

## Statement

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee strongly endorses the theme of the 58th session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) in 2025: *Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages*. This theme aligns with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the outcomes of regional review conferences, and the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the 57th Commission on Population and Development session in 2024.

With 45.9 million youth aged 15–29, nearly a quarter of Bangladesh's population consists of adolescents and young people. While progress has been made in reducing child mortality and maternal deaths, challenges remain in ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), particularly for adolescent girls. Social norms and systemic inequalities perpetuate harmful practices such as child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and gender-based violence (GBV), limiting access to essential sexual and reproductive health services.

Despite years of advocacy by civil society organizations (CSOs), progress in sexual and reproductive health education in Bangladesh has faced significant challenges. While the government initially included components of this education in the 2022 national curriculum, recent criticism has led to a decision to revert to the 2012 curriculum, which contains minimal content on sexual and reproductive health rights for adolescents. Additionally, there has been a noticeable rise in online hate speech and videos targeting civil society organizations, particularly those advocating for sexual and reproductive health and gender equality. Although the final curriculum for January 2025 has not yet been confirmed, the current political economy suggests that these components may be significantly reduced. These challenges underscore the urgent need for a stronger and more collaborative presence of civil society organizations to help navigate these obstacles.

The cultural stigma surrounding sexual and reproductive health and rights restricts open discussions among parents, teachers, and adolescents, undermining access to accurate information. While sexual and reproductive health and rights topics are included in the national curriculum, their implementation is inconsistent, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Additionally, the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation frameworks hinders the scalability of sexual and reproductive health and rights education programs, leaving many adolescents without essential knowledge.

Adolescent girls in marginalized communities face limited awareness of menstruation and contraception, jeopardizing their health and autonomy. Vulnerable groups, such as slum dwellers and refugee youth, encounter even greater barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health and rights services. To address these gaps, holistic and inclusive efforts are required, ensuring that no young person is left behind.

Bangladesh's commitment to the ICPD's Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides a roadmap to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality. The following actions are critical:

## Recommendations

### 1. Strengthening sexual and reproductive health and rights education in schools

- Integrate critical topics such as puberty, consent, mental health, bodily autonomy, and gender-based violence prevention.

- Train teachers to confidently and effectively deliver sexual and reproductive health and rights education.
  - Conduct awareness campaigns for parents and communities to reduce stigma.
  - Establish robust monitoring frameworks to ensure consistent implementation.
2. **Ensuring access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health and rights services**
    - Expand youth-friendly health services nationwide, ensuring accessibility for married and unmarried youth.
    - Offer confidential, culturally sensitive services, including contraception, menstrual health, and mental health support.
  3. **Promoting gender equality and ending harmful practices**
    - Enforce laws against child marriage and gender-based violence through targeted campaigns.
    - Challenge harmful norms such as patriarchal beliefs and menstrual stigma through community engagement.
  4. **Integrating mental health support for young people**
    - Embed mental health services into Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights programs, focusing on stress, trauma, and gender-based violence-related challenges.
    - Build the capacity of healthcare providers to deliver empathetic, youth-friendly mental health care.
  5. **Building resilience through climate adaptation and crisis preparedness**
    - Incorporate Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and gender-based violence prevention into climate adaptation plans.
    - Actively involve youth in developing strategies for disaster preparedness and in climate resilience programme.
  6. **Driving evidence-based policies**
    - Expand data collection systems to track youth health, disaggregated by age, gender, disability, and geography.
    - Prioritize research on menstrual health, gender-based violence, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights access to inform policies.
  7. **Investing in health system strengthening**
    - Increase funding for youth-focused Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights programs and gender equality initiatives.
    - Develop gender-responsive health systems integrating Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, mental health, and preventive care.
  8. **Fostering youth leadership**
    - Ensure meaningful participation of youth in policy-making at local, national, and global levels.
    - Empower youth to lead initiatives advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and gender equality.

## **9. Promoting gender-responsive governance**

- Establish gender-responsive budgeting in health and education to ensure equitable resource allocation.
- Strengthen multi-sectoral partnerships to address gender-based violence and promote inclusive health strategies.

### **Call to action**

Bangladesh is at a pivotal moment to advance the health and well-being of its youth, particularly young women and girls. As we mark three decades since the ICPD's Programme of Action, it is imperative to ensure access to SRHR without fear, stigma, or discrimination. The global community must prioritize youth-centered and gender-responsive actions to achieve the ICPD's Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, leaving no one behind.