

CONFERENCE ON “POPULATION GROWTH AND INVESTING ON HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT” CONCLUDES AT GCU

The 18th National Research Conference on “Population Growth and Investing on Human Resource Development” has concluded on Saturday at the Government College University Lahore with some suggestions including a submission to the government to conduct the post-census enumeration surveys including on migration and disability to improve the census results and to include the uncounted female population in the census count. Punjab Higher Education Commission Chairman Prof Dr Muhammad Nizamuddin chaired the concluding session of the conference addressed by a large number of academicians, politicians, bureaucrats, member of census bureau, civil society and other stakeholders.

The three-day conference was organized by Population Association of Pakistan at GCU in collaboration with the Punjab Higher Education Commission.

Addressing the closing ceremony, Prof Dr Muhammad Nizamuddin said the preliminary results of 6th housing and population census Pakistan 2017 identified few key points such as the high growth rate, high urban migration in Sindh and decline in sex ratio. He said that the conference participants highlighted few census methodology errors and few discrepancies, such as the urban and rural demarcation were not well defined, the data on disability is not captured properly, information on migration are deficient, the census was conducted in phases with too much gap, the census blocks were not uniformly formulated, and most of the UNFPA recommendations were not followed. Dr Nizam said, in this situation post-census enumeration surveys would improve the census results.

He briefed the participants about the initial suggestions from the conference shaped up by the executive council members of PAP from the proceedings of the main and technical sessions. However, he said complete proceedings of the conference would be published soon and presented to the policy makers both at the federal and provincial levels.

The recommendations, which the conference proposed, included establishment of the Population and Development Research Center which would be set up in in Government College University Lahore and undertake interdisciplinary research to guide policy and action on population and human development.

The conference participants also laid stress on ensuring strong political and bureaucratic commitment with consistent policies of federal and provincial governments; there must be a functional coordination and oversight committees or working groups to revise the population policies considering the high growth rate of 2.4 % depicted in Population Census of Pakistan 2017

The speakers said Pakistan has just three years’ time to achieve its FP 2020 targets, CIP development and implementation in all provinces, must be ensured by all provincial governments.

To ensure the fertility decline, the PAP President maintained, there is a need to improve the access and quality of family planning services. This may be achieved if we explore public-private partnerships, private health care providers, and alternative funding sources at a provincial and district level. The district level stakeholders and population welfare departments must be strengthened to develop their own plan. To enhance the capacity and skills of the district level management of population welfare and health program, the provincial governments may make it a part of Population policy, strategy and action plan.



The conference speakers also laid a stress to increase advocacy and education programming, with a particular focus on youth outreach and inclusion. The youth must be aware of the population issues that are emerging as development challenges due to high growth rate and youth bulge in population. This young population has the potential to convert the youth bulge from burden to dividend.

The conference also suggested more resources allocations for human development especially youth development should be a priority of federal and provincial governments. This includes the increased budgetary allocations and technology based innovative initiatives for enhancing the capacity of the young population, to grow them as a productive human capital for the whole society.

It is also suggested that media including the print and electronic, should come up as an active partner in dissemination of population issues in our cultural context. The current youth bulge would be converted over next four decades into the old age bulge. So, the conference highlighted a need to devise policies, and launch social security schemes and action plans to cater the growing number in old age population.

Prof Nizam said that Pakistan had considerable population nearly 7 million as expatriate and there was a trend of rural-urban shift mostly in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. “There is need to regularize the migration through provincial coordination and creating opportunities of development and employment near to the rural areas,” he concluded.

Later, shields were presented to the organizers of the conference.

(26-12-2017)

SPEAKERS CALL FOR CONTROLLING POPULATION GROWTH AND INVESTMENT IN YOUTH

The 18th National Research Conference on “Population Growth and Investing in Human Resource Development” Wednesday began at the Government College University Lahore under the auspices of Population Association of Pakistan (PAP) and Punjab Higher Education Commission (PHEC).

Punjab Minister for Population Welfare Mr. Mukhtar Ahmed Bharti chaired the inaugural session the three-day conference which was also addressed by Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan Ms Margaret Adamson, Punjab Minister for Environment Protection Begum Zakia Shahnawaz, United Nations Population Fund representative Mr Muqadar Shah, PHEC Chairman Prof Dr Muhammad Nizamuddin and Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Hassan Amir Shah.

Addressing the conference, Mr. Mukhtar Ahmed Bhart said that the data of recent population census has set off the alarm bells; Pakistan is already a water-scarce country and if the growth rate of 2.4 persists, by 2030, the country would not be able to feed their population from its indigenous resources. He said that the Punjab government was developing next five-year population policy, and would certainly consider and incorporate the outcome and recommendations of this timely conference.

The population minister said that the government was not expecting such high population growth rate before the census but unfortunately it had emerged as one of the biggest challenges to the country's economic development. He also highlighted different initiatives of Punjab government for youth and human development. He said that the Punjab government was committed to bring a social change through cultivating the minds of people about the hazards of rapid population growth.



In her key note address, Population Council Country Director Dr Zeba A. Sathar called upon the government to invest in youth, saying that Pakistan was the sixth largest population in the world with the highest ratio of youth bulge, but unfortunately it was ranked 155 of 179 countries on the Global Youth Development Index; separately 156th in education, 77th in health, 154th in civic engagement and above all 165th in youth's participation in politics.

She asked government to prioritize youth in all policies, programs and initiatives across the spheres including politics, health and civic participation. He highlighted the disparities in the society across different segments, especially by gender, age, socioeconomic status, and rural/urban residence. "Without engaging the 40 million young women, sitting in homes in the process of economic development, the country could not expect progress," the country director said.

Punjab Minister Begum Zakia Shahnawaz also said that Pakistan has no other choice but to move forward by managing its youth bulge especially girls. She said that controlling population growth was a shared responsibility, and along with the government, several NGOs were also playing effective roles for raising awareness about birth gap, girls' education and women's health.

Begum Shahnawaz advised the population ministry and other stakeholders to take their campaigns to the union council levels especially in rural areas. She revealed that all well-educated religious scholars were on board with the government and they supported birth gap for women's health. "We could only be successful if we do what we say," she concluded.

UNFPA representative Mr Muqadar Shah said Pakistan recent census was a mine of information in terms of demographics and public health but they had seen many countries in the world failing to use their census data as a planning for public infrastructure. "Pakistan must soon be able to know how many schools, universities, hospitals, transport facilities, agriculture land and maternity wards would be needed next year, in five years or next 10 years," he added. He also highlighted that about 43 percent of Pakistan's population is below 20 years in 2017 and this has serious implications for continuing population growth resulting from the population momentum.

The UNFPA representative said that situation was alarming for Pakistan as unsustainable population growth rate, rapid urbanization and demographic transition in Pakistan was continuously creating a pressure compounded by the environment degradation and vulnerability to climate change.

The Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan said that the outcome of Pakistan's population census were surprising, so it's a high time for the country to address the issues related to population growth, human rights, youth bulge and human resource development. "If we want a sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the engagement of women must be captured, she added.

In his address, PHEC Chairman Prof Dr Muhammad Nizamuddin, who is also President, PAP, said that the government has been focusing on population welfare since 1965 but it always fail to achieve targets because there are structural issues which are needed to be addressed first. He proposed a National Population Development Commission which has representation from all stakeholders for drafting and implementing of viable population policy, saying "this a sensitive issue and could not be handled by the bureaucracy alone." He said that the conference would also discuss deficiencies in addressing family planning goals and highlight what is required to fulfill international commitments as the country's population program has been devolved to the provinces

Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Hassan Amir Shah said that if the current growth rate persists population growth, the population of Pakistan would reach 400 million in next thirty years. He said that they had invited all stakeholders to the conference for serious academic deliberations engaging youth in technical sessions. He said the proceedings of the population conference would be published and shared with the government for drafting a viable population policy.

Earlier in her video address, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology President Shahnaz Wazir Ali said that population growth was eroding large part of their natural resources.

Later, former federal population minister Dr Attiya Inyatullah chaired first technical session of the conference on "Tracking Pakistan's progress on family Planning -2020 Pledge." Besides civil society and social scientists, federal and provincial secretaries including from Sindh and KPK are also scheduled to participate in the technical sessions.

(21-12-2017)