
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Ram B. Bhagat is Professor and Head, Department of Migration and Urban Studies, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai. His research areas include migration, urbanisation and environment. His publications appeared in the leading journals like *GENUS*, *Asian Population Studies*, *Population and Environment*, *Asia Pacific Population Journal*, *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, etc. He was a member on the IUSSP panel on Demography of Armed Conflict, 2006–2010. He is Coordinator of the Centre for Environmental Information System (ENVIS Centre) on Population, Settlement and Environment. He is teaching post graduate students and guiding MPhil and PhD students of population studies.

Population has been a critical factor in sustainable development. While the relationship between population and sustainable development has evoked considerable debates both for and against from a Malthusian perspective, in recent years there is a growing emphasis, on size and growth and on other aspects of population such as age structure, geographical distribution of population, migration, urbanisation and related population and social policies influencing sustainable development. The concept of sustainable development is an important tool that emerged from the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development appointed by the U.N. General Assembly in 1983. The commission which was headed by Brundtland submitted its report entitled *Our Common Future* in 1987. This report was a turning point in the history of human endeavour for safeguarding the environment. The commission has focused the attention among others, towards the rapid growth of population in many parts of the world. It has noted that in many parts of the world the population is growing at rates that cannot be sustained by available environmental resources and pleaded for achieving sustainable development as the goal of human progress. The concept of sustainable development was defined on the premise of inter-generational justice which invoked the sense of responsibility of the present generation towards the future generations. In the words of the commission, the “sustainable development means ability to satisfy the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

As a sequel to the report of the commission, a United Nations conference on environment and development was held during 3–14 June 1992 in Rio-de Janeiro. This conference discussed at length the population, economic trade issues along with north-south relationship in tackling environmental crisis. Both the report and the conference have sensitised the world community towards the problem of environment and served as watershed in the history of environmental protection. There were several follow up conferences held afterwards and the next Earth Summit 2012 will be held again

in Rio-de Janeiro next year to take stock the situation of challenges of sustainable development and climate change.

However, during the last one decade, it has been increasingly realised that the relationship between population, environment and development is a complex issue. Any attempt in neo-Malthusian framework of simply dividing the volume of resources by the number of people on the globe will not suffice. The relationship between population and sustainable development is mediated by a host of factors like science and technology, culture, institutions and policy and programmes (Shrivastava, 1992; De Souza et al., 2003). On the other hand, the urban transition and ageing of population are two significant demographic processes likely to influence the energy use and sustainability. The world population has reached almost a 7 billion mark and majority of the population growth is likely to occur in the developing countries. More than half of the population of the world already lived in urban areas in 2009 (UN, 2009a). On the other hand, population ageing is unprecedented. Since 1950, the proportion of older persons, i.e., 60 plus has been rising steadily, passing from 8% in 1950 to 11% in 2009, and is expected to reach 22% in 2050. Marked differences exist between developed and developing regions in the number and proportion of older persons. In the more developed regions, over a fifth of the population is currently aged 60 years or over and by 2050, nearly a third of the population is projected to be in that age group (UN, 2009b). The population ageing has huge implications for economic growth, energy and resource consumption and sustainable development. Migration could be another factor influencing sustainability. According to Human Development Report 2009 there were 214 million international migrants constituting about 3% of the world's population who moved across the national boundary. There were also 740 million people who moved across the major zonal demarcations within their countries [UNDP, (2009), p.21]. Given the changing demographic scenario, along with size of population, the composition and characteristics of population seem to influencing sustainable development more intensively. A proper planning and policy perspective might reduce the negative impacts and strengthen the positive impacts of changing population scenarios.

In this context, this special issue focuses on population and sustainable development, considering the diversity of the field of population studies, and not from a narrow demographic perspective. There are seven papers included in this issue which throw light on future population growth and sustainable development, issues of migration, regional planning and sustainable development, green consumption behaviour, water security; urbanisation, violence and sustainable development. Not only topics are diverse but also cover very different dimensions of the relationship between population and sustainable development. The selected papers in this special issue document the wide range of research currently taking place in the field of population and sustainable development and provide rich knowledge which will serve as a basis for decision makers to shape policies of sustainable development inclusive of population issues.

References

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