

QUOTATION

POPULATION CONTROL THAT REALLY WORKS

What some are now calling the Tamil Nadu “miracle” corroborates the research findings in an unforgettable way. In the 1970s, the chief executive of this state in south India launched a free midday meal program for children in primary schools. The purpose was political populism—the result entirely unexpected.

The number of schools and teachers had to grow—as vehicles for delivering the meals. The free meals also changed families’ economic calculus. A little girl became more valuable to the family by going to school and getting a nutritious meal (especially if she brought some home to share) than staying home taking care of younger siblings. The number of girls in the school went way up. Tamil Nadu also had a minister with an obsession for family planning. He insisted that every bus and autorickshaw be covered with family planning slogans. Movie theaters and billboards carried the message. Clinics made the means available. The midday-meal girls began to marry in 1985. In the next six years, the birthrate—which had declined slightly in the previous decade—dropped by more than 25 percent.

From: Mathews, J. (1994, April 10). Population control that really works. Guardian Weekly, p. 17.

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