Differing Approaches to Population Control in India and China

With the world's population at 6 billion and growing, NBC reporter Kiko Itasake compares population control efforts and results in China and India.

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Transcript

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JOHN SEIGENTHALER, anchor:
Earth--only 29 percent of it is land and much of that is inhospitable, but as of Tuesday, there will be 6 billion people on the planet--6 billion--a population milestone. Each minute there are 250 births and just over 100 deaths, and that desparity is at the heart of the world's population explosion. It was back in 1804 when the total reached 1 billion. It took another 123 years before reaching 2 billion. But only 33 more years to reach 3 billion. And it's been accelerating since then, passing 4 billion in 1974. 5 billion 1987. Today, the world's population is double what it was just 40 years ago. Just as dramatic, the unequal distribution of people around the globe. The dark parts show the densest populations. Even here in the United States, the difference between East and West is striking. And then, there is Asia, home to the most dramatic numbers of all. Here's NBC's Kiko Itasaka.

KIKO ITASAKA reporting:
China, with 1.2 billion people, the world's most populous nation. India, with 1 billion, catching up fast. Combined, more than one-third of the world's population. Two countries grappling with huge populations, employing drastically different ways of coping. In Communist China, a strict government controlled approach--for the last 40 years, one child per couple. The justification: it was necessary to help the masses.

Professor KONG-LAI ZHANG (Beijing Medical University): I think the Chinese people--most of the Chinese people are in favor of this--of this, because they--they just wanted to improve their standard of living.

ITASAKA: A policy sometimes brutally enforced. Mandatory abortions and sterilization, and examples of infanticide and abandoned baby girls, ending up at orphanages. The population is now levelling off, and within the next 40 years, may begin to decline.
Mr. BRIAN HALWEIL (Worldwatch Institute): For China, the movement to smaller families has been instrumental in raising living standards, making people more productive.

ITASAKA: In India, a very different strategy. After a brief attempt in the '70s to enforce sterilization of women with large families, officials decided on a more democratic and open approach, adopting family planning programs. The result: a population growing by more than 20 million every year, and increasingly poor.

Professor TIM DYSON (London School of Economics): The poorest sections of society tend to be increasing at a somewhat faster rate than the better-off sections of society.

ITASAKA: The statistics reveal dramatic contrasts. In India, half the population lives below the poverty line. In China, it's just one-third.

In India, just over half are literate. In China, more than 80 percent.

India, in other words, impoverished, but free.

Prof. DYSON: It is a very valuable thing, and it's a very valuable achievement which--which applies in the India context, and perhaps unfortunately doesn't apply in the--in the Chinese.

ITASAKA: Explosive growth and freedom in India, less of both in China.

Two approaches, worlds apart. Kiko Itasaka, NBC News.