

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. **UNFPA** supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.



CONTRACEPTIVES SAVE LIVES

THE GLOBAL PICTURE: In the developing world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, progress in reducing maternal and newborn deaths has been slow. One reason for the persistently high maternal and newborn mortality rates is the lack of access to family planning for those women who want to delay or prevent pregnancy. Family planning reduces maternal and newborn mortality rates and improves the health and well-being of women and their existing children.

Access to voluntary family planning is also a critical part of fulfilling the fundamental human right of couples and individuals to choose when and how many children to have. From a national perspective, universal access to family planning is a critical component for development. The benefits of having contraceptives widely available to those women and couples who want it are widely recognized. Despite this, donor assistance dedicated to family planning has dropped dramatically in absolute dollars since the mid-1990s, and many countries are not making the needed investment for family planning.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

There are an estimated 215 million women in the developing world who want to delay or avoid pregnancy¹, but who are not using family planning, largely because they don't have access to it, they fear side effects or their families object. Globally, the desire for voluntary family planning is growing. UNFPA estimates that meeting current unmet need and keeping pace with population growth will lead to an increase in the number of contraceptive users of over 30 per cent during the next 15 years.

Low income countries are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to modern family planning methods. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Central Asia together account for 59 per cent of women with unmet need. In low income countries, 54 per cent of women who want

to avoid pregnancy don't have access to contraceptives, compared with 20 per cent in better-off developing countries.²

In 2008, about 60 per cent of women (47 million) in sub-Saharan Africa who wanted to avoid a pregnancy were not using family planning or were using a traditional method. These women accounted for 91 per cent of unintended pregnancies.³

Investing in family planning compares favourably with other cost-effective health investments such as antiretroviral therapy, childhood vaccinations and oral rehydration therapy. Fulfilling the unmet need for modern family planning would cost an additional \$3.6 billion annually, coming from a combination of international and domestic sources.⁴

Due to an increase in the number of women of reproductive age globally, the estimated number of unsafe abortions rose to 21.6 million in 2008, after changing little between 1995 (19.9 million) and 2003 (19.7 million). Corresponding to the overall decline in maternal deaths, fewer women died from unsafe abortion in 2008 than in 1990. But the proportion of maternal deaths unsafe abortion causes (13 per cent) and the annual unsafe abortion rate (14 per 1,000 women aged 15-49) have remained unchanged over this period.⁵

Every year, an estimated 47,000 women die as a result of unsafe abortions. Of the 21.6 million women who have unsafe abortions each year, approximately 8.5 million will experience complications, and three million of these will not receive the follow-up care they need, leaving them vulnerable to long-term and often debilitating health problems.⁶

Fulfilling unmet need for family planning would reduce unsafe abortions by almost three quarters and death from unsafe abortion by more than four fifths.⁷

WHAT MUST BE DONE:

Family planning needs to be recognized by international donors and national governments alike as a top development priority and reflected in an increase in funding and commitment for implementing family planning programmes. Most governments in poor countries have adopted appropriate population and family planning policies, but many are not implementing them because of a lack of political will and adequate funding. Fulfilling the unmet need for family planning would cost an additional \$3.6 billion every year, for a total of \$6.7 billion annually. A reasonable sum, considering the breadth of potential benefits, which range from improved maternal and child health to the empowerment of women, to more financially secure families, and the economic growth of nations.

BENEFITS OF MEETING THE UNMET NEED FOR FAMILY PLANNING:

Access to family planning saves lives. If the gap between demand and supply for family planning was met, the number of women dying in pregnancy or childbirth would be cut by approximately one third.

Fulfilling the unmet need for modern family planning in the developing world would reduce unintended pregnancies from 75 to 22 million, a reduction of over 70 per cent, and unplanned births would drop from 30 to 8 million. This would result in 25 million fewer induced abortions ever year.⁸

Having fewer, healthier children reduces the economic burden on poor families and allows them to invest more in each child’s care and schooling, helping to break the cycle of poverty and improving the prosperity of families, communities and nations.

When fertility rates fall, more women join the labour force. The healthy years of life lost due to disability and premature death of women and their newborns would be reduced by more than 60 per cent if the need for maternal and newborn health services and family planning were met.

Universal access to primary education and educating boys and girl equally is more likely to occur where there is lower fertility, slower population growth and later childbearing.

Investing in family planning enables faster economic growth in nations by reducing fertility and changing the age structure and dependency ratio of a given population. As well, depending on what services are offered, each dollar spent of family planning can save governments four

dollars in spending on health, housing, water, sewage and other public services.⁹

WHAT IS UNFPA DOING?

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, works to ensure universal access to reproductive health, including voluntary family planning and sexual health for all. Advocacy and provision of family planning services is essential to this work. The complex logistics of providing the right quantities of the right products in the right conditions in the right place at the right time for the right price involves many actors, including both the public and private sectors.

UNFPA works with governments, civil society and sister United Nations agencies and takes a lead role in providing and coordinating the distribution of reproductive health commodities, forecasting needs, mobilizing support and building logistical capacity at the country level. UNFPA advocates the right of all people to decide the number and timing of their children, and the Fund provides contraceptives and other reproductive health supplies to health posts and hospitals that supply millions of men and women worldwide.

For more information on UNFPA’s work – please visit www.unfpa.org.

Links:

UNFPA: Family Planning Resource Kit:
<http://www.unfpa.org/rh/planning/mediakit/>

UNFPA: Safe Motherhood Resource Kit:
<http://www.unfpa.org/public/site/global/lang/en/pid/4390>

¹ Adding it Up : The Cost and Benefit of Investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health. Guttmacher Institute/ UNFPA 2009.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Unsafe Abortion: Global and Regional Estimates of Incidence of Unsafe Abortion and Associated Mortality in 2008. WHO, 2011.

⁶ Abortion Worldwide: A Decade of Uneven Progress. Guttmacher Institute, 2009.

⁷ Adding it Up : The Cost and Benefit of Investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health. Guttmacher Institute/ UNFPA 2009.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: The contribution of fulfilling the unmet need for family planning. USAID. May 2006.