Why stronger family planning services matter more than family size targets



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'Bangladesh's earlier family planning programmes helped transform the country's demographic future. The next phase should respond to today's evidence.'

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Bangladesh is preparing to renew its family planning campaign, with rallies, fairs and contraceptives delivered to homes, under the slogan: "No more than two children, one is better". The trigger is clear. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2025 shows that the total fertility rate has risen to 2.4 births per woman, from 2.3 in 2019. Contraceptive use among married women has fallen to 58.2 percent, from 62.7 percent, and the adolescent birth rate has risen to 92 per 1,000 girls aged 15-19, from 83. Contraceptive shortages have made headlines nationwide. Exposure to family planning messages fell from 44 percent to 22 percent of women between 2004 and 2018. Reliance on the private sector has also grown, from 42 percent of modern-method users in 2011 to 57 percent in 2022.

Bangladesh's population of more than 17.5 crore, and its high density, make population growth a legitimate policy concern. Reproductive choice, rather than a numerical target, is the most effective way to address it. At current fertility, much of the country's future growth will come from population momentum: a large young generation is entering reproductive age, so births remain numerous even if each couple has about two children.

Renewed attention, therefore, is overdue. However, the harder question is whether the upcoming campaign's slogan fits Bangladesh's present demographic circumstances. The evidence suggests it does not.

Slogans have long been part of Bangladesh's family planning programme. "A small family is a happy family" dates from soon after independence. It was followed by "Boy or girl, two children are enough" from the 1980s, and by "No more than two children, one is better" from 2004 until 2018. These slogans helped make the two-child family a social norm and raised demand for contraception, and fertility fell from 6.3 births per woman in the mid-1970s to 2.7 in 2007 and 2.3 in 2011. Yet the decline in fertility did not necessarily mean that people had greater control over their reproductive decisions. In 2017-18, about one in five recent births was mistimed or unwanted, and one in four followed an interval shorter than three years. Women's desired fertility has been estimated at 1.7 births, below the actual rate of 2.3. The programme reduced births without closing the gap between the kind of families women wanted and the kind they had.

That gap explains why the purpose of family planning has changed. When women had six children, persuading couples to want fewer was central to the programme. With fertility now near replacement level, the task is to ensure that people can have the number of children they want, when they want them. Bangladesh endorsed this principle at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, which recognised the right of individuals and couples to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children. The National Population Policy 2025 was presented as a shift from population control to rights and choice, and it carries no numerical fertility target. The National Family Planning Strategy 2025-2030 aims for zero unmet need. The revived slogan, declaring one child better than two and more than two undesirable, sits outside these commitments.

Survey data support this shift. Most couples already want small families: in 2022, 72 percent of married women with two children wanted no more. The desire to stop childbearing has eased, from 65 percent of married women in 2011 to 57 percent in 2022, so preferences may play some part. The clearer change, however, is in access. Between 2019 and 2025, contraceptive use fell and need met with modern methods dropped from 77.4 percent to 73.5 percent. Unmet need rose from 13.7 percent to 16.2 percent. Official data showed that 27 percent of Directorate General of Family Planning posts were vacant and that its regional warehouses held no pills, IUDs or implants. No study has yet tested whether these gaps raised fertility. UNFPA has suggested that service disruptions during the Covid pandemic contributed. Whatever the cause, a slogan cannot restock a warehouse or fill a vacant post. A slogan about family size leaves these gaps unaddressed.

Bangladesh's population of more than 17.5 crore, and its high density, make population growth a legitimate policy concern. Reproductive choice, rather than a numerical target, is the most effective way to address it. At current fertility, much of the country's future growth will come from population momentum: a large young generation is entering reproductive age, so births remain numerous even if each couple has about two children. Demographic evidence shows that momentum slows mainly through later first births and fewer unintended pregnancies. Both are outcomes of reproductive choice. Neither depends on persuading couples who already want two children to stop at one, as the slogan urges. UNFPA estimates that every $1 invested in family planning in Bangladesh saves $14 in health and social costs, and could prevent 30 percent of maternal deaths and two-thirds of unintended pregnancies. Population goals and reproductive rights point in the same direction.

The slogan can also shape how frontline services set priorities. Where posts are vacant, remaining workers cover the households of absent colleagues, with gaps of many months between visits. Under such workloads, a campaign built around "two, preferably one" may lead workers to concentrate on couples who already have two children, where results are most visible. Newly married women, adolescents, women with disabilities and families in remote areas could then receive less attention. No published evidence shows that workers are currently assessed against family-size targets, so this is a risk to monitor, not an established effect. The programme still offers payments to people who adopt implants and permanent methods. Incentives combined with a slogan stating that one child is better could create pressure that weakens informed consent.

For families, the slogan's main weakness is what it leaves out. For young women, the most pressing question is often not how many children to have, but when to have the first. The adolescent birth rate rose between 2019 and 2025, although the share of women aged 20-24 who gave birth before 18 fell slightly, from 24.2 percent to 22.3 percent. Half of young women still marry before 18, and the median interval between marriage and first birth has shortened to about two years. A newly married 17-year-old who wants to delay her first child is not helped by a slogan urging her to stop at one. For couples who want a third child, the slogan implies that their choice is a failure. How families will receive the slogan is not yet known, but it does not support informed, voluntary decisions.

The campaign's practical content should continue, because restoring procurement, delivering supplies to homes and filling vacant posts respond to rising unmet need. What should change is the slogan. Instead of a number, it could promise choice: every pregnancy planned, every method available, every couple informed. Bangladesh's earlier family planning programmes helped transform the country's demographic future. Its next phase should respond to today's evidence. The decline in contraceptive coverage, persistent unintended pregnancy, rising adolescent childbearing and geographical inequalities all justify stronger services. None requires a slogan that prescribes how many children a family should have. Bangladesh now needs to move from a population control framework to a reproductive choice framework, consistent with its changing demographic circumstances and reproductive rights commitments. The success of the next campaign should be measured by how many people can have the children they want, when they want them, rather than by how many families follow a prescribed number.

Can COP31 deliver on climate finance and trade justice?



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The 31st United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31) begins in Antalya, Türkiye, on November 9 with a persistent gap between promised climate finance and what is actually delivered. Two questions will decide whether COP31 succeeds: who funds the transition, and will trade rules help or hinder the flow of money to those who need it most? Climate action rests on three pillars: mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage. Under the Paris Agreement and in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, developed countries are obliged to finance all three in developing countries.

At COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, developed countries agreed to take the lead in mobilising at least $300 billion a year by 2035; developing countries had asked for $1.3 trillion. At COP30 in Belém, the "Baku-to-Belém Roadmap" for reaching $1.3 trillion was merely "taken note of", with no binding milestones. Most developed countries have yet to announce new pledges. Multilateral development banks provided a record $103 billion in 2025, but mostly as loans, adding to heavy debt burdens. The Bonn talks in June failed to even set up the climate finance work programme agreed upon in Brazil. The hardest fight, over what developed countries now owe, lands squarely in Antalya.

For frontline countries, adaptation is where the gap is felt the most. COP30 agreed to at least triple adaptation finance by 2035, five years later than many had wanted, while leaving open questions of both the baseline and about who pays. Developing countries need $310 billion to $365 billion a year to adapt, yet only $26 billion was available in 2023. Even where finance exists, access is a severe hurdle, as Pacific leaders stressed at the pre-COP in Fiji.

Loss and damage are the least-funded pillar of all. The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage holds only $250 million in its start-up phase, and replenishment is not due until 2027. But communities are losing homes, land, and livelihoods now. Bangladesh has more at stake than most, and our eventual graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category could also reduce our access to concessional support. Graduation reflects income, but eligibility for climate finance should be based on risk, not income.

While finance remains the primary battleground, a much larger front has opened in trade. The flashpoint is the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which began pricing embedded carbon in imports in January. The G77 and China oppose such unilateral measures, warning that a levy collected at Europe's border could move money from South to North. That concern is legitimate, but CBAM can also work in our favour. By putting a price on carbon at the border, CBAM rewards producers who decarbonise early. Exporters that invest in renewable power, efficiency, and credible emissions data can turn it from a cost into a competitive edge and a source for green investment. It also spurs the emissions-tracking systems that unlock carbon markets and climate finance.

Trade can cut the finance bill in two further ways. First, lower tariffs on solar panels, batteries, and grid components reduce what a project must borrow. The second is the cost of borrowing itself. Clean energy costs are almost entirely upfront, so interest rates decide whether a project is viable, and developing countries could end up paying more to borrow than rich ones. Steady hard-currency earnings from green exports cut currency risk and the cost of capital. We must be clear about the limits. Trade gains mostly help revenue-earning mitigation, not embankments or disaster recovery, which still need grants. Nor should they ever be counted against developed countries' finance obligations.

For Bangladesh, the trade question is immediate. LDC graduation is scheduled for November 24 this year, or in 2029 if a pending deferral request is approved. It starts the clock on duty-free access to the EU, which bought an estimated 19.4 billion euros of our apparel in 2025. Three years after graduation, most garments will face tariffs of around 9.6 percent unless Dhaka secures GSP+ status or a trade agreement. CBAM does not yet cover garments, but its logic is already spreading through European buyers' demand for low-carbon supply chains. Moving early on cleaner power and verified green factories would protect the export earnings that underpin our credit standing and make Bangladesh a preferred low-carbon sourcing destination.

Bangladesh should therefore push for three priorities. First, affordable clean technology through lower barriers to clean equipment, so that we have less to borrow. Second, future trade terms, including GSP+, that recognise verified green production. Third, a share of CBAM revenue channelled to help exporters decarbonise, so that border measures support countries rather than penalise them just as they lose LDC status.

Ultimately, for COP31 to deliver, a move from pledges to delivery is essential. This requires, firstly, an agreement on the scope of the climate finance work programme. Then comes a delivery path for tripling adaptation finance, a credible replenishment plan for the loss and damage fund, and a just transition mechanism with money attached. On trade, lower clean-tech tariffs and recycled border revenue can turn CBAM from a grievance into a lever for cheaper finance and faster transition. South Asia also needs a coordinated voice on finance and trade, given our shared vulnerabilities. We can no longer rely on promises. For LDCs and other frontline countries, as their leaders made clear in Fiji, COP31 will be judged not by what is promised, but by what arrives.

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01	1353755	DBRT/ Shifting/ 2026	Shifting and Relocation of Dhaka BRT Head Office from Uttara to Gazipur BRT Depot, including Dismantling, Packing, Transportation, Unpacking and Reinstallation of Existing Fittings, Furniture, Documents and Air-Conditioning Systems, Installation of New Thai-Aluminum partitions, Electrical and Sanitary Fittings, and All Related Works.	09-11-2026	10-11-2026 at 12.00 PM

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