

International family planning programs: A fact sheet

Fact: Family planning programs have made a significant contribution to lowering the number of births per woman.

Decades of research show that family planning and reproductive health services raise contraceptive use by meeting a demand for contraception, thus allowing women to avoid unintended pregnancies. Between 1960 and 1990, fertility declined in the developing world from more than six to fewer than four births per woman. Almost half of that decline—43%—is attributable to family planning programs.

Fact: Global population growth is still a critical problem, despite the progress made by family planning programs and the low birth rates in some developed countries. Every day, the population of the developing world grows by 200,000 people, the equivalent of adding a Washington, DC every 3 days.

Population would keep growing even if fertility could immediately be reduced to the replacement level of 2.1 births per woman, because:

- The large number of young people entering their childbearing years will result in population growth for decades to come. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, 43% of the total female population was younger than 15 years in 2005.
- People live longer due to higher standards of living, better nutrition, and greater investments in public health. Further improvements to living standards are likely in today's developing countries.

Evidence-based research has shown that family planning can and does:

- alleviate poverty
- reduce infant mortality
- reduce maternal mortality
- reduce at-risk births
- promote gender equality
- slow the spread of HIV/AIDS
- accelerate socioeconomic development
- help protect the environment

Fact: The need for family planning remains high, despite the death toll of the AIDS epidemic.

In spite of the substantial mortality from AIDS, the UN projects further large population increases for all developing regions. Sub-Saharan Africa's population, despite the AIDS pandemic, is expected to grow by at least *one billion* between 2005 and 2050. The annual number of AIDS deaths—2,000,000—is equivalent to just 10 days' growth in the population of the developing world.

Fact: Family planning programs are a cost-effective public health strategy.

The World Bank estimates the cost of family planning at \$100 per life-year saved. This is of the same order of magnitude as other health interventions, such as basic sanitation for diarrheal disease, a short course of chemotherapy for tuberculosis, and condom distribution for HIV prevention. All these interventions, including those for family planning, are much more cost-effective than antiretroviral treatment of AIDS, which currently receives a large proportion of health-related development aid.

Fact: Family planning programs allow individuals to be in charge of the course of their own lives.

Today, nearly all programs around the world (with the important exception of China's) respect the right of women and couples to make informed reproductive choices, free from undue persuasion or coercion.

Based on "A response to critics of family planning programs," by John Bongaarts and Steven W. Sinding, in *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, March 2009.