

## MONGOLIA PRONATALIST POPULATION POLICY LESSONS AND QUESTIONS

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*In her population policy, 1996, Mongolia stated the intention to maintain her annual population growth rate at no less than 1.8 percent. This came in the background of a declining growth rate in the 1990's, which actually dropped to 1.4 percent according to the 2000 population census. The achievement of the objectives of such a pro-natalist policy is fraught with many problems and challenges both in design as well as implementation. Many countries in the world have in the last century experimented with pro-natalist policies without much success. This scenario raises many questions and issues that need to be addressed by countries either embarking or already implementing such population policies. Some countries have limited their success as a result of weaknesses in the design and development of the policy itself. Often inadequate preparations are made before the pronouncement of the policy. There are in some cases inadequate demographic and policy studies conducted before the policy is formulated, insufficient consensus among politicians, policy bureaucrats and the public, weak infrastructure as well as poor advocacy of such policies by governments as well as lack of a clear set of policy measures that will yield the best results. This paper seeks to ask some of these questions in the context of Mongolia without necessarily offering solutions. The hope is that the policy makers and others will be wary of them as they embark on further development and implementation of the policy in the future. The paper examines the rationale for pro-natalist policies and in a very brief way, the performance of pro-natalist policies in Nazi Germany and France.*

**“French pro-natalist policy:** After WW1, the population structure of France was weakened by the loss of so many young males during the fighting. In 1920, all forms of contraception became illegal. France wanted a population of 100million by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1995, the TFR was 1.8, and by 2000 it had only risen marginally to 1.9. In year 2025 it is forecast to be 1.8. The incentives: 1064 Sterling pounds to couples having a third child, general maternity leave and child benefits, 6 months paid maternity leave, preferential treatment in allocation of council flats, tax benefits, 30% fare reduction on public transportation for families with more than 3 children. Pension schemes for mothers and house wives, child orientated development policies and nursing mothers encouraged to work part time” , US Census Bureau, 2003 -what are the possibilities for such a scenario unfolding for Mongolia?

### RATIONABLE FOR PRO-NATALIST POLICY

Pro-natalist policies have been considered at various times by many developed countries especially in fertility troughs of the 1930's and 1970's facing below replacement fertility. Different approaches have been used which have included restrictions on access to methods of fertility control, financial incentives to increase fertility, moral pressure to have more children for the good of the country. Why have governments on the other hand adopted pro-natalist policies? The reasons vary.

However a number deserve discussion here. Countries such as Nazi Germany, some former Marxist regimes and states such as Israel undertook to implement such policies for ideological reasons relating to assertion of power, national pride and political ideology. Religious beliefs such as those held in Catholicism and Islam relating to family and birth control have also been a motivating factor.

Many countries in Western Europe adopted such policies primary to increase labor force and decrease the dependency ratio. Other countries also were motivated by militaristic goals such as France in the 1920's and Nazi Germany, which linked fertility to racial supremacy and territorial domination. There was massive political propaganda promoting the concept of a "master race".

### **PERFORMANCE OF PRO-NATALIST POLICIES**

How well have population policies aimed at raising fertility done? No common conclusive and unanimous position can be reached based on the literature that has been reviewed so far from researches conducted.

However the range of performance on the effect of fertility has been narrow. It can be generally said however that in general the modal finding has been that the effects have been nil or negligible in countries that have tried to implement such policies. Two cases will be reviewed here, that of Nazi Germany in the 1930's and that of France in the 1920's.

As indicated earlier Nazi Germany had a very aggressive policy aimed at raising fertility in the 1930's. The rationale was primarily to produce a "master race" embedded in racial supremacy and territorial domination. Certain measures were undertaken then to ensure the success of the policy primarily based on incentives.

These included criminal prosecution of women having abortions, suppression of information on contraception, tax on unmarried adults, marriage loan to young couples, partly written off by having children, family allowances, tax concessions and housing preferences for large families, as well as a political propaganda that aimed at promoting a master race. What were the effects on fertility in the 1930's? The birth rate (per thousand) increased from 14.7 in 1933, to 18.0 in 1934 and to 19.7 in 1938. Although the policy had qualified success in raising the birth rate most of the effect was on earlier marriage and earlier first births with little effect on completed family size.

In France, the legislation came into force in 1920. The measures that were undertaken included the prohibition of induced abortions, sale of contraceptives and information on birth control (only repealed in late 1960's). Every *Department had* a commission on population. Financial incentives were given to families with children, with special payments to mothers remaining at home as well as generous family allowances. Indeed the 1950's allowance for a 3-child family was more than the national average wage. The legislative measures may have raised French fertility by 10%, that is 0.2 children per woman, although it is hard to separate the effects from those arising from other social and economic changes.

This finding has been criticized primarily on methodological grounds because it requires massive *ceteris paribus* assumptions and secondly because it was based on comparison of the French birth rate with those of neighboring countries. Studies on policy performance are fraught with methodological problems, especially their reliance on period data, a subject that is not dealt with here. When fertility is low, variations in period fertility need not go hand in hand with variations in cohort fertility. Therefore short-term success has little long-term predictive power. This recurrent qualification removes much of the interest from efforts to study the linkage between a given policy move and its immediate demographic aftermath.

## **MONGOLIA PRO-NATALIST POPULATION POLICY**

Like many countries in former Soviet communist block, Mongolia, had adopted a pro-natalist population policy by the early 1980's, (UN, 1982). According to Mongolia's population policy, 1996, the objective is to maintain the average annual population growth rate at no less than 1.8% per year until the government-planning period 2015-2020. During the last decade the annual population growth rate declined to 1.4%.

## **THE DEMOGRAPHICS**

In order to facilitate understanding of the Mongolia pro-natalist policy, it is important to review some of the demographic parameters in the last century particularly the growth rates and the TFR.

According to historians, the population of Mongolia had been declining for 300 years until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The rate of growth was slow until the 1950's. Some of the reasons for this slow growth include the economic instability that was experienced in Mongolia between the revolution of 1911 and the advent of the Second World War, unusually high mortality, out-migration of people during the revolution, internal conflict and loss of lives during the political repressions in the 1930's.

In 1930 the growth rate was only one per-cent. Between 1935-44, the growth rate was only 0.3 while it was 0.90 between 1944 and 1956. This rose to 2.6% during 1956 and 1963. Between 1963-69 the growth rate was 2.76% rising to 2.91% between 1969 and 1979. In the following decade (1979-89), the rate declined to 2.5%, before declining even further between 1989-2000 to only 1.4%.

The birth rates have also been declining over time. The crude birth rate has also been declining in the last decade or so. In 1989, the CBR stood at 36.5 before declining by 40% to 20.4% in 1999.

Exploration of the demographic landscape in Mongolia shows remarkable changes in demographic parameters since the fall of socialism in 1991. Migration as well as the natural increase has been the main determinants at play. The decline in fertility has according to researchers, been driven largely by several factors, among the main ones being the emerging difficulties during the transition, deterioration of living standards of the people, an increased use of contraception by women and the legalization of abortion in 1990.

On the other hand out-migration has been a very significant factor as well. Out-migration has been rising since 1989. It is reported that thousands (more than 60,000) of Kazakh ethnic Mongolians left for Kazakhstan through a labor agreement while another 50,000 citizens of former Soviet Union who were working and living in Mongolia left for their countries. In the same period, thousands of young people left for other countries to work and study. Certainly these movements have had a large demographic impact in Mongolia. Could they have been responsible for the rapid decline in growth rate between 1989-2000? What about the CBR?

## **QUESTIONS AND ISSUES**

These questions relate to the period before the launching of the pro-natalist policy and its actual implementation. It is vital that consideration be given to these issues if the policy is to start on the right footing and be implemented with some degree of success. Certainly the Mongolian pro-natalist population policy is still in its infancy to the extent that it has not acquired certain features. In a large way it is still as has already been described above an implicit pro-natalist population policy to the extent that no special programs have been launched to achieve the policy objectives.

## **FORMULATION OF POLICY:**

**Q1.** Has the argument been made for the need for a pro-natalist policy? Has a committee of parliament or government been established to synthesis scientific and bureaucratic opinion on the societal implications of a declining population, which should be a basis for proposal development? Were the longer-run consequences of a declining population been made clear to the public? Or is the decline as revealed by the demographic statistics serve as enough justification for intervention?

Any proposal that might promise a desired effect on fertility must pass the exacting tests of the political process. In a democratic polity, such as Mongolia is today. It must command majority support and satisfy the constitutional rules that protect the rights of a dissenting minority. The process in Mongolia should and ought to pass these tests.

**Q2.** Has a study been conducted to provide information on the actual consequences of a decline in population-preferably an inter-ministerial working group?

Evidence that declining population was visiting serious harm on the economy, the society or the polity? If these conditions are satisfied, a consensus in favor of a pro-natalist policy might be achieved

**Q3.** Has any study been conducted to reveal whether the attention given to national trends and levels of fertility in Mongolia is unjustified on the basis that there may be certain sub-populations, and which can be identified geographically, socio-economically or on ethnic criteria whose fertility is on average high enough to warrant no such interventions in form of a pro-natalist policy.

**Q4** Are parliamentarians as well as bureaucrats on whom they rely on for ideas and advise and who write the reports and proposals for policy, fully convinced of

the gravity of the demographic situation? Are the proposals they advance likely to be tempered by alternative values that they consider equally or more important? Is there some ambivalence even in the heart of policy-making circles?

A consensus among parliamentarians and key bureaucrats is absolutely vital for success in implementation of a pro-natalist population policy. Overt or covert opposition undermines progress in implementation. It is vital that only those who support such a policy be in positions of influence and entrusted to oversee its implementation. Ambivalence such as has been observed in the institutions of certain countries undertaking pro-natalist population policies has worked to undermine progress in attainment of program goals.

**Q5.** Do the young, men and women want more children?. If there is a strong desire for children among the youthful public there is then potential for success of a pro-natalist policy. Do women for example want to be tied down with children? Governments have learnt to be where the people are. Support from the public is a useful asset in achieving the goals of the policy.

**Q6** How well do we understand why fertility is what it is, where it is going and why in Mongolia? Clearly without an adequate body of knowledge of fertility determinants, however good intentioned the pro-natalist policy may be, it is navigating without a compass. There is need to constantly have an adequate body of knowledge to explain the current phenomenon in Mongolia based on which cogent recommendations to policy makers can be made from time to time. The lack of an expert's demographic opinion as to the spontaneous future trends of fertility means that no one is in a position to guarantee a rise in fertility back to replacement level or to exclude the possibility of a continuing downward trend.

**Q7** What has been and is likely to be the impact on fertility behavior of the consequences of entry to a market economy? Already structural reforms have brought about a harsher economic climate, which has implications for domestic economy, especially on disposable income as well as on stability and attitude towards children? As a result, continuous studies need to be undertaken to examine these issues to the extent that they may support or undermine the pro-natalist policy.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION:**

**Q8** How strong and visible is the office of family/population affairs, which is leading the campaign on the pro-natalist population policy, in overall governmental system? In many countries population ministries are often embedded in multi-functional ministries of wider scope. In such circumstances the focus of some proposals may be lost as they are shaped to conform to overall policy, or measures introduced in one department may conflict with those of another. Processes of this kind account for much of the incoherence of population policy as well as a weaker demographic impact than was intended by pro-natalist. A low status means that population ministries are likely to have tenuous access to centers of government power and may have little capacity to influence or coordinate activities of other government agencies. Coordination of this nature is particularly important not just in the formulation of the population policy but also in implementation since demographic trends are widely thought to be affected by conditions that cut across several sectors of a government's economic policy. Immigration and labor are such two sectors. Therefore the problem of coordination can be very complex. It is

incumbent upon the policy makers in Mongolia to evaluate the existing conditions and provide the best atmosphere for the implementation of the pro-natalist policy if it has to succeed.

**Q9.** Are there any policies that have been advanced with respect to women that appear to counterbalance the main thrust of the pro-natalist policy? For example policies aimed at achievement of equality between sexes both at home and at work. Such policies are often seen to give more independence to women including freedom in matters of childbirth. Such policies should be framed and seen to support a pro-natalist policy for the policy objectives to be achieved. Policy makers in Mongolia need to evaluate the policies that have been passed that may have potential for conflict with a pro-natalist population policy.

**Q10.** Does there exist a political lobby for the traditional family? The entry of Mongolia into a market economy has come with certain individual freedoms. Some of these may undermine the values of the traditional family, which is an important unit of reproduction. Under these circumstances the existence of a political lobby for the traditional family may be important for the success of the pro-natalist policy. Are the bastions of tradition still intact in Mongolia or have they been penetrated by all sorts of comers such as single parent families, divorced and un-married families, whose interests differ from those of traditional families? The existence of a network of family associations, which are articulating the needs, and demands of the family is important. Unity of such organizations is vital if they have to mount an effective lobby for the traditional family.

**Q11.** Where does labor market and immigration policy fit within the broader context of pro-natalist policy in Mongolia? The idea should be to balance the demands of parenthood and work and to make working conditions more compatible with parental responsibilities. Once specific programs are started in Mongolia in the future( if Mongolia decides to take this route), especially relation to incentives to mothers and fathers there will be need for issues on conditions of work to be addressed. Consequently there will be need to have employers and workers unions have elaborate departments looking at family interests so as to be able to implement proposals such as for maternity leave. Immigration is an important demographic phenomenon in Mongolia especially after the entry into market economy. Both internal and external migration has increased. As a result it is legitimate to enquire into the role of the immigration policy. Is it a part of the population policy? Currently the issue of migration is being examined by the legislature. As a result, migration should be examined to evaluate the capacity and suitability of it being a more economically and socially, albeit unwelcome compensation for low fertility.

**Q12** What infrastructure has been put in place to back the policy? This should be both budgetary and institutional. In Mongolia, there is need to strengthen the institutional infrastructure so as to have a strong campaign for the pro-natalist policy. Whenever government opts for financial incentives to families there certainly will be need to consider budgetary allocations to support the policy. Within government framework, demographic policy has to compete with many other programs for funding.

**Q13.** Is there sufficient institutional coordination in government for the pro-natalist policy? Some governments have failed in many policies and programs because of absence of an efficient coordination mechanism. As Mongolia implements the pro-

natalist policy it important to ensure the coordinating bodies do not have diverse interests that might undermine the effectiveness of the policy

**Q14.** How much focus needs to be paid between providing financial incentives to families to bear children as opposed to other measures that have been adopted by governments since the 1970's which focus more on creating a social environment that is more closely adapted to the needs of parents and children. These include provision of recreational facilities in the suburbs; better public transportation between home and day-care centers, and shopping areas, improvements in working hours, and conditions for parents of young children, the right to stay at home with sick children without the loss of wages and a host of similar measures. Intention here is to minimize problems such as have been experienced in many countries, which have experimented with both. Mongolia should therefore seek to learn from these other countries in formulation of a coherent set of measures.

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