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Family planning programs in Asia: Approaching a half-century of effort

Amy Ong Tsui

In 1930 the first government-sponsored birth control clinic opened in Mysore State, India. Nearly two decades later, in 1949, the Family Planning Association of India began operation, marking the beginning of a worldwide family planning movement. Since then the availability of contraceptive information and supplies throughout the world's largest continent and most populous region has grown dramatically, and today few populations in Asia are without access. Although birth control, as a behavior, is not new, the ability to achieve high levels of contraceptive effectiveness is indeed a historic development. This ability, facilitated by a major piece of social engineering, has revolutionized human control of a behavior fundamental to the species's survival.

In reviewing the emergence, establishment, and maturation of family planning programs in Asia, this Research Report concentrates on the countries of East, South, and Southeast Asia that had developing status in 1970. The review is set against a dynamic backdrop of rapid population growth, spurred by rapidly declining mortality rates, and expanding opportunities for social and economic development. The commitment of government and civic leaders, in both national and international circles, played a key role in bringing contraceptive means to the doorstep of many Asian couples in a remarkably short period of time.

To understand why some programs have been more successful than others, the author examines the characteristics of family planning organizations: their policy environment, financial and human resources, service infrastructure, and production level. A final section suggests how family planning programs may evolve over the next half-century in response to a changing environment. The review offers lessons for programs under development in other parts of the world.

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