

India's Readiness to handle its Overpopulation Crisis

India with the GDP of 2.6 trillion dollars in 2019 is the sixth largest economy in the world. India's GDP for the financial year 2018-19 was 7% and the growth rate for 2019 is projected to be almost 7.5%. This is one side of the coin, other side of the coin is that India is the world's largest democratic state and the second most populous country in the world with nearly 1.37 billion people. Currently China with 1.41 billion people is at number one but in 5 years down the lane from now i.e. around 2024 India will surpass China. The reason is quite simple, the current birth rate in India is 1.19 % and India is the home of largest young population in the world with more than 50% of its people below the age of 25 and more than 65% of its population is below the age of 35. If this situation continues India will be tagged as the first country in the history to be inhabited by 1.5 billion in 2030 and 1.7 billion in 2050.

Does this mean India can rely on its demographic dividend to stimulate development? The development of any nation is depicted not only by its economic performance but also by its social growth. No doubt that the GDP of India is growing rapidly but what about its Human development index which is far behind the satisfactory levels. India occupies 130th rank among the 189 countries in Human development index which is lowest amongst the BRICS Nations. However India's Human development index value increased from 0.427 to 0.640 registering a growth of nearly 50% between 1990 to 2017.

India being a young nation with an average age of 29 years will be adding nearly 10 to 12 million working age people every year over the next few decades. In India nearly 850 million young work forces will be there in the job market by 2022, which means, there is a constant demand to generate 8.1 million jobs yearly against 5.5 million produced in 2017 to keep the employment rate stable. With the advancement in automation, artificial intelligence, robotic there is already a threat of 69% of job loss.

As per a report by world economic forum by 2025 more than half of the Indian workers will require up scaling to meet the altering demands of the business and economy due to technological development. Nearly 65% of the children entering into the primary school will end up doing entirely new jobs that do not exist today. This will lead to huge skill development challenges for India. As per an estimate by World Economic Forum, India will be creating 50 to 70 million jobs during the next five years. These jobs shall be in the fields of data analytics, automations, artificial intelligence and other areas which shall require vocational training but unfortunately just 4.69 percent of India's workforce is formally trained against 68% in UK 75% in Germany and 80% in Japan.

The challenge of employment becomes sterner in India because the current education system emphasizes more on gaining theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills. Secondly there is raise in jobs in the informal segment in India than in informal segment. Third, there is a high level of disparity in access to education and technological resources among rural and urban areas in India. Another setback is very low participation of working age women in the labor force, which shall be a huge economic loss. Thus, if the Indian youth are not trained and if they encounter employment challenges, the demographic dividend turn out to be burden rather than benefit.

By 2030, 40% of Indians will be residing in urban India. This will certainly pose new challenges in health and sustainable living. The imminent crisis of water and air pollution, waste management and urban overcrowding is another alarming issue. Nine of the world's ten most polluted cities are in India including its capital New Delhi. Another vital concern is food and water. India claims to be self sufficient in food production but the brutal reality is that the country is inhabited by 270 million hungry people. In global hunger index, India stands at 103rd position in 2018. Further demand for food will double and the demand for water in 2050 estimated to be more than 50% of what it was in 2000. one ton of food grains production require on an average 1000 ton of water and it is not surprising that water disputes have increased among states in India.

The pertinent question is, has the policy measures undertaken are proportional to the magnitude of ecological, demographic, and developmental troubles facing in India. The credible concern is that somewhere the policymakers are missing on all quantifiable factors for sustainable growth and development in India. China's highly criticized policy has taken almost 40 years to stabilize China's population trend and has certainly helped China to control its population by a probable 400 million people.

The pertinent question remains how India will provide nearly 1.7 billion people with minimum demands of livelihood. The longer India delays acknowledging the sternness of these problems and dealing with them straight out, the alarming the consequences are likely to be.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mahima', with a stylized flourish at the end.

(Prof. Mahima Birla)

Editor in Chief