

## Time for urgent, climate-smart reform in agriculture

Home-grown science offers a roadmap to avert a future food crisis

One of the biggest challenges Bangladesh is facing now—and one that is likely to intensify in the coming years due to climate change—is its food production capacity. Rising salinity in coastal areas, the depletion of groundwater, and increasing temperatures are likely to pose some of the most serious threats to our agriculture in general, and rice production in particular. We must, therefore, urgently address this issue if we are to avert a future food crisis.

In Bangladesh, the average temperature has risen by 0.24 degrees Celsius per decade since 1981, and is estimated to climb another 1.5-2 degrees by 2050, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department and the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report. Agro-scientist Mohammad Kamruzzaman Milon, in a recent article published by this daily, predicts that rice yields may dip by 15-20 percent "unless irrigation, fertiliser, and varietal strategies are re-engineered" for future resilience. The author also pointed out some significant innovations already achieved by our scientists, the timely implementation of which could help significantly mitigate those critical problems.

Through field research in Gazipur, Rajshahi, and Satkhira, a set of low-carbon agronomic practices has been developed that can simultaneously raise yields, conserve resources, and cut greenhouse gas emissions. The findings suggest that Bangladesh can pioneer climate-smart measures that produce more rice with less water, less energy, and a lower carbon footprint. The author identified several innovations that are already in place and can contribute significantly to combating the impact of climate change on our food production system. These are scientifically proven and have been recognised internationally as acceptable options.

What we urgently need now is the required funding as well as changes in our policy direction. The author makes five suggestions that we find worthy of consideration: making all climate and satellite datasets publicly available to enable research by universities and other competent bodies, including those interested in funding such initiatives; integrating verified efficiency and mitigation indicators into the agricultural credit scoring framework of Bangladesh Bank; introducing performance-based incentives that reward farmers for reducing carbon emissions; expanding concessional credit and capacity-building programmes for women- and youth-led agri-tech ventures; and building a unified monitoring, reporting, and verification framework that links agronomic data with financial data.

We seldom write editorials on views expressed in our op-ed columns. However, we find the suggestions made by Mohammad Kamruzzaman to be of sufficient merit and practical value to urge the government and relevant authorities to take immediate note and attach the highest priority to their implementation. We often desperately search for solutions to the myriad problems we face. But this is a case where solutions may already be in our hands. All we need to do is focus on them, coordinate the various bodies that need to be engaged, provide the necessary funding, and expedite implementation. After all, climate challenges must be addressed urgently. We urge immediate action in this area.

## Close the health gap for the vulnerable

Stark inequalities in child survival, maternal care remain

The latest Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2025 lays bare an unsettling truth: poverty and low education are shaping life-and-death outcomes in Bangladesh. Children from the poorest households are almost twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday compared to those from the richest homes. Among mothers with little or no schooling, the under-five mortality rate rises to 48 per 1,000 live births—more than double that among women with higher education. This is not just a health issue; it reflects deep-rooted social and economic inequities. Development over recent decades has not been inclusive enough, leaving poorer families on the margins of essential services.

Maternal care remains one of the biggest fault lines. While 99 percent of pregnant women in wealthier households receive at least one antenatal care (ANC) visit, this drops to 84 percent among the poorest. The gap widens further for proper, repeated care as only 23 percent of pregnant women in the poorest quintile receive the recommended four or more ANC visits, compared to 68 percent in the richest group. With limited public investment in health and nutrition, low-income families are often forced to rely on private facilities they can hardly afford. The economic strain has only intensified since the pandemic, as rising inflation and food prices have compromised both nutrition and healthcare access. These pressures are reflected in child stunting and wasting rates, which are far higher among poorer households. Moreover, only 21 percent of children from low-income families complete upper secondary schooling, compared with 66 percent among those from wealthier families.

Other indicators reinforce the extent of these disparities. After decades of decline, the total fertility rate has climbed to 2.4, with significantly higher rates among poorer and less-educated women. Adolescent births are also far more common among low-income households—120 per 1,000 women, compared with 61 per 1,000 in the richest group. These trends are linked closely to widespread child marriage, with 63 percent of women in the poorest households married off before 18, while the rate drops to 13 percent among the richest. Education once again emerges as a decisive factor, as adolescent fertility is sharply lower among women with higher levels of schooling.

The survey's findings demand urgent, targeted action. Improving maternal healthcare, expanding nutrition programmes, and ensuring access to quality education for girls—particularly in low-income and low-literacy regions—must be treated as national priorities. Free or subsidised ANC, stronger community health services, and safer delivery options are essential steps. Unless the state confronts these inequalities head-on, the poorest mothers and children will continue to bear the heaviest burden.