***Case Study***

***Population Growth Control in China – Progress with Enforcement***

Since 1970, China has used a government-enforced program to cut its birth rate in half and sharply reduce its total fertility rate.

Since 1970, China has made impressive efforts to feed its people and bring its population growth under control. Between 1972 and 2008, China cut its crude birth rate in half and cut its total fertility rate from 5.7 to 1.6 children per woman.

To achieve its sharp drop in fertility, China has established the world’s most extensive, intrusive, and strict population control program. Couples are strongly urged to postpone marriage and to have no more than one child. Married couple who pledge to have no more than one child receive extra food, larger pensions, better housing, free medical care, salary bonuses, free school tuition for their one child, and preferential treatment in employment when their child enters the job market. Couples who break their pledge lose such benefits.

The government also provided married couples with ready access to free sterilization, contraceptives, and abortion. This helps explain why about 90% of married women in China use modern contraceptives.

Government officials realized in the 1960s that the only alternative to strict population control was mass starvation. China is a dictatorship. Thus, unlike India, it has been able to impose a fairly consistent population policy throughout its society.

China has 19% of the world’s population. But it has only 7% of the world’s fresh water and cropland, 4% of its forests, and 2% of its oil. Soil erosion in China is serious and apparently getting worse. In the 1970s, the Chinese government had a system of health clinics that provided basic health care for its huge rural farm population. This system collapsed in the 1980s as China embraced capitalistic economic reforms. According to government estimates, more than 800 million people – 9 of every 10 rural Chinese – not have no health insurance or social safety net.

Population experts expect China’s population to peak around 2040 and then begin a slow decline. This has led some members of China’s parliament to call for amending the country’s one-child policy so that some urban couples can have a second child. The goal would be to provide more workers to help support China’s aging population.

What lesson can other countries learn from China? One possibility is to try to curb population growth before they must choose between mass starvation and coercive measures hat severely restrict human freedom.

**Figure 1:**

A family planning ad in China (caption reads “Carry out family planning. Implement the basic national policy.”)

Case Study taken from “Living in the Environment” (Miller & Hackett).