



# National Narrative on Population Growth



**Pakistan's progress** on most health, education, and demographic indicators has slowed down according to the Population Census 2017 and the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) 2017-18. These trends signify a worsening of existing inequalities and imbalances, threatening the country's shrinking resource base as well as its future viability and stability. The situation warrants urgent corrective actions at all levels of State and society.

As a key measure, Pakistan must lose no further time in joining the countries of the region and the Muslim world in achieving a rate of population growth that is sustainable. This will have to be much lower than the current (1998–2017) high growth rate of 2.4%. In this regard, a National Task Force constituted by the Supreme Court has already identified eight broad sectors and thirty-three specific recommendations for implementation by Provincial Governments, regions and the Federal Government<sup>1</sup>. These recommendations have been endorsed by the Supreme Court and approved by the Council of Common Interest (CCI) chaired by the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

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<sup>1</sup> Supreme Court of Pakistan, Judgment of Human Rights Case No.17599 OF 2018 (Regarding alarming high population growth rate in the country), January 3, 2019, Available at [http://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/web/user\\_files/File/H.R.C.\\_17599\\_2018.pdf](http://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/web/user_files/File/H.R.C._17599_2018.pdf)

## Rationale of a National Narrative on Population

The idea of balanced population growth has historically evoked disparate, ambivalent and often negative responses in the country. The endorsement by all concerned of a new “national narrative” is, therefore, the first of the Task Force’s recommendations under “Advocacy and Communication.” Simply put, a national narrative is an articulation of the beliefs and the aspirations of the people and the nation that unites and compels the nation towards collective action. Such a consensus was reached by most other nations with similar challenges and contexts such as Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia and Iran several decades ago. As a result, these countries have made enormous progress. In Pakistan, such a narrative is necessary to foster consensus across provincial and regional identities, ethnicities, religious groupings to achieve balanced population growth with environmentally sustainable social and economic development. The federal and provincial governments shall also have to fulfill their financial commitments given in the CCI recommendations.

Pakistan is a uniquely created, richly diverse nation-state with enormous potential but it currently ranks 150<sup>th</sup> among 189 countries on the Human Development Index 2017. There is a need to eliminate preventable maternal and neonatal deaths, ensure adequate nutrition and education for all, provide access to clean water, and eradicate poverty.

Improved conditions for girls and women enable improved lives for all members of the family. Poverty too will be reduced only when *girls and women* are able to access universal *reproductive health care including family planning*, adequate nutrition and when their rights are ensured. Unless investments in *Human Capital* keep pace with population growth, we will only add to the huge numbers of people in poor health, with little or no education and skills, and with bleak prospects of employment especially for women. This is an untenable situation that denies the right of all citizens to a dignified life and threatens national well-being and security.

## National Narrative

Parents have the right to freely and responsibly decide the number and spacing of their children to fulfil the fundamental rights of their children and family by maintaining a Balance/Tawazun between their family size and resources. The Government and society have the responsibility to facilitate parents to achieve this balance by providing universal access to family planning information and services, thereby achieving sustainable development.

Sustainable population growth means growth in which this tawazun is maintained. It must prevail, at the macro level, between essential human goals and population numbers; the numbers and quality of citizens; natural resources and the people they sustain. At the micro level, tawazun must be attained between the births of children and their mother’s capacity to recuperate and breastfeed them; between the size of the families and their capacity to ensure the rights of each member. All

eminent religious scholars the world over have endorsed birth spacing as one way to ensure balanced family size.

While family size remains a private choice, separate from the public domain, parents' right to have as many children as they desire must be balanced with their responsibility to ensure that each child is brought up under the care of a healthy mother. Certainly, family planning and birth spacing should be driven by informed choice and free will, and not coercion. But the State is responsible for fulfilling all citizens' rights to the information and to the services they need in order to make, and act on informed choices.

The proposed narrative aims at balanced population growth to ensure wellbeing, prosperity, safety and security—which is the common aspiration of the people of Pakistan. The attainment of this imperative goal is possible through three inter-linked principles:

### Rights

The first principle recognizes that all citizens of the country have fundamental rights, which are enshrined in all religious teachings, the Constitution of Pakistan and the international covenants (ICPD, FP2020, SDGs) to which Pakistan is a signatory. This includes the right to adequate shelter, nutrition, health and family planning, education, employment opportunities and gainful livelihoods to improve the quality of life.

### Responsibilities

The second principle is the recognition that, to attain these rights, *individuals, and parents as well as the State have distinct responsibilities to fulfill*. Parents ought to act responsibly and have the number of children they can provide with the basic rights and needs, e.g., nutrition, health, and good upbringing, while the State remains responsible for providing necessary services and resources, such as family planning and health services, quality education, proper housing, and job opportunities.

### Balance-Tawazun

The third principle recognizes the need to strike a balance, or *tawazun*, in all aspects, especially between rights and responsibilities. This implies a *tawazun* between population growth and available resources and regenerative capacity. “*Tawazun*” is intrinsic in Nature and commanded in Islam and other faiths as a prerequisite for peace and well-being.



## قومی بیانیہ

”والدین کو یہ حق حاصل ہے کہ وہ آزادانہ مگر ذمہ داری کے ساتھ بچوں کی تعداد اور بچوں کی پیدائش میں وقفے کا تعین کریں تاکہ وہ اپنے خاندان کی تشکیل اور وسائل میں توازن قائم کرتے ہوئے اپنے بچوں اور خاندان کے بنیادی حقوق کو پورا کر سکیں۔ حکومت اور معاشرے کی یہ ذمہ داری ہے کہ وہ والدین کو خاندانی منصوبہ بندی کی وسیع تر بنیاد پر سہولیات اور معلومات فراہم کر کے والدین کی اس توازن کو قائم کرنے میں معاونت کریں تاکہ پائیدار ترقی کا حصول ممکن ہو سکے۔“

مجوزہ بیانیہ کا مقصد عوام کی خوشحالی، ترقی اور تحفظ کو یقینی بنانے کیلئے آبادی میں اضافے کی شرح کو وسائل سے متوازن رکھنا ہے اور یہ ایسا مقصد ہے جو پاکستان کی عوام کی امنگوں سے ہم آہنگ بھی ہے۔ اس اہم مقصد کا حصول تین اصولوں سے مشروط ہے جو ایک دوسرے سے منسلک ہیں:

- **حقوق**۔ پہلا اصول تمام پاکستانی شہریوں کے بنیادی حقوق کو تسلیم کرتا ہے جو کہ تمام مذاہب کی تعلیمات کا حصہ ہونے کے ساتھ ساتھ آئین پاکستان اور ان بین الاقوامی معاہدوں (SDGs، FP-2020، ICPD) کا بھی لازمی جزو ہیں جن پر پاکستان نے دستخط کئے ہوئے ہیں۔ ان حقوق میں اپنے اور اپنے خاندان کیلئے زندگی گزارنے کے مناسب وسائل جن میں رہائش، غذا، لباس، گھر، پانی اور نکاسی آب کا مناسب انتظام، صحت اور خاندانی منصوبہ بندی کی سہولیات (جیسا کہ بچوں کی تعداد اور ان کی پیدائش میں وقفے کیلئے آزادی اور ذمہ داری سے فیصلہ کرنے کیلئے مناسب معلومات اور وسائل) تک رسائی، تعلیم، اور معیار زندگی میں بہتری کیلئے روزگار کے مناسب مواقع اور گزراوقات کے مفید ذرائع شامل ہیں۔
- **ذمہ داریاں**۔ دوسرا اصول ان حقوق کے حصول کیلئے اس بات کو تسلیم کرنا ہے کہ معاشرے کے ہر فرد، والدین اور ریاست پر الگ الگ ذمہ داریاں عائد ہوتی ہیں۔ والدین (دونوں شوہر اور بیوی) کو ذمہ داری کا مظاہرہ کرنا چاہیے اور اتنے بچے پیدا کرنے چاہئیں جن کو وہ خوراک، صحت اور مناسب پرورش جیسی بنیادی سہولیات، جو ان کا حق ہیں، فراہم کر سکیں۔ جبکہ ریاست پر ذمہ داری عائد ہوتی ہے کہ وہ خاندانی منصوبہ بندی اور صحت کی سہولیات، معیاری تعلیم، مناسب رہائش اور روزگار کے مواقعوں کیلئے درکار وسائل اور خدمات فراہم کرے۔
- **"توازن"**۔ تیسرا اصول زندگی کے تمام شعبوں میں، خصوصاً حقوق اور ذمہ داریوں کو نبھانے کے درمیان، بیلنس یا توازن قائم کرنے کی ضرورت کو سمجھنا ہے جس میں آبادی میں اضافے اور دستیاب وسائل اور ان وسائل کی تجدیدی صلاحیت کے درمیان توازن قائم کرنے کی اہمیت کو سمجھنا بھی شامل ہے۔ "توازن" فطرت کے اصولوں میں شامل ہے اور اسلام اور دیگر مذاہب میں بھی اس کی اہمیت پر زور دیتے ہوئے اسے سماجی انصاف، امن اور خوشحالی کیلئے لازمی قرار دیا گیا ہے۔

**The messages** emanating from the narrative shall be guided by the following five pre-requisites:

<b>1. Credibility</b>	The use of easily understandable language which emphasizes choice rather than imposition or coercion. There should be no use of the word "control."
<b>2. Unanimity</b>	Bringing people who have diverse opinions together including communities, regions and provinces, with no partisanship.
<b>3. Singularity</b>	Using a distinct single theme / slogan with the same words and terms for a specific central idea while supplementary messages can be adapted as per the precise needs of each province, region, language, for different audiences.
<b>4. Consistency</b>	The messaging should remain the same and continuous, both over the years ahead, and remain the same even when governments change, while also being consistently used and applied across different administrative departments within a single government.
<b>5. Rooted in reality</b>	The messaging should be based on empirical evidence and ground realities.

The State and society must enhance awareness of health benefits of family planning, especially the wisdom and concern for maternal and child health underlying the *Quranic injunction* that mothers breastfeed their children for two years. In particular, *pesh* imams in mosques across the country and the senior-most *religious scholars* should come forward in support of balanced family size to help forge an authentic national consensus.

The State must provide free and easy access by new-married couples, first-time parents and other married couples to high quality counseling, complete information on contraceptive options, related benefits and risks, and the wide range of effective modern contraceptives and follow-up services.

The State is responsible for imparting educational content to sensitize youth about implications and advantages of planned families.

The persuasive role of the media should be fully utilized to widely disseminate the messages coming out of the narrative.

As per CCI recommendations, the State must act on an emergency footing, especially for the 7 million Pakistani couples who want to practice family planning but do not have access and for others who are unsure or still planning their families, as well as the millions of married women who have had to resort to unsafe abortions.

Under the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment, each province is responsible for improving and expanding comprehensive health services and doing so collectively with the private sector and civil society organizations. In particular, family planning must be offered as a core element of maternal and child care to seize the opportunities, currently being missed, to help attain *tawazun*. As mandated by CCI, family planning counseling and modern contraceptives should be made available at all public and private sector health care facilities, in addition to centers specifically devoted to provide family planning/population welfare.

In conclusion, to secure and sustain balanced population growth by actively seeking behavioral change in target groups is a responsibility shared by every citizen of the State of Pakistan.

