

KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

NARRATIVE ON POPULATION GROWTH

According to Census 2017, Population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is 35.523, which increased at 2.89% per annum during the inter-censal period of 1998-2017. With the current growth rate of 2.89%, Population of the Province will get doubled in 24 years. Similarly, according to Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) 2017-18, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there is a lot of room for improvement in the health and family planning services. The trend of high population growth rate coupled with inadequate social services is further worsening the inequalities and imbalances in the society, threatening the province's shrinking resource base as well as its future viability and stability. The situation calls for an urgent corrective action at all levels of the province and society.

A National Task Force on Population constituted by the Supreme Court identified eight broad Areas and thirty-three specific recommendations for implementation by Provincial Governments, regions and the Federal Government. These recommendations have been endorsed by the Supreme Court and principally approved by the Council of Common Interest (CCI).

The provincial government is determined to decrease the current high population growth rate of 2.89% and bring it down to a much lower level of 1.3% which is imperative for sustainable development. In this backdrop, a Provincial Action plan under CCI recommendations has been developed in consultation with all stakeholders. The Provincial Action Plan has addressed all eight broad areas and thirty-three specific recommendations including **“Advocacy and Communication.”** The Action Plan will further supplement the Programme activities in achieving Goals and objectives of the Population Policy as well as SDG 3.7.

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 150th 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.

Rationale of Adopting National Narrative on Population as Provincial Narrative

One of the Task Force's recommendations under the Broad Area “Advocacy and Communication.” was to develop a “National Narrative” on population. A national narrative **“Tawazun; The Balance”** was developed in consultation and consensus of provincial governments and other

stakeholders. The national narrative has been approved by the Federal Task Force in its meeting dated 23rd December 2019 as reproduced below:

“The National Narrative also stands approved; however, it would be further strengthened and shared at the next meeting. The provincial Governments should also share any provincial narratives which should be in line with the new national narrative.”

The approved National Narrative on population is in line with the socio-cultural norms and religious beliefs of the people of the province. Therefore, the National narrative is being adopted by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to be used as a guiding document for all Communication and Advocacy related activities in the province.

Provincial Narrative

Parents have the right to freely and responsibly decide the number and spacing of their children so long as they can fulfill the fundamental rights of their children and their family by maintaining a balance/tawazun between family size and their resources. The Government and society have the responsibility to help parents achieve this balance.

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 birth 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 Province 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 Provincial narrative aims at balanced population growth to ensure wellbeing, prosperity, safety and security – which is the common aspiration of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The attainment of this imperative goal is possible through three inter-linked principles:

Rights

The first principle recognizes that all citizens of the Province 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, *individual, and parents as well as the Province 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 Province 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. “Tawazun” is intrinsic in Nature and commanded in Islam and other faiths as a prerequisite for peace and well-being

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

1. Credibility	The use of easily understandable language which emphasizes choice rather than imposition or coercion. There should be no use of the word “control”.
2. Unanimity	Bringing people who have diverse opinions together including communities and districts with no partisanship.
3. Singularity	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 district, region, language, for difference audiences.
4. Consistency	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.
5. Rooted in reality	The messaging should be based on empirical evidence and ground realities.

The Province 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 consensus.

The Province 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 Province 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 province must act on an emergency footing, for 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 18th Constitutional Amendment, the 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 centres specifically devoted to provide family planning services.

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 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.