



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.

FAMILY PLANNING AND POVERTY REDUCTION

BENEFITS FOR FAMILIES AND NATIONS

CONTINUED RAPID POPULATION GROWTH poses a bigger threat to poverty reduction in most African countries than HIV/AIDS, according to researchers.

Family planning programmes create conditions that enable women to enter the labour force and families to devote more resources to each child, thereby improving family nutrition, education levels and living standards.

Slower population growth cuts the cost of social services as fewer children attend school; fewer and healthier people seek health care; fewer women die in childbirth; and demand eases for water, food, housing, transportation and jobs.

In some countries, high population growth is outpacing economic progress.

Family planning is a powerful tool in combating poverty. However, universal access to family planning is not yet a reality—particularly not among the poorest. Worldwide, 200 million women would like to delay or prevent pregnancy, but are not using effective contraception.

The demand for contraceptives is expected to grow by 40 per cent in the next 15 years, but funding for it has been declining over the years.

Effective family planning programmes targeted to meet the needs of poor populations can reduce the fertility gap between rich and poor people, and make a powerful contribution to poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

- The population of many nations will double or triple in coming decades.

- **Rapid population growth, usually defined as an annual increase of at least 2 per cent, will double a country's population every 35 years.** A 3 per cent growth will double a population in 23 years.

- A study of 48 countries estimated that the proportion of people living in poverty would have fallen by a third if the birth rate had fallen by five per 1,000 people in the 1980s.

- Just to maintain existing conditions, countries with rapidly growing populations must double the number of teachers, equipment and classrooms every 20 to 25 years.

- A country's wide adoption of voluntary family planning over several decades can allow its number of workers to increase relative to the number of people they must support.

- While this "window of development" is open, savings and investment can increase, generating improved living standards and lower poverty levels. The "Asian Tiger" countries are prime examples.

- This "demographic window for development," however, requires that supportive policies are put in place to create employment, education and health programmes.

- As the population ages, the "window" closes, a cause of current concern in advanced industrial countries. But that remains a distant prospect in today's poorest countries.

- **In developing countries, women's health has critical economic importance.** Women are more than half the agricultural labour force. They grow 80 per cent of staple crops in Africa, and in Southeast Asia, 90 per cent of rice growers are women.

- **Since the 1960s, family planning has reduced fertility in developing countries from an average of six births per woman to three.** But in 56 developing countries, the poorest women still average six births, compared to 3.2 for the wealthiest.

BENEFITS OF ACTION

- Researchers estimate that universal access to family planning could save the lives of about 175,000 women each year. Increasing birth intervals to three years could also prevent the deaths of 1.8 million children under 5.

- **Having fewer, healthier children can reduce the economic burden on poor families and allow them to in-**

vest more in each child's care and schooling, helping to break the cycle of poverty.

- As women become more educated, they tend to have fewer children and participate more in the labour market. Families with fewer children are better able to invest in the health and education of each child.

● Spaced births and fewer pregnancies improve child survival.

- Depending on the services offered, each dollar spent on voluntary family planning can save governments up to US\$31 in health care, water, education, housing, sewers, etc.

- Smaller families in general benefit girls: children in large families are usually less well-nourished and educated than in smaller families, and the penalties fall chiefly on daughters.

- Being able to manage their fertility empowers women in other areas of their lives.

- A global cost-benefit analysis found that spending US\$3.9 billion on contraceptives for women in the most needy of developing countries could prevent 52 million unintended pregnancies and 22 million abortions, and save on health care costs.

- Fertility reduction in most poor countries has occurred only in the presence of comprehensive family planning programmes.

WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Donors and governments should explicitly state the urgency of voluntary family planning as a development intervention, and persuasively explain its long-term benefits.

Most governments in poor countries have adopted appropriate population and family planning policies, but many lack funds and/or political will to implement them. Adequate policies must seek to prevent the catastrophic consequences of lack of access to contraceptives and maternity care

Multi-sector plans for economic growth should explicitly recognize reproductive health and family planning as priorities and assign them budget allocations.

Family planning is now seriously under-funded by donors and developing country governments. 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.

UNFPA believes the following will help:

- A broad coalition of support at the global, national and local levels.

- Adequate and consistent funding to provide universal access to contraception and pertinent information.

- Universal access to contraception education and materials, as well as to sexuality, health and reproductive rights counselling.

- 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 debate on 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.