

Editorial

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Greenstar Social Marketing (GSM) Pakistan is a leading development sector partner of provincial and national governments in health and population sectors. The organization believes in responding to the on-ground situations in a proactive manner. Understanding the importance of reaching out to the urban population, especially living in the urban slums of major cities, GSM has joined hands with the Federal and Provincial governments for Islamabad, and Sindh and Punjab through The Challenge Initiative (TCI) platform funded by the Bayer and the Gates Foundations.

TCI began implementation of its high-impact interventions (HIIs) in 15 densely populated urban districts of Pakistan, in collaboration with the provincial departments of Population Welfare and Health. TCI is a global platform which is currently being implemented in 13 countries in Africa and Asia and is managed centrally by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. In Pakistan, Greenstar Social Marketing has been leading the implementation of HIIs since June 2022. The high-impact interventions selected for Pakistan focus on improving service delivery, demand generation, and advocacy for modern family planning (FP). Under service delivery, there are eight HIIs: 1) Integrated In-reaches, which are dedicated facility-based days for providing family planning services, 2) Integrated Out-reaches, which refers to contraceptive services provided through outreach vans and satellite camps, 3) Family Planning Integration, which refers to the integration of modern family planning services into other health areas such as vaccination or disease prevention, 4) Post-partum Family Planning and 5) Post-Abortion Family Planning refers to the provision of modern contraception to women after their delivery or abortion, 6) On-the-Job Training, refers to the on-the-job training provided to field staff by senior medical staff on provision of contraceptive counselling and services, 7) Whole Site Orientation refers to facility-based sessions where each staff member including facility's janitorial staff and guards, is oriented on modern family planning methods to facilitate clients better, and 8) Facility Makeover refers to infrastructural renovation of facilities financially supported by TCI. Under demand-generation, the main HII is Community Health Workers which refers to either the training of existing health workers of government departments on social mobilization for modern contraceptive methods or recruitment of community health volunteers (CHVs) for the same purpose.

Pakistan recently became the 5th most populous country in the world with the population exceeding 240 million with an annual growth rate of 2.55%. With limited resources and heavy reliance on foreign agencies for development and sustenance, the country is in a state of imbalance between the population and its resources. The government has been acutely aware of this, and has been taking actions to mitigate this with support from the private sector. However, the demographic indicators have only worsened since with the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) reporting contraceptive prevalence at 34% with a high fertility rate at 3.6. These indicators prompt a fundamental question: How has a country with such a defined and institutionalized population program consistently failed to achieve significant progress?

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The answer to this question is multifaceted and complex. A close examination of the problem reveals structural and programmatic challenges that must be addressed to transform the family planning landscape for the better. Previously, it was commonly assumed that the major proportion of this population surge can be attributed to rural areas, however, in the latest 2023 national census, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported the urban growth rate to be 3.67% which is double the growth rate for rural areas. These estimates underpin the impact of the high rural-to-urban migration rate, and the need for policy-makers and donors to shift their focus and investments from rural to urban areas. Moreover, PBS reported that out of the country's 159 districts, 15 highly urbanized districts constitute 28% of the total country's population. As of now, 53% of the total urban population of Pakistan is living in these 15 districts which are a part of the TCI program.

By December, 2025, the implementing districts are expected to graduate. Graduation refers to strengthening of government health system to an extent where the high impact interventions become a permanent and self-sustained part of the government planning and budgeting. This would ensure long-term sustainability and impact on the demographic indicators and reducing the imbalance between our population and resources. This supplement, therefore, serves as both a knowledge repository and a clarion call to anchor family planning programs in scientific evidence, foster accountability, and accelerate progress towards a balanced and sustainable future.