

Feature

The Numerical Manipulation of Population

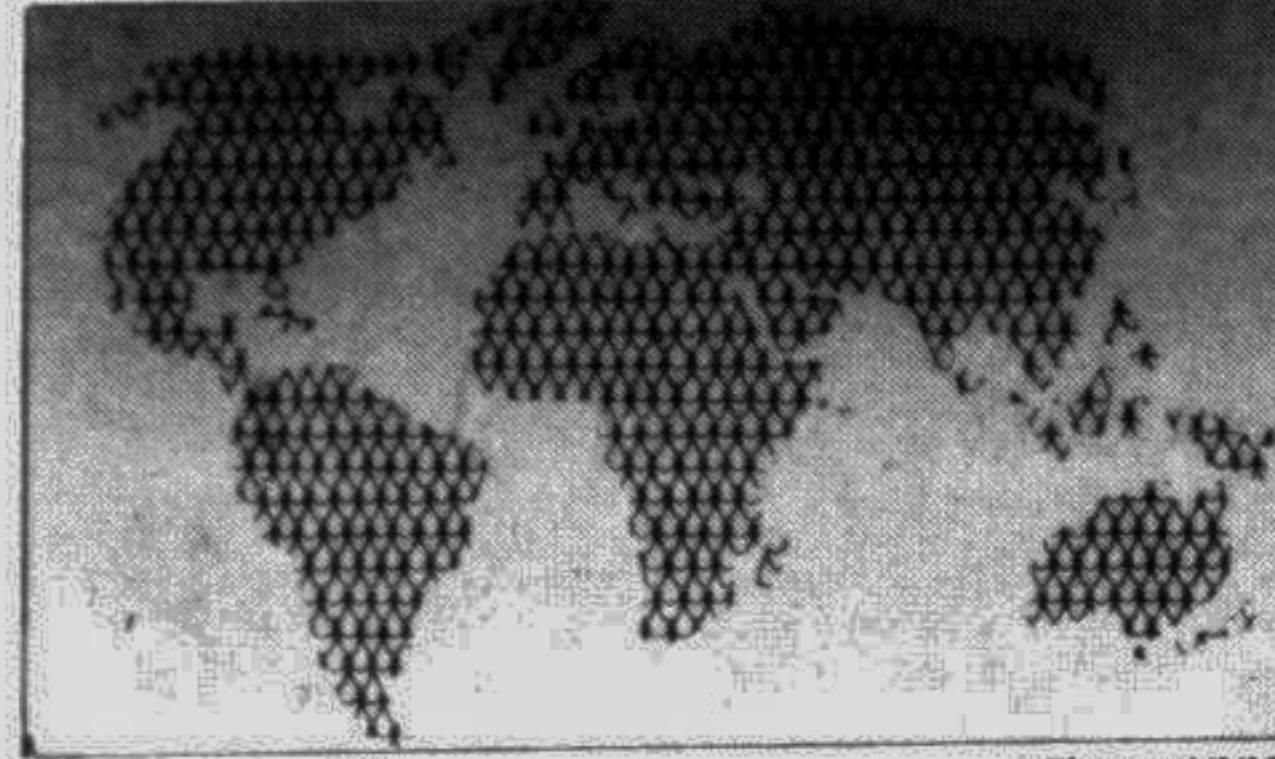
by Farida Akhter

figures on contraception, nutrition and abortion across nation states.

Manipulation of numbers

One of the strategic needs to reduce people into numbers is to manipulate the figures. 'Population' being a number also indicates that it can be manipulated to realise predetermined intentions: numbers can be manipulated at the tip of the fingers or by using a computer programme.

In Bangladesh, the present population is known to be 110 million. Since the liberation of the country in 1971, three censuses have been conducted.



How less is enough?

Photo: UNICEF

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agencies, population controllers, environmentalists, and others ceaselessly produced inflated figures on the basis of the 1963 census despite the fact that it had many shortcomings.

To prove that population of Nigeria is increasing at an alarming rate, the 1963 census was made the basis to inflate the figures of later years.

Rate of population growth was marked arbitrarily and ranged from 2.5 per cent to 4 per cent growth rate per years.

Some of the examples of the false figures derived by this procedure are:

122.5 million in 1991 (according to World Population Data Sheets of Population Reference Bureau Inc), 115 million in 1989 (according to Paul and Anne Ehrlich), 108 million in 1987 (according to Werner Fornos of Population Institute) and 110 million in 1989 (according to Judy Jacobson of Worldwatch Institute), etc (PID 92).

None of these are even closer to the real population number which came out in 1991. In China, two very competent and well funded census

organisations — United States Bureau of the Census and the United Nations Population Division — both made studied estimates of the population of mainland China in 1972. The results of these 'very careful, professional and very objective institutions', happened to have been 120 million people apart.

The US census bureau estimated the mainland Chinese population to be about 871 million people while the UN Census Bureau estimated at 753 million. The Chinese census authorities, by counting the people came up with a figure of 697,260,000 i.e. 697 million people.

The international and multi-lateral agencies have taken the responsibilities of making projections about world population.

These projections are made on certain assumptions of population growth rate for different regions of the world. The United Nations projections are made upto the year 2150. There are low, medium and high projections. The medium projection has been accepted as the most probable with the assumption that the 'number of children born to a typical woman in developing countries will decline gradually, stabilizing between 35 and 55 years from now.

According to the medium projection, world's population was projected at 5.48 billion by 1992, to 10 billion in 2050 and a plateau of 11.6 billion in 2150.

The role projections does not only to show the absolute number of world population, but also to specify particularly that the '95 per cent of this population growth is occurring in the developing countries'. However, the statistics from the developing countries show that 'average family size has decreased; from 6.1 children per woman in the early 60s to 3.9 today. Population growth rates in developing countries have also declined from more than 2.5 per cent a year in the early 60s to just over 2.0 per cent today. However, the absolute number being added continue to increase'. It is clear from these, the census examples that the 'overpopulation' in the Third World countries has been overcounted. The projections are also based on false and manipulated assumptions.

The writer is Executive Director of UBINIG, a leading NGO in Bangladesh.

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