



WIC Hybrid Colloquium

The Future and the Potential of Mass Education: What can 'Thick Description' tell Us?

**Friday, 24 November 2023,
11:00 – 12:00 (CET)**



Alaka M. Basu

Department of Sociology, Cornell
University, Ithaca, NY, USA

Abstract:

Paul Ehrlich, an author of the 1968 doomsday tract, The Population Bomb, recently acquired new fame for his mellower (compared to his earlier emphasis on population control) recommendation to increase female education to bring down population growth rates in poor countries. This recommendation is not his brainchild; it follows from the near universal empirical demonstration that mass education comes with a host of desirable demographic and socioeconomic outcomes. I subject these universal findings from the positivist methods of social science and demography, to what may be loosely called, after Clifford Geertz, some 'thick description'. My focus will be on a specific context (mass education in India) and the meaning of education in this context. I look at some ground accounts of different kinds of and levels of education in India and how the meanings attached to these differ across social groups and change over time. I reflect on how these differences and trends might affect the trajectory of educational growth in India, as well as its continuing potential to dictate future demographic and socioeconomic change. Overall, the quantitative findings on this are too robust to be contradicted by such thick description, but some important notes of caution do follow from my focus on India. These notes may or may not apply to other parts of the world, but that is a matter to be resolved by more locally embedded and 'subjective' analyses from these other places.

Please click [here](#) to register.

Login information will be sent to registered participants shortly before the presentation.

About the presenter:

Alaka Basu is a Social Demographer with publications in the areas of reproductive health, gender, child health, the politics of population policy. She served on the boards of PAA, IUSSP, The Population Council and The Population Reference Bureau, was the chair of the IUSSP Scientific Committee on Anthropological Demography, a member of the Committees on Reproductive Health and on Population Projections of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the Lancet-Guttmacher Commission on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. She is on the Advisory Boards of Population and Development Review, Genealogy, and The Pakistan Journal of Applied Economics, and the series editor of the Policy Briefs of the Sociology of Development section of the American Sociological Association.

The Wittgenstein Centre is a col- laboration among the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW), the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and the University of Vienna.

If you would like to be added to the WIC Colloquium mailing list, please click [here](#).