



Because everyone counts

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.

# A GLOBAL NEED FOR FAMILY PLANNING

**WORLDWIDE, AROUND 200 MILLION WOMEN** say they want to delay or prevent pregnancy but are not using effective contraception. Either they have no access to it, they think they will not get pregnant, they fear side effects or their families object.

**THE RESULT: thousands of unintended pregnancies, ill health and maternal deaths.**

Access to contraceptives empowers women and can save their lives. Contraception can prevent 2.7 million infant deaths a year. It can reduce poverty, slow population growth, ease the pressure on the environment and make for a more stable world.

**Being able to plan how many children to have and when to have them is a recognized human right.** But this right is not yet realized, especially among the poor.

Demand for family planning is expected to soar in the next 15 years as millions of young people become sexually active and smaller families become the norm in many countries. But funding for it is declining and has been doing so for years.

If the Millennium Development Goals are to be met, the international community must restore family planning to the top of the development agenda. That will require both political and financial commitment.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

- Between 1960 and 2000, the proportion of married women in developing regions using contraception rose from less than 10 per cent to 60 per cent, and the average number of births per woman fell from six to about three.
- An estimated 200 million women worldwide want to delay or avoid pregnancy but are not using safe and effective family planning.
- **Researchers project that the demand for contraception will grow by 40 per cent over the next 15 years.**
- In most of Asia and Latin America, national family planning programmes have stabilized population growth. But the needs of the poor have only been partially addressed.

- In 56 developing countries, the poorest women average six births, compared to 3.2 for the wealthiest.
- Population growth is highest in poor countries already struggling to meet their people's needs for jobs, education, health care and services.
- **Fewer than 20 per cent of sexually active young people in Africa use contraception.** Apart from lack of money, barriers include insufficient knowledge, fear of social disapproval, side effects and misperceptions about the partner's opposition.
- Every year, 190 million women become pregnant—and nearly 50 million resort to abortion.
- An estimated 68,000 women die every year from unsafe abortions. Millions more suffer long-term disability.
- To meet the unmet need for contraceptives, global population assistance should now exceed US\$1.2 billion per year for family planning and increase to over \$1.6 billion by 2015. Current assistance is \$550 million—less than half of today's needed amount.

## BENEFITS OF ACTION

- Being able to choose when and how many children to have allows women to exercise a basic human right. This right will often lead to a significant reduction in the fertility rate.
- **Researchers estimate that universal access to family planning could save the lives of about 175,000 women each year.** Increasing birth intervals to at least 36 months could also prevent the deaths of 1.8 million children under 5.
- Fulfilling the unmet need for family planning could reduce fertility by 35 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 20 per cent in the Arab States and in eastern and southern Africa, and 15 per cent in Asia and western Africa.
- **Having fewer, healthier children can reduce the economic burden on poor families** and allow them to invest more in each child's care and schooling, helping to break the cycle of poverty.

## BENEFITS OF ACTION (CONTINUED)

- Smaller families mean education is more likely for all family members—a particular benefit for girls.
- Enabling young women to avoid early pregnancy allows many to attend school longer.
- **More women join the labour force as fertility falls.**
- Slower population growth places less stress on limited natural resources, including fresh water and arable land.
- In most of Africa, high fertility and population growth rates pose a greater threat than HIV/AIDS to reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
- Family planning programmes can prevent sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, by promoting condom use. By preventing unwanted pregnancies among HIV-positive women, mother-to-child transmission is averted.
- **Individuals' fundamental human right to choose the number and timing of their children requires access to contraception.**
- Depending on the services offered, studies show that each dollar spent on family planning can save governments up to US\$31 in health care, water, education, housing, sewers and other waste disposal, etc.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Information on risks and effective access to family planning and contraceptives are essential to prevent maternal deaths, reduce poverty and achieve universal reproductive health for all.

Family planning, however, has slipped down the list of international development priorities. Inadequate supplies and increasing demand pose serious challenges.

**Most governments in poor countries have adopted population and family planning policies, but many lack funds and/or political will to implement them.**

High-level political and financial commitment to promote family planning is urgently needed at the global, regional, national and local levels. NGOs and civil society are crucial to this work.

**UNFPA believes the following will help meet the essential commitment:**

- A broad coalition of support from groups and individuals at the global, regional, national and community levels.

Some 200 million women worldwide, especially in the poorest countries, still have an unmet need for effective contraception. Meeting their needs would cost about US\$3.9 billion a year, and could prevent 23 million unplanned births, 22 million induced abortions, 142,000 pregnancy-related deaths (including 53,000 from unsafe abortions) and 1.4 million infant deaths. (*Adding it Up, 2004, UNFPA/Guttmacher Institute*)

- Adequate and consistent funding for family planning information and services.
- Universal access to contraception education and materials, as well as to counselling in sexuality, health and reproductive rights.
- Involving men in promoting family planning.
- Mass media campaigns to educate people on the benefits of smaller families.
- Access to a range of safe and effective contraceptive methods in health facilities and through social marketing and local outreach.
- National and local discussion of the rights of men and women in relation to their bodies, health, education and access to economic and social resources.

## WHAT IS UNFPA DOING?

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, works to ensure universal access to reproductive health and the right of all people to be able to decide the number and timing of their children. Advocacy and provision of family planning are essential to this work.

UNFPA works with governments, civil society and other UN agencies, and leads in forecasting needs, providing and coordinating the distribution of reproductive health commodities, mobilizing support and building each country's logistics capacity.

The fund has family planning programmes in 140 countries, providing contraceptives to health posts and hospitals that serve millions of men and women.

## LINKS

Family planning: so that every pregnancy is wanted.

<http://www.unfpa.org/rh/planning.htm>