**Population control in China**



*Cyclists in Beijing, China*

In the late 1970s, the Chinese government introduced a number of measures to reduce the country's birth rate and slow the population growth rate. The most important of the new measures was a **one-child policy**, which decreed that couples in China could only have one child.

* In 1950 the rate of population change in China was 1.9 per cent each year. If this doesn't sound high, consider that a growth rate of only 3 per cent will cause the population of a country to double in less than 24 years!
* Previous Chinese governments had encouraged people to have a lot of children to increase the country's workforce. But by the 1970s the government realised that current rates of population growth would soon become unsustainable.

**The one-child policy**

The one-child policy, established in 1979, meant that each couple was allowed just one child. Benefits included increased access to education for all, plus childcare and healthcare offered to families that followed this rule.

**Problems with enforcing the policy:**

* Those who had more than one child didn't receive these benefits and were fined.
* The policy was keenly resisted in rural areas, where it was traditional to have large families.
* In urban areas, the policy has been enforced strictly but remote rural areas have been harder to control.

**Impact of the policy**

* The birth rate in China has fallen since 1979, and the rate of population growth is now 0.7 per cent.
* There have been negative impacts too - due to a traditional preference for boys, large numbers of female babies have ended up homeless or in orphanages, and in some cases killed.
* As a result, the gender balance of the Chinese population has become distorted. Today it is thought that men outnumber women by more than 60 million.

**Long-term implications**

China's one-child policy has been somewhat relaxed in recent years. Couples can now apply to have a second child if their first child is a girl, or if both parents are themselves only-children.

While China's population is now rising more slowly, it still has a very large total population (1.3 billion in 2008) and China faces new problems, including:

* The falling birth rate - leading to a rise in the relative number of elderly people;
* Fewer people of working age to support the growing number of elderly dependants - in the future China could have an ageing population.