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Population Crisis: Challenges and Way forward

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This article is based on the editorial “A stable planet: on World Population Prospects 2019 report”, that appeared in The Hindu on 22nd June 2019. It talks about the Challenges of population growth and suggests a way forward.

According to **the UN’s World Population Prospects 2019** report, India is projected to become the most populous country by **2027** surpassing China and host 1.64 billion people by 2050.

Meanwhile, **India will have a vast number of young people and insufficient natural resources left for exploitation** so, with the rising population, India will have to face a herculean task of providing basic amenities of life to its people like food, shelter, healthcare, and education.

Population Crisis

- According to the **United Nations (UN) report** the number of children born per woman in the country still lies in the range of 2.1-4. This puts India in the intermediate-fertility group of countries in which around 40% of the world population lives.
- India is expected to add nearly 273 million people between 2019 and **2050**.

Challenges

- **Stabilizing Population:** Reduction in **fertility rate** is one of the prerequisites for stabilizing the population growth and it would be a challenge to achieve optimal fertility rate in states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh — which have higher fertility rate as per Sample Registration System data.
- **Quality of Life:** India will need to invest in augmenting its **education** and **healthcare system**, grow more **food**, provide more **housing**, sharply increase its **drinking water supply** and add capacity to **basic infrastructures**, such as roads, transport, electricity, and sewage to provide a **minimum quality of life** to every citizen.

- **Heavy Expenditure** is required in order to fund the basic needs and augment the social infrastructure of India for accommodating the rising population, for that India will have to raise resources through taxation and other means.
Even if less than five million people are entering the workforce every year, employing them at a decent wage is a complex task.
- **Malthusian fears:** Malthus argued that because there will be a higher population than the availability of food, many people will die from the shortage of food.
- **Demographic dividend:** In order to reap the benefits from the rising demographic dividend India needs to develop a strong base of human capital that can contribute significantly to the growth of the economy but India's low literacy rate (about 74% - leaving a quarter of the population without basic reading and writing skills) will turn demographic dividend into the burden.
- **Sustainable Urban Growth:** UN report suggests that by 2050, the urban population will be increased to 87.7 million and the number of urban agglomerations consisting more than a million people is also expected to be doubled by 2035. Thereby creating the need for improvisation of urban facilities with an emphasis on access to good, affordable housing and mobility.
- **Ageing of Population:** As per India Ageing Report 2017 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) the share of the population over the age of 60 could increase from 8% in 2015 to 19% in 2050. Thereby **twin challenges of rising population** and **old age dependents** will add to India's troubles of providing jobs, education, health along with geriatric care.
- **Inequitable income distribution:** In the face of an increasing population, unequal distribution of income and inequalities within the country would be a possible outcome.

Way Forward

- Making agriculture remunerative (actualizing dream of doubling the income of farmers by 2022) and keeping food prices stable is crucial to ensure nutrition for all.
- Implementing a '**universal basic income**' as a social safety valve will help in providing employment opportunities to a large number of unemployed youth.
- Managing forest and water resources for future generations and willful implementation of sustainable development goals must assume center stage in policy-making.
- India needs to find ways to contain the growth of the population without the use of coercion.
- The poor, populous northern States must make concerted advances in women's literacy, health, and participation in the workforce, emulating the achievements of the southern States.
- Progress in poverty reduction, greater equality, better nutrition, universal education, and health care, needs state support and strong civil society institutions.

- Rising life expectancy and growing population of older adults opens up prospects for employment in many new services catering to them.
- Effective and efficient implementation of schemes like AMRUT, SMART cities, Piped water for all, Make India India and Sustainable development goals framework will certainly help in augmenting the social infrastructure and will help India in reaping the benefits of its demographic dividend.

The Government of India, politicians, policymakers and Civil societies should initiate a bold population policy and initiatives so that the economic growth of the country can keep pace with the demands of a growing population.

Drishti Input

India is projected to surpass China as the world's most populous country by 2027. Discuss the challenges of rising population and suggest a way forward. 250 words.
