

A Report on the ‘National Seminar on Demographic Transition and Inclusive Development’ held in Kolkata Organized by IIPS in Collaboration with ISI, Kolkata, 15-17 March, 2012.



A national seminar was organized to understand the synergy between various aspects of demographic transition and economic development keeping in view the inclusive development as a paradigm shift in India's planning process during the two decades. It was decided by IIPS that seminar will be held in Kolkata. The Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Kolkata was our natural ally in this endeavour which enthusiastically accepted our offer to collaborate in organizing this seminar. In response to our call of papers, we received more than 450 abstracts out of which about 220 abstracts have been selected. A record 171 papers were presented in two plenary sessions, two poster sessions and 24 technical sessions in the three days seminar. Everyday three parallel sessions were running with duration of one and half hours with tea and lunch break in between. A cultural programme of Bengali songs and folk dance was organized in the evening of 16th March, 2012. Majority of the participants were either young researchers or research scholars with delegates from the countries from USA, Philippines and Bangladesh also participated in this seminar.

In the inaugural session, Professor Manoranjan Pal welcomed the delegates to ISI at Kolkata and the theme of the seminar was introduced by Professor R.B.Bhagat who highlighted that India has made a good progress in the demographic transition, but the process is uneven with persistence of very high infant, child and maternal mortality. Also, a high level of malnutrition continues (40-45 percent) beside the largest number of illiterates (about 250 million) in the country. While welcoming the delegates Professor F. Ram, Director, IIPS, Mumbai pointed out the importance of demographic and health indicators in the measurement of inclusive development. He argued for the need of the expansion and strengthening the discipline of population studies in the country and stressed the role and responsibility of IIPS in promoting the teaching and research in the field of population studies. The seminar was inaugurated by Professor Jayant K. Ghosh, Professor Emeritus, ISI, Kolkata and inaugural address was delivered by Professor T.K.Roy, former Director, IIPS, Mumbai. In the inaugural address, Prof Roy highlighted the issue of declining fertility and rising male to female ratio at birth in the country. The natural sex-ratio has crossed the mark of 106/100 at the country level and has reached as high as 115-120/100 in some of states. This is a matter of serious concern as declining fertility is continued to be associated with son preference and sex-selective abortions. Dr Aparajita Chattopadhyay proposed the vote of thanks in the inaugural session.

There were two plenary sessions exclusively devoted to inclusive policies and programmes. One was related to population and health issues and another on migration and urbanization. The plenary session on population and health issues mainly focused on infant mortality, maternal mortality and maternal health care, gender bias in our programmes and health sector reforms through health insurance. The presenters have pointed out that although India has experienced significant decline in infant and maternal mortality, the high concentration of infant and maternal deaths are found in the rural areas and also among weaker sections like SCs and STs. India is going to miss the millennium development goals in health sectors notably the infant mortality of

39 per 1000 live births by 2015. It is pointed out that health facilities are highly deficient in meeting the challenges of maternal mortality particularly the referral health facilities are not equipped with comprehensive obstetric care (surgery and blood transfusion). The presenters have pointed out the 3 delays which are vital influencing the maternal mortality namely delay in deciding to seek care, delay in reaching care in time and delay in receiving adequate treatment. Tracking of all pregnant women, birth preparedness, counseling at various levels and access to health services without delay are the suggested strategies of reducing maternal mortality. Another plenary session was organized on the theme of migration and urbanization. The presenters have been in agreement on the point that propensity to migrate is lower among the poor compared to the rich which goes against the popular belief that poor migrants are inundating the cities. Further the urbanization process is dominated by the preponderance of informal sector. Both these processes show the exclusionary nature of the emerging trend of the migration and urbanization in the country emphasized by the panelists.

The outcome of the plenary sessions and the perspectives emerging from them are vindicated by several papers presented in the 24 technical and two poster sessions. Various papers have shown high level of economic, social and spatial exclusions of poor and socially disadvantaged groups like SCs, STs and minority in nutritional status, sanitation and health and also education and employment. Out of the pocket expenditure was raised as one of the major concerns of the health sector and its impact on sustaining high poverty levels was emphasized. Several papers presented in the seminar pointed out that merely changes in the health programmes will not improve the health situation in the country but changes in the governance and institutional strengthening along with attitudinal changes are necessary for inclusive development. Papers have emphasized that eradication of gender bias and empowerment of women is the key to inclusive development. Ageing, healthy life expectancy and demographic dividends are other important issues that attracted considerable attention in different papers. The link between violence and conflict with demography was discussed in some papers. Environmental degradation, climate change and forced migration are the other areas of concern that were discussed and debated in this national seminar.

The seminar was concluded with the valedictory address delivered Shri Dilip Ghosh, NRHM Mission Director, Department of Health, Govt of West Bengal. The valedictory session was presided over by Shri Sanjay Mitra, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of West Bengal. The vote of thanks was proposed by Dr Rajiva Prasad, Associate Professor, IIPS, Mumbai.