program Network. However, the government can formulate a plan of action for these outreach programs and tailor their scope specifically to focus on two aspects: awareness regarding family planning and counseling about managing the existing size of the family. Additionally, United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and USAID have initiated some awareness programs in this regard. Still, there is potential to leverage international support and collaboration to enhance funding and resource mobilization for community outreach initiatives.

According to one of the lawmakers from Sindh, provincial governments can set up the ‘Jawan Marakiz’ on the Union Council level.⁶² By employing the local tier of governance, the government can designate counselors to counsel families on issues related to the planning and management of their families as enshrined in Pakistan's national population narrative. This will help create a conducive environment for family planning and management. Moreover, extensive media campaigns and employing local influencers such as renowned local social media personalities can be vital to enhance the programs’

⁶¹ Dr Ali M. Mir, “A new narrative on population,” *Express Tribune*, October 6, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2072920/new-narrative-population>.

⁶² Sidra Imran, interview by Daniyal Shiekh, February 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdKOsPaZsl4>.

effectiveness further.

People-Centric Governance

Besides curtailing the exponential population growth rate, it is equally important to address the impact of the existing population on various socio-economic indicators elaborated in the above section. For that, it is essential to adopt a people-centric approach. This refers to the approach to governance that places the country's population at the forefront of policymakers' decision-making.

Credible Information Structure

There should be a Credible Information Structure to regulate data-driven decisions. The recent census conducted by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) was a digital census. However, the analysts made many observations on the extent of the data shared after completing the process. First, PBS only published the list of all the districts with their total population. It did not make public the information regarding gender and rural and urban distribution, which are significant aspects of the basic data sets. Secondly, PBS gave Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) detailed block-wise data to delimit electoral constituencies in 2023. It shows that PBS possesses this data but is restricting its access. Another issue was that there was no separate data for the new districts established after the 2023 census.⁶³

The lack of credible census data will hamper policymakers' decision making strategies. In addition, the absence of important information regarding rural and urban divides and gender break-ups will hamper service delivery in the various policy areas. To counter that, the government needs to focus on collecting data regarding essential aspects of the population composition that are directly related to its socio-economic well-being.

Incentivize Population Management

It is high time the government incentivizes population management. The structure of the National Finance Commission (NFC), which provides the criterion for dividing resources between the central and provincial governments, disincentivized population management. According to the NFC, 82% of the resource allocation is based on population, while 10% is based on

⁶³ Tahir Mehdi, "A digital fairy-tale," *DAWN*, October 14, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/amp/1781022>.

poverty and 8% on generated revenue.⁶⁴ This formula ensures that most funds are allocated to the areas with the highest population. Many places with fewer people are more underdeveloped and require more funds, but according to the current distribution system, the development gap would further increase. This situation requires policymakers to carefully deliberate gradually reducing the population's weightage by 4% in the allocation of NFC awards. Bangladesh and India both have reduced the population's share in determining the allocation of their national resources.⁶⁵ Replicating this formula in Pakistan can help reduce the state's role in providing indirect support to exponential population growth.

Capitalizing on the Youth Dividend

Currently, 64% of Pakistan's population is under the age of 30. By 2030, the population will likely cross 280 million, of which 100 million will be youth.⁶⁶ By harnessing the potential of the youth population, Pakistan has an excellent opportunity to revamp its socio-economic landscape by investing in the youth.⁶⁷ For this purpose, skilled and educated youth in the labor force can enhance national productivity.

According to the United Nations "Medium Projection", Pakistan's working-age population (15-64) will reach its peak by 2050.⁶⁸ Pakistan has a limited time window to capitalize on this factor. Moreover, the lower dependency ratio due to the increased working-age population can also enhance national savings and investment. However, this positive outlook depends on the extent of employment opportunities and quality of education provided to the working-age population.

Pakistan can opt for the 'skills first approach' in this regard. As per 2023 Labour Force Survey by PBS, the young population is growing faster than the overall population. This necessitates investing in their skills and employability. Pakistan has a Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET)

⁶⁴ Zarrar Khurro, "Pakistan and the politics of population management," *Arab News*, July 13, 2023,

<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2337286>.

⁶⁵ Zarrar Khurro, "Pakistan and the politics of population management," July 13, 2023,

⁶⁶ Amir Jan, "Demographic dividend or dilemma? Pakistan's youth and economic prosperity," *DAWN*, November 3, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1785903>.

⁶⁷ Ishrat Hussain, *Governing the Ungovernable* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2018) 84.

⁶⁸ Dr. Sara Shehzad, "Pakistan's population: What we do now will shape the headlines of future," *Nation*, July 11, 2023, <https://www.nation.com.pk/11-Jul-2023/pakistan-s-population-what-we-do-now-will-shape-the-headlines-of-future>.

⁶⁹ Rashda Javaid, Master Trainer, TEVTA, Bahawalpur in discussion with the author (April 12, 2024)

infrastructure comprising various programs.⁶⁹ However, there is a skill gap in various manufacturing industries and the current TVET infrastructure cannot fill it due to a lack of skilled trainers, insufficient collaboration between the TVET institutes and industries and technological obsolescence.⁷⁰ Pakistan can take inspiration from Switzerland, the global leader in vocational education training (VET) and known for its collaboration between VET institutions and the industrial sector. By following this, Pakistan can enrich its employment sector with skilled individuals. Providing this facility to the youth can equip them with competitive skills for self-employment.⁷¹

Accountability and Constant Reviews

Especially in the last five years, some significant steps in population management have been taken, including a population action plan, parliamentary oversight and a national narrative on population. However, as identified by UNFPA, there has been a significant lack of appropriate accountability and review of these devised programs. The lack of oversight and regulation of various designated tasks has led to ineffective implementation of the initiatives that have not achieved the desired results. The state has an almost non-existent role in the regular policy review at both the federal and provincial levels.⁷² The state must adopt a robust mechanism of regular policy reviews to ensure the impact assessment of various initiatives and their practical implementation. The pattern of constant regulatory oversight through various review committees consisting of experts would ensure the timely completion of the set targets concerning population management, especially regarding fertility and population growth rates.

Findings

The following are some of the paper's salient findings, which necessitate adoption of effective population management strategies by the government:

⁶⁹ Rashda Javaid, Master Trainer, TEVTA, Bahawalpur in discussion with the author (April 12, 2024)

⁷⁰ State Bank of Pakistan, "Special Section: Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Pakistan: Issues and Challenges for Productivity Enhancement," Accessed April 28, 2024, <https://www.sbp.org.pk/reports/quarterly/fy20/Third/Special-Section.pdf>.

⁷¹ Amir Jan, "Demographic dividend or dilemma? Pakistan's youth and economic prosperity," DAWN, November 3, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1785903>.

⁷² UNFPA, "Slow progress of Family Planning in Pakistan and possible Learnings from the successful experiences of Iran, Turkey and Bangladesh," Assessed April 24, 2024, https://pakistan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/low_uptake_of_fp_pk_-_v9.pdf.

- One of the significant factors behind the rapid population growth in Pakistan is the High Fertility Rate.
- The gap between the higher birth and death rates is another vital factor contributing to rapid population growth.
- The lack of proper education and awareness regarding family planning and certain social, cultural and religious beliefs has influenced the country's population growth.
- The exponential population growth, as evident in Pakistan, has implications for the country's human security, which is fundamentally linked to national security.
- Pakistan was one of the first countries in South Asia to adopt the family planning program in the 1960s. Over the years, the government has launched various policies and programs. However, these programs have not achieved the desired results, such as lowering of the fertility rate.

Summed-up Recommendations

Following are summed-up policy recommendations on the necessity of population management:

Table 4: Policy Recommendations for Effective Population Management

Recommendations	Description
Whole-of-Government Approach	<p>Institutional Collaboration (i.e., merger of population welfare and health department) to broaden the horizon of family planning services and reproductive health services aimed at lowering the fertility rate.</p> <p>In this regard, following policy actions are suggested:</p> <p>Initiatives to involve religious scholars in the campaigns focusing on informed reproductive choices.</p> <p>Initiating Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes aimed at incentivizing reproductive health services.</p> <p>Devise integrated community outreach programs to ensure a conducive environment for population management.</p>

<p>People-centric Governance</p>	<p>Data-driven policy decisions need to be made that keep people at the forefront and are regulated by credible information structures.</p> <p>Incentivizing population management by gradually reducing the weightage of the population in the allocation of NFC Award.</p> <p>Capitalizing on the youth dividend and enabling them to enter the labor market with skilled and quality education.</p>
<p>Accountability and Constant Review</p>	<p>Foster the culture of robust policy reviews and impact assessments to ensure the effective and timely implementation of population management initiatives.</p>

Source: Author’s Compilation

Conclusion

The imbalance between the growing population and the availability of resources makes it difficult for Pakistan to achieve the desired level of socio-economic development. The rapidly increasing population has put a severe strain on resources and has impacted the quality of public services. This also poses a threat to the well-being of the citizens, ultimately impacting the country's national security spectrum.

The impact of the increasing population on socio-economic indicators necessitates Pakistan to adopt comprehensive population management strategies to curtail further exponential growth of the population. This will help ensure the welfare of the existing human capital. Pakistan should focus on the whole-of-government approach that ensures institutional collaboration to implement population management strategies effectively. Furthermore, there is also a need for people-centric governance focused on data-driven decision-making that considers the various variables of population composition such as age, sex, race, ethnicity and marital status. Therefore, comprehensive policy-making in light of the above recommendations should be adopted to harness the real demographic potential.

Pakistan has made various population-related programs and action plans over the years. However, the extent of their implementation has depended

on political will and quality of governance and service delivery. There is a need for continuous national level effort and across-the-board commitment of all relevant stakeholders to achieve the target of implementing population management strategies.