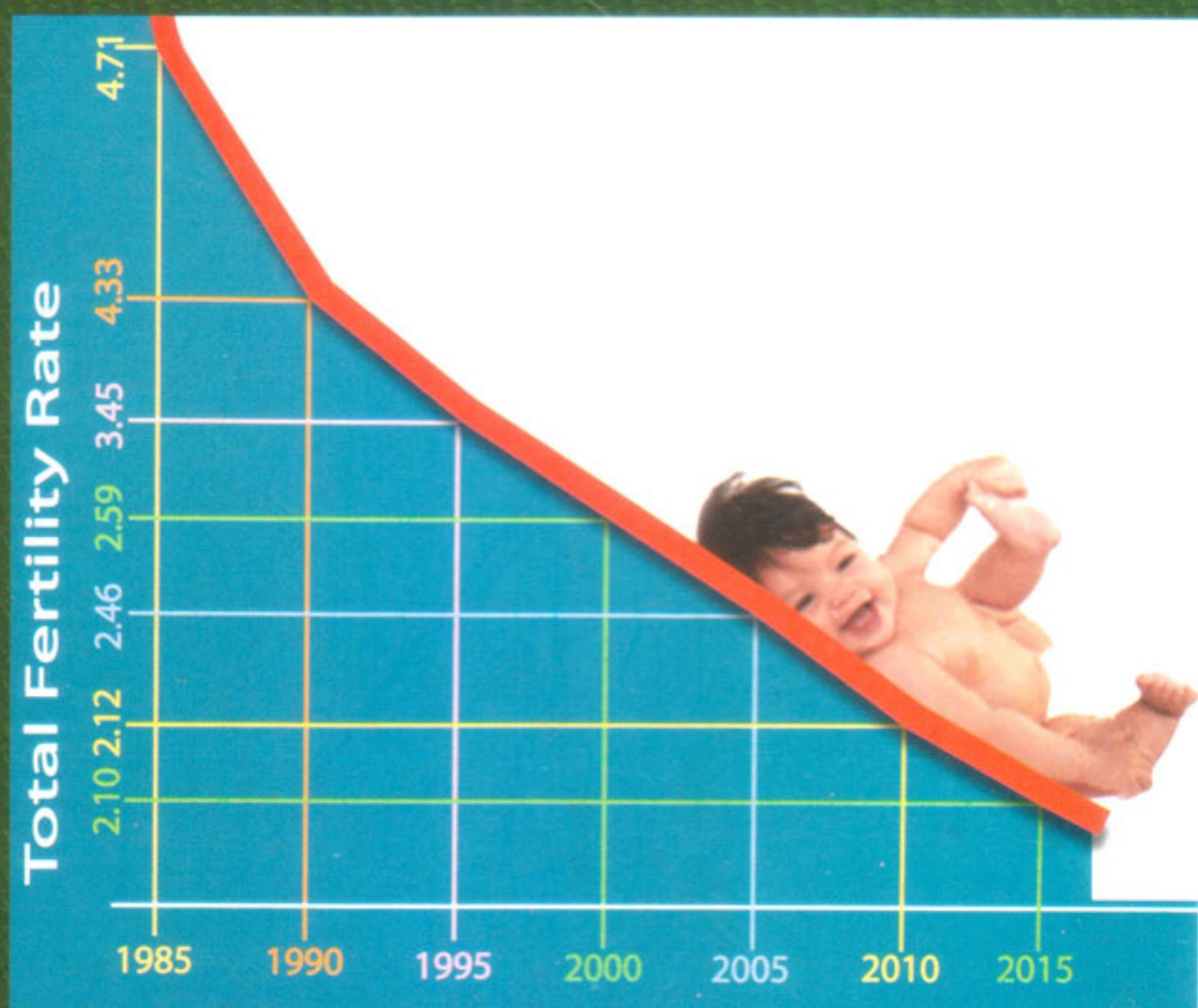


M. NURUL ISLAM

DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN BANGLADESH

● AN UPDATE ●



SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL (SSRC)

Ministry of Planning

Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Dhaka



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Demographic Scenarios of Bangladesh: An Overview

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Abstract

The paper traces the demographic scenario of Bangladesh from historical perspective. It begins with a brief history of census taking in the territory now forming Bangladesh and examines the trends and patterns of growth, fertility, mortality and migratory behavior of the population over the last century and a decade at the macro level. The paper also assesses the impact of contraception and marriage on the demographic parameters referred to above. An attempt has also been made to examine the prospects for zero population growth vis-à-vis achieving replacement level of fertility in foreseeable future keeping in view the current population policy adopted by the Bangladesh Government. The study makes use of both census and nationally representative survey data. Finally, the paper concludes with the findings that the increased level of contraceptive prevalence does not have the outcomes as expected during the recent past rather the level of fertility has remained almost unchanged. Hence, attainment of replacement level fertility vis-à-vis zero population growth remains as a formidable challenge to the policymakers and planners.

Keywords: Growth rate, Contraception, Population policy, Fertility, Mortality, Replacement level.

1. Country Profile

Bangladesh is located in the northeastern part of South Asia and covers an area of 147570 square kilometers. It is almost entirely surrounded by India, except for a short southeastern frontier with Myanmar and a southern coastline on the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh is predominantly an Islamic country with about 90 percent of its population being Muslim.

Most of Bangladesh territory is low and flat and consists of alluvial soil. The climate of Bangladesh is dominated by seasonal monsoons. For administrative purposes, the country is divided into 6 divisions, 64 districts and 496 sub-districts, called upazilla.

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Agriculture is the single largest producing sector of the economy, and it contributes about 22 percent of the GDP. This sector also accounts for around 48 percent of the total labor force. Average per capita income in Bangladesh increased to about 700 US\$ during the fiscal year July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011. Under-employment and unemployment are the serious problems, and pressure on the land in rural areas has led to large scale movement of people from rural to urban areas.

2. Population Policy and Program

Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world having a population of more than 150 million according to the latest census of 2011 with a corresponding population density of about 1000 persons per square kilometers. The population policy and programs have evolved through a series of developmental phases and have undergone changes in strategy, structure, content, and goals. Since 1980 the program has stressed functionally integrated health and family planning programs. The goal of this program is to provide an essential package of high quality, client-centered reproductive and child health care, family planning, communicable disease control, and limited curative services at a one-step service point. The Health and Population Sector Program (HPSP) was formulated as part of the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1998–2003), keeping in view the principles of the Health and Population Sector Strategy (HPSS) that called for a single sector for both health and population. The main objective of the HPSP was to ensure universal access to essential health care services of acceptable quality and to further slow down the population growth.

Recently, the government adopted the Bangladesh Population Policy. Its goals are to improve the status of family planning and maternal and child health, including reproductive health services and to improve the standard of living of the people by striking a desired balance between population and development in the context of MDGs and a Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). We enumerate below a few of the several objectives of the recent population policy:

- Reduce the total fertility rate and increase the use of family planning methods;
- Attain NRR by the year 2010 in order to stabilize population by the year 2060;
- Improve maternal health
- Reduce IMR and under-five mortality;
- Reduce maternal and child malnutrition;
- Ensure and support gender equity and empower women;
- Support poverty alleviating strategies
- Support measures for environmental sustainability;

- Promote and actively support programs to eliminate gender disparity in education, health, and nutrition

Several factors have contributed to the increase in contraceptive use over the past 20 years, a few of which are enumerated below:

- Strong political commitment to family planning program by successive governments;
- Successful promotion of a small family size norm through information and educational activities;
- Establishment of a widespread infrastructure for delivering family planning and health services down to the village level;
- Increased involvement of the non-government organizations to supplement and complement the government's effort;
- Flexibility to make policy and programmatic adjustment in response to emerging needs and the like.

The success achieved so far in the family planning program is worth encouraging and has increased confidence that it is possible to achieve further progress. However, there remain several issues of concern, such as

- Tremendous growth potential built into the age structure as a consequence of the past high fertility
- Rising number of young people in child-bearing ages
- Anticipated increase in the demand for family planning
- Lack of steady supply of contraceptives from external sources affecting program performance
- Quality of facilities and services
- Extent of involvement of males in the family planning program.

Keeping in view the brief introduction of the population policy and the current status of family planning program in Bangladesh, we present below an overview of the demographic scenarios of the country in brief.

3. Population Growth

The population of Bangladesh was estimated around 14.5 millions in 1801 (Roy and Das Gupta, 1976; Islam, 1995). It took about 100 years to double the size of population in the year 1901. The population was growing at a modest rate of less than 0.7 percent per year during the most part of 1801-1901. In other words, the total population increased by 14.4 millions in 100 years. However, the same size of increase in population was observed during approximately the next fifty years. Since then, the increase in population was very rapid. During 1951-74 period, the population increased by about 29 million, in a period of only 23 years. However, it was more rapid during the next 27 years. An increase of