

Population And Economic Growth In Bangladesh

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THE unprecedented population growth of Bangladesh (about 3 per cent) is one of the most serious national problems we are facing at the moment. All our economic problems centre round the population problem. The present 80 million people crammed into a limited space of about 55 thousand square miles and high fertility rate have given rise to a basic challenge to our economic and ecological viability. All our economic efforts for development are eaten up by the ever growing mass of population every year. In the next decades, if steps are not taken now, we will not have sufficient arable land to cultivate to meet our increasing demands for foodgrains, industries, energy, and urban expansion. It goes without saying that a country like ours with a given geographical limit can support well only a limited number of persons. The economic welfare and economic growth of a country is profoundly affected by the size and composition of the population. Therefore, the economic growth of a country will remain dependent upon the population in proportion to its natural resources. The size of the population also affects the distribution of income among the suppliers of various factors of production.

Agriculture is the mainstay of our economic life. As much as 90 per cent of the total population live in the rural area; over 80 per cent of the people are employed in agriculture about 60 per cent of national product is derived from agriculture. Population and land are the main reservoirs from which the whole productivity is generated. Therefore, an objective study of the problem of economic growth from the point of view, man as producer and ultimate consumer of what is produced is essential.

FACTS ABOUT POPULATION RISE

In 1600 AD there were only 10 million people living in Bangladesh. It has taken thousands of years to reach this number. We do not have any record of population prior to 1600 AD.

From the recent study it is found that after the end of the Sepoy Mutiny birth rate increased very fast and there was a sharp rise in population. The chart below will show population growth from 17th century to the end of this century:

Year AD	Population in million	Remarks
1650	10	(a) From 1650-1872 in 222 years only 12.8 million increase.
1800	12	
1845	13	
1872	22.8	(b) From 1872-1974 in 102 years 20.5 million increased is about 42.6 PC increase.
1901	28.9	
1911	31.6	
1921	33.3	
1931	35.6	
1941	42.0	
1951	42.1	
1961	50.8	
1974	76.5	
1980	High	Low
1985	106.5	89.2 x
1990	127.9	98.8 x
	152.6	110.1 x

It is evident from the above table that in 222 years, from 1650 to 1972 AD the country's population rose by 12.8 million (1.28 crore) while in the first thirty years, from 1931-61 population of this country increased by 15.2 million (1.52 crore). From the last Census Report of 1974, it is evident that between 1961-74 population of Bangladesh has increased by 20.5 millions.

This gives a 3.1 PC annual growth rate during the last 13 years and an overall 42.27 PC of total population of the country. If this high growing rate continues the population of the country will be 152.6 million in 1990.

To understand this phenomenal growth of population we should investigate the mathematics of growth of human population. People do not multiply in simple arithmetic progression but they grow in the exponential form. Population grows in the way money grows when interest is compounded. Just as interest added to the principal, earns interest and so on, so people added to people produce more people.

From the above we find that the rate of annual growth of population will determine how soon a country's population

will double. At 3.4 PC growth rate 76.5 million population will become double in 1990. As compared to our population growth, UK is growing at the rate of 0.6 PC and her population will double in 117 years, while those of Belgium, Luxembourg and East Germany at the rate of 0.1 PC doubling in 700 years.

ASPECTS OF AGE STRUCTURE AND DENSITY OF THE RURAL POPULATION IN BANGLADESH

Since long time the population of Bangladesh has been overwhelmingly rural in character. In 1901 97.57 per cent of the total population of the country was rural, in 1961 the proportion was 94.81 per cent. Because of the magnitude of rural population our economic structure is agricultural. As such, it would be worthwhile to examine the general age structure conditions of Bangladesh to understand the characteristic of Socio-economic phenomena of our country which is directly related to it.

TABLE-II
Age Structure of the population in Bangladesh 1901-81

Year	Children %	Adult %	Aged %	Dependency ratio	Median Age
1901	42.11	53.48	4.43	1.00	18.49
1911	43.33	52.60	4.07	0.90	18.04
1921	42.45	53.70	4.05	0.86	18.56
1931	40.93	55.53	3.54	0.78	18.93
1941	41.23	54.82	3.95	0.82	19.07
1951	41.50	53.50	5.00	0.87	18.44
1961	45.10	49.70	6.20	1.05	17.53
1971 (est)	45.85	49.37	4.78	1.05	17.00
1981 (est)	46.27	49.00	4.73	1.04	—

In Bangladesh nearly half the population is above 15 years and is classed as adult. The percentage of population in the adult age group in the country showed a slight upward rise from 1901 to 1931 after a fall in 1911. From 1941 onwards it started to decline and continues to do so. On the other side that of children has been rising since 1941 and estimated to 46.27 per cent in 1981.

As shown in the table the low proportion of adult population and proportionate increase in minor population is likely to continue until the end of this century and the economic of the total population will continue to rest on less than half of the population. This large minor and together with the aged population as dependent on less than 50 per

cent has gone above 1.00 This has been an alarming situation in view of the country's economic and demographic conditions. In Bangladesh the average density of population was 923 persons per square mile (1961) and the agricultural density was as high as 1300 to 1500 persons per square mile with 0.70 acre of land and 0.40 acre of cultivated land per capita (Govt of Bangladesh No. 7 1970-71, BBS Dacca 1971) The high agricultural density together with a massive population growth potential amply demonstrates tremendous pressure on the existing land and resources.

MAN/LAND RATIO: Total land available is 352.8 lakh acres of which 20.52 lakh acres consist of riverine land. Out of this land area, total land under cultivation in 1974 was 205,60,000 acres (205.60 lakh acres). About 5.4 million acres are covered by forest and about 6.5 million acres remain uncultivated.

Each year, due to population increase our arable land area diminishes. Total shrinkage of

cultivated land in the last 13 years goes 730073, lakh acres that is 5.57 lakh acres per year. This includes about 62,000 acres shrinkage (about 100 square miles) due to urbanisation, industrialisation, and road construction, etc.

77 per cent of the large farms (12.5 acres and over) have 10 or more fragments while small size farms (under 2.5 acres) have nearly 2 to 5 fragments. On an average a farm has 6 to 7 fragments and the size of an average plot is only 1 acres (less than two bighas). Sub-division of plots requires construction of ails (raised demarcation boundaries) which consume some valuable portion of cultivated land. It has been found from detailed surveys from villages that 3 PC of the cultivated land are occupied by these ails. On this basis about 7 lakh acres of land which could otherwise produce much required 0.74 million tons of foodgrains are wasted.

According to the Provincial Banking Inquiry Committee's Report, 1941 the average size of holding in Bengal was 5.25 acres in the early thirties and the same was put at 4.36 acres by the land Revenue Commission of 1940. From this the average annual shrinkage of land holding comes to 0.89 acre per holding. At this rate of shrinkage in seventies, the average holding comes to about 1.69 acres. The average per capita cultivated land, thus comes 0.4 acres and forest land comes to 0.1 acre which is one of lowest per capita land holding and far below so the required land to support a family. To be more clear we have 2 to 3 people per acre of land and at the present rate of population growth there will be 5 to 7 people per acre of land after the end of this century.

FOOD PRODUCTION-POPULATION: Out of the present available cultivated land 205.6 lakh acres we produce yearly 1 crore 17 lakh tons of foodgrains. This total food grain production falls short of total requirement of food grains by 28 lakh tons annually on an average for last 3 years.

A recent survey (1974-75) shows that there had been a 2 per cent increase in food grain production in the country. In 1975-76 rice production has gone up by about 30 lakh tons. This is a healthy sign no doubt but as compared to our enormous need of the fast growing population this is not sufficient enough. With 3.1 PC yearly increase in population and the consequent shrinkage in arable land this foodgrain deficit will go on increasing unless some measures are taken to check the population growth. The chart below will give some idea of our future food grain deficit and if population growth at the present rate is not arrested this deficit will increase more and more in relation to number of people. (To be continued)