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Family planning is a human right

ASA TORKESSON and SATHYA DORAISWAMY

IN 1989, the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme recommended that July 11 be observed by the international community as World Population Day, a day to focus attention on the urgency and importance of population issues. This year, on World Population Day, the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, will celebrate the theme "Family Planning is a Human Right". This year marks the 50th anniversary of the 1968 International Conference on Human Rights, where family planning was, for the first time, globally affirmed to be a human right.

Family planning as a human right views people not as passive beneficiaries, but as active agents in planning their families and shaping their lives. Family planning is widely considered as a foundation for a range of rights, built upon the explicit identification of individuals as rights-holders and governments and other entities as duty-bearers that are responsible for delivering these rights.

Family planning is, quite simply, central to women's empowerment, reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development. When a girl or woman has access to family planning information and services she can shape her life, she can avail of more education, seek better jobs and contribute to her family, society and nation as a whole.

Bangladesh has made commendable progress in many reproductive health outcomes including family planning. The Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR), a widely used indicator to understand usage of contraceptive methods among married women of reproductive age, increased from 7.7 in 1975 to 62.4 percent in 2014 and Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has reduced from 6.3 to 2.3 per women in similar period. However, 3.8 million women of reproductive age are not using any contraceptives even though they want to avoid pregnancy for at least two years.

Adolescents who comprise 22 percent of Bangladesh's population—some 35 million—are crucial to the country's future. Such a large cohort of young people represent an opportunity for growth, development and innovation. But more than half of all girls still get married before the legal age of 18—a huge concern on many fronts. These girls

enter into married life without the necessary information and knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, jeopardising their rights, health and wellbeing. The adolescent fertility rate of 113 live births per 1,000 girls and women aged 15-19 remains the highest in South Asia. The Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey (BDHS) 2014 shows that 31 percent of adolescents aged 15-19 have begun childbearing; about 25 percent had given birth, and another 6 percent were currently pregnant with their first child.

In Bangladesh, the use of contraception among married adolescent girls remains low at 51 percent, lower than the national average of 62 percent. Furthermore, the unmet need for family planning is highest among married adolescent girls, at 17 percent compared

insufficient post-partum and post abortion contraception; absence of a structured urban family planning service delivery system and limited contribution of the NGO sector to CPR. In addition, the shortage of a skilled workforce and its management is a continuous challenge especially in the remote rural hard-to-reach areas.

Bangladesh currently stands at a population of 160 million. Half of its population are women. At the midpoint of Global Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) commitment, a global partnership that supports the rights of women and girls to decide, freely, and for themselves, whether, when, and how many children they want to have, at a summit held in July 2017 in London, Bangladesh committed to achieving its family planning objectives by

sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. The goals are interconnected—often the key to success on one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices now to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations.

Henceforth, to minimise inequalities in different variables and respond to the SDG call to leave no one behind, additional efforts are needed to move FP programme towards more effective, longer lasting and lower-cost clinical and permanent methods. FP services should be widely available, accessible and affordable for all. Bangladesh's current health policies set a clear agenda for ensuring availability and accessibility to effective and safe family planning services for all citizens. In order to ensure zero unmet need for family planning the government should strengthen effective partnerships with all stakeholders across civil society to create an enabling environment for women and girls in accessing wider contraceptive choices.

UNFPA would like to commend the Government of Bangladesh, in particular the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, for its hard work in promoting family planning in the country.

In celebrating World Population Day, UNFPA would like to further advocate for increased national investment in family planning services, reproductive health commodity security and efforts to expand the choice of methods and improve the quality of services. UNFPA reaffirms its commitment to working with the Government of Bangladesh and other development partners to increase contraceptive access.

Let us not forget that the right to family planning, permits the enjoyment of other rights, including the rights to health, education, and the achievement of a life with dignity. An informed rights-based approach to family planning is the most cost-effective intervention for tackling maternal death in Bangladesh. Ensuring universal access to reproductive health services, including family planning, can ultimately speed up Bangladesh's progress towards reducing poverty and achieving the SDGs.

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with 12 percent among women aged 15-49. Moreover, women during the first two years after a birth have a high unmet need for contraceptives at 44 percent. UNFPA will continue to support the Government of Bangladesh in addressing the unmet need for family planning, especially for vulnerable and marginalised communities all over Bangladesh.

Despite the achievements made in reducing TFR and increasing CPR, it is clear that formidable challenges remain. These include the following: young married females, especially adolescents, are underserved; geographic inequalities in contraceptive use prevail probably due to shrinking outreach activities; low use of effective methods of contraception such as long acting methods and

implementing the postpartum action plan, regional family planning package for the lagging behind Sylhet and Chittagong divisions, and the national adolescent health strategy, in a time-bound efficient and effective manner.

The movement towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), long-term political engagement and cost-effective interventions are essential to ensure Universal Health Coverage for all. The SDGs, otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation,

High Court's observation timely

Strikes by private hospitals unethical

WE are greatly relieved by the High Court's position expressed on Monday that strikes enforced by clinics, hospitals and diagnostic centres to justify medical negligence were unethical.

Coming in the backdrop of the 20-hour strike enforced by the private clinics, hospitals and diagnostic centres in Chittagong, the observation is very timely. The strike was called after Rab conducted drives in four hospitals of the port city on July 8, resulting in indescribable sufferings of the patients. Earlier on June 29, Raifa Khan, the two-and-a-half-year-old daughter of a senior reporter of daily *Samakal*, died due to wrong treatment at Max Hospital in Chittagong. After her death, as the journalists and the general people demanded a fair investigation of the incident, the leaders of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) and Private Clinic and Hospital Owners' Association had, reportedly, threatened the journalists of consequences. The BMA's Chittagong unit general secretary threatened the journalists saying that doctors would stop treating journalists in the port city. Such threats by medical professionals are objectionable.

The whole idea that the medical profession is beyond any kind of criticism and scrutiny and nobody can make any complaints against any irregularities is unacceptable. It is strange that whenever there is any complaint of wrong treatment against any doctor, rather than investigating the complaints, the doctors go for work abstention. Holding patients hostage as a response to any complaint or punitive action by the agencies must be stopped. On both counts, such practices are unethical and a violation of the doctors' Hippocratic Oath. The medical professionals should come out of this mentality to make sure that this noble profession is one that the public admires, not fears.

Disregard for students' lives

Investigate school authorities for negligence

IN a story published in this newspaper on Tuesday, we reported how seven schoolgirls, aged between 14 and 15, were injured when chunks of the ceiling of their classroom in Rangpur fell on them. Around 30 students of grade nine were taking their half-yearly examinations when about 80 square feet of ceiling plaster collapsed. Given the context which led to the final collapse, the incident warrants some serious questions.

According to students, they had already informed the headmistress of the school about the risky situation in which they were asked to take their exams. But despite repeated complaints to the headmistress, not only was action not taken to repair the classroom, but the room was actually being used to sit school students. This is completely irresponsible behaviour on the part of the school administration. If these young students had the foresight to point out that the plaster was likely to collapse anytime, the authorities should definitely have acted to prevent this. What is worse is that the headmistress is trying to pass the incident off as a mere "accident", refusing to comment about the complaints received earlier, when clearly this is a case of negligence of duty which directly put these students in harm's way.

It is the responsibility of the headmistress to own up to her failure to act in time. We have seen numerous times before how accidents have taken a heavy toll on the nation simply because authorities were negligent in repair work and refused to heed complaints. We hope that the school board will investigate this matter and take action for the school authorities' failure to address this risk and for putting young students in a situation which clearly could have had a worse outcome.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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BCL's brutality

We all remember how a group of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) men hacked a tailor to death in broad daylight. Recently, a group of BCL men again beat up a quota reform movement activist, Toriqlul Islam, with hammers in front of members of the police. This incident was nothing short of shameful.

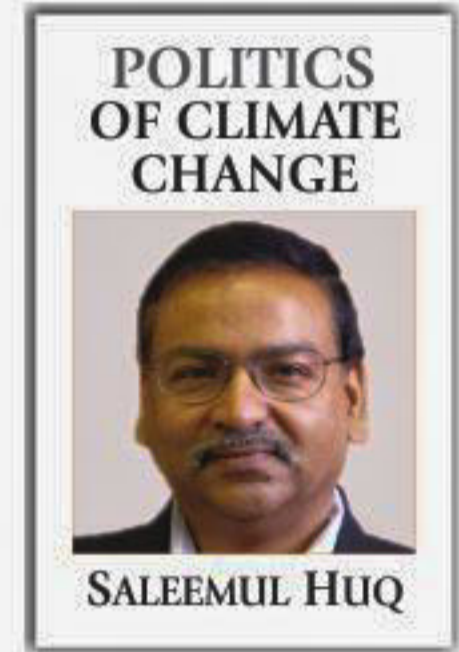
How could law enforcers turn a blind eye while a man was mercilessly being beaten right in front of them? What is worse is that the police are yet to take any action against the culprits, despite the fact that video evidence and images of their brutality are both widely available.

It is incidents like this that make us feel more and more helpless and less and less hopeful about the future direction of our nation.

Tanaka Rahaman, Gandaria, Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE Green Climate Fund (GCF) was created under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to channel up to USD 100 billion a year from 2020 onwards from the developed countries to the developing countries to help them tackle climate change through both mitigation and adaptation projects. The fund started four years ago with its headquarters in Songdo, South Korea, and currently has around USD 10 billion for disbursement for such projects. Decisions are made at the quarterly board meetings which have an equal number of members from developed as well as developing countries.

The 20th board meeting of the GCF in Songdo just concluded last week with the board arguing about procedural matters for days, unable to make any decisions on about a billion dollars' worth of proposals and finally with the chief executive officer resigning with immediate effect (for personal reasons). This meltdown at the board level and resignation of the CEO is a symptom of the fact that the GCF has some major flaws which need to be fixed if it is to fulfill its promise of managing USD 100 billion a year from 2020 onwards to support efforts to tackle climate change in the developing countries.

Hence the crisis in the GCF presents an opportunity to review what has gone wrong and try to rectify it going forward. It is in that spirit that I will point out a major flaw, in my view, in the design and functions of the GCF so far with some recommendations on how to rectify it going forward.

The major flaw I am referring to is the following undeniable fact: since the fund's creation and activities over several years now, it has been unable to provide funding for adaptation to the most vulnerable communities and countries, at any substantial scale, despite this being one of its core mandates. While the GCF Board took a laudable early decision to allocate half its funds to adaptation, and within that to prioritise the most vulnerable developing countries, unfortunately that goal has remained unfulfilled in practice.

While there are many reasons for this failure, I will focus on one which can now be addressed, namely the difference between acting as a "bank" and as a "fund". I will argue that the GCF from the beginning has seen itself as a bank that must see returns on its investments in terms of repayment of loans and hence looked for "bankable" projects to fund and also emphasised fiduciary and fund management capacities of both recipient country governments and entities applying for funds for the needs of the most vulnerable. Most of the senior management was recruited from the banking sector whose experience had hardwired this banking mentality.

However, the GCF is the Green Climate "Fund" and not the Green Climate "Bank". It has a mandate to not just give loans and seek repayment of those loans but

What we can learn from the Green Climate Fund crisis



PHOTO: FLORE DE PRENEUF/WORLD BANK

also give grants for which the return is supposed to be effective tackling of the climate problem, especially when it comes to adaptation.

This fundamental difference in objectives played out in terms of the two major areas of projects, namely mitigation projects versus adaptation projects. Mitigation projects have now become very easy to develop and always have a revenue stream that allows them to repay the investment and hence the GCF has been able to support a substantial number of quite sizeable mitigation projects.

Adaptation, on the other hand, has no revenue stream to repay a loan (and hence requires grant funding) and is also normatively meant to reach the most vulnerable communities in the most vulnerable developing countries which also tend to be the poorest communities and countries and the least capable of producing "bankable project proposals". This has led to the failure of the GCF to reach those it was supposed to support for adaptation.

Here are a number of recommendations that may help rectify this major design failure of the GCF.

Firstly, I advise the separation of loans (which are fine for mitigation projects) from grants (which should be mostly for adaptation projects) with the appointment of a co-CEO (or at least a deputy CEO) for adaptation grants. This position should be held by a person with grant-making experience and not a banker.

Secondly, the adaptation division of the GCF must proactively seek out the most vulnerable communities and countries and provide support to them (either directly or through intermediaries) to enable them to be able to access the funding. Simply sitting in Songdo and expecting to receive "bankable" proposals has resulted in very few proposals from those who need the funding the most. Even though the GCF is providing developing countries with so-called readiness funds, the efforts need

to include support to sustain national-level capacity building by national institutions rather than by fly-in, fly-out international consultants as is being done now.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the GCF must provide better guidance on how to prepare adaptation projects so that the case of two proposals (one from Bangladesh and the other from Ethiopia) being rejected by the GCF Board, after having been approved by the technical evaluations, is not repeated. This lack of clear guidance has been a major impediment in getting good adaptation proposals (and is a major barrier for the most vulnerable who are also the least capable).

To be fair to the GCF, this lack of clarity is based on a genuine confusion between general development and adaptation to climate change and the GCF is quite correct to insist on proposals being genuinely adaptation-based and not just development proposals dressed up as adaptation.

However, insisting on a strict distinction has become counterproductive and the GCF needs to provide better guidance on how proposals can be better prepared to address climate change impacts by allowing for development co-benefits (this is especially important when supporting the most vulnerable communities). It may well be worth the GCF learning from (and perhaps even supporting) the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Adaptation Fund (AF), both of which have developed these capabilities over many years and in fact have a pipeline of approved adaptation projects without the funds to support them.

Hence if the GCF takes this opportunity to go back to the drawing board and address some of the flaws in its design as well as practice, some good may indeed come out of the fiasco of the 20th board meeting.

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