

# [According income shares, poverty, regional resources, etc. india](https://assignbuster.com/according-income-shares-poverty-regional-resources-etc-india/)

According to the 2011 Census, the population of India stood at 1, 210, 193, 422 persons, an increase of 17. 64 per cent over the 2001 Census.

It is down by 3. 90 per cent in comparison to the preceding decade. At present, the population growth is estimated at 1.

58 per cent, a decline from an average growth of 2 per cent. All these indicate that our population is rising, but with a declining growth rate. According to the demographic projections, India’s population may very soon overtake China’s in numbers to gain the distinction—perhaps, a dubious one—of being the country with the largest population in the world. Critics view the prospect of such a large population with horror.

India’s population is not just large but it is marked by a diversity not found elsewhere. At least six major religions of the world, besides other sects, have their followers in the country. Over the last several thousand years, Indian ethnic diversity has assumed such a complex intermingled state that it is almost impossible to differentiate various racial strains. Here people speak multiple languages, and each one has a rich cultural history, literature and tradition of its own. This linguistic diversity poses the problem of how to provide education at the primary level and how to develop a national consensus on a link language for the entire country. It also makes a challenging task to provide information on family planning to every section of the population.

Beyond all these differences, India also shows large economic diversity in terms of income shares, poverty, regional resources, etc. India has three distinct faces—the reasonably well-off middle and upper middle class constituting about 20 per cent of the population; what could be called the lower middle class, people who have received some of the benefits of growth since Independence and manage a level of living, if not comfortable, at least not desperate; and the bottom 30 per cent or so of the population which lives in considerable poverty. The economic disparities inevitably being compounded by disparities in education and literacy problems in accelerating social development arise in many regions.

There is little doubt that the levels of growth in India’s population put all kind of pressure on the economy. The material quality of life of the vast masses suffers. There may be a steady growth in GDP, but at least a third of that is neutralised by population growth. The net increase in the general quality of life is modest and given the skewed distribution of the benefits of development, the hard-core poor are practically left out of it.

The problem is not quite Malthusian, though the spectre of Malthus does raise its head every now and then when some region suffers from hunger, malnutrition and even famine. The impact of overpopulation is also felt in areas other than food production. And “ the diversity of India’s population makes the problem of overpopulation all the more complex, as it is difficult to formulate a policy on demography in the circumstances.

One obvious economic implication of population growth is the growing need of foodgrains while India has quite disproved the arguments in the international fora that the country could not be saved from large scale famines and resultant deaths, the problem of feeding the millions remains. Can India cope with the kind of figures projected by demographers? All available data suggest that the average Indian yields are among the lowest in the world. There are regions, for example, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, which could be made to yield millions of tonnes more of foodgrains than they do at present. The amount, according to experts, would easily meet the needs of the projected population levels. If technology and inputs improve, the potential could well increase. So, even if there are occasional food shortages due to erratic monsoons and so on, India’s ability for feeding its population does not seem unrealisable. The very fact that agricultural demand and growth will inevitably increase, draws attention to the next problem—that of environmental degradation. Agricultural development on a large scale, with its attendant use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, problem of water logging and other forms of soil degradation, is bound to create environmental problems.

The increase in the population, especially in the Himalayan region, has led to destruction of forests. Devastating floods take their toll in the rich Gangetic plains and increasingly the damage caused by them is on the rise. There are other environmental problems created by overpopulation. The unplanned urbanisation with the concomitant lack of adequate civil infrastructure has already wreaked havoc in many of our cities and towns. Much of this growth has been in the form of slums and shanty towns harbouring refugees and those squeezed off the land. The exploding cities could cause social tension and unrest, in turn affecting economic stability. Pollution from vehicular emissions and industrial wastes has steadily increased in the cities. Such environmental degradation, in its turn, adversely affects the people and causes health problems.

Poverty, it is said, is the greatest pollutant. It is marked by an apathy that erodes self-esteem and any willingness to live life to the fullest. It is also a major factor in the creation of a paradoxical situation: hunger and malnutrition amidst plentiful availability of food; the lack of purchasing power leading to starvation deaths. Poverty is accompanied by lack of health care and nutrition. And when these very basic needs are not met who cares about education, information and awareness? The population of a country could easily be turned to advantage if it is highly skilled or trained so that it could be utilised in development. India can hardly boast of such a population. Given the monetary resources it has, it cannot quite meet the condition of making its entire populace literate, leave alone highly skilled. Lack of resources, again prevents good basic health facilities being provided to every person in the country.

If the population were not so large, the resources could be made to meet the situation. The same holds true for other human needs such as housing. Natural resources, especially water, are being depleted at an alarming rate because of increasing population. Most cities of India are facing acute water shortage; even underground water is being dangerously depleted. The likely population growth in India over the next several years will make it difficult to improve the quality of life of the people. In the long run, even a large population, only if educated properly and equipped with the right skills, will prove an asset to India. But in the short run, uncontrolled growth of population will have serious repercussions on the country’s economic development. It is a kind of vicious circle: with a large population, available resources are either too thinly spread to be of much use or they get concentrated and produce a skewed development; ‘ trickle down’ of growth is a long and slow process, so improvement in the standard of living of the masses is excruciatingly slow; natural resources are strained to an almost irreparable level; all this leads to discontent and social tensions; economic growth slows down, so does development, and ultimately the people suffer.

It is necessary that India consciously plans to give a heavier emphasis on social and economic development even as a policy for stabilising the population level is put in place only then can the population be turned into an economic asset.