



International Family Planning: Saving Women's Lives, Protecting Women's Health

Voluntary family planning: vital to women's health

- Nearly 600,000 women die annually from preventable pregnancy-related causes. Studies show that one in four maternal deaths can be prevented through family planning. According to a statement issued in 1999 by the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, and the World Bank:

Enabling women and families to choose whether, when, and how often to have children is central to safe motherhood...Pregnancies among very young women and women with many children, and unwanted pregnancies are all associated with increased likelihood of mortality.

- 34 million people now live with HIV/AIDS, 95% of whom are in the developing world. Women account for nearly half of new infections. Half of the newly infected are also under 25 years of age. Family planning programs help slow the spread of the devastating HIV/AIDS pandemic by providing information and counseling, as well as male and female condoms. Now more than ever, these services and programs are needed to save lives and protect health.
- More than 75,000 women die each year due to unsafe abortion. Increased use of family planning, by preventing unintended pregnancies, could help avoid many of these deaths, along with treatment for abortion complications. Experience with expanded family planning services in Russia, Romania, Turkey, and the Central Asian Republics since 1990 has proven that increased use of contraception greatly reduces women's reliance on abortion.

Enhancing women's status and family well-being

- Use of family planning, and therefore, the ability to determine the number and spacing of children, can have profound effects on women's opportunities for schooling, employment, and participation in local and national affairs.
- Spacing births at least two years apart has been shown to dramatically reduce infant and child deaths, with even greater reductions when births are spaced three years or more. When mothers are healthy and educated, their children are more likely to survive and be healthy.

Ensuring that young people receive the information and services they need

- Over one billion young people are entering their reproductive years -- the largest generation in history -- with another 2 billion right behind them. Encouraging safe and responsible sexual behavior through innovative and culturally-sensitive approaches is absolutely essential at this critical time.

Enabling women and men everywhere to make choices

- U.S. support for voluntary family planning and related health programs around the world enables women and men to use contraception and to make choices about the number and spacing of their children -- choices that most Americans take for granted.
- An estimated 270 million couples are currently using modern family planning methods in developing countries -- representing all cultures and religions. In every national survey in 55 countries since 1980, women report that their desired family size is less than their actual family size -- which now averages 3.8 children in developing countries (excluding China).
- The number of married women of reproductive age continues to grow each year by 15 million. Programs are striving not only to continue meeting the needs of current users, but also to meet increasing demands.

Promoted through global partnerships

- In 1994, nearly 180 governments agreed at an international conference in Cairo on universal access to family planning and other reproductive health services as a priority goal for 2015. U.S. assistance through USAID and UNFPA is helping countries to achieve this goal.
- USAID has supported innovative community-based approaches to provision of family planning and reproductive health services. CARE and Save the Children are among the U.S.-based private organizations through which USAID channels its assistance. USAID also has been a world leader in engaging the private sector in providing services through pharmacies, private physicians, and other commercial outlets.
- UNFPA programs have emphasized support to government services, traditionally the backbone of national family planning efforts. UNFPA is also working increasingly with nongovernmental organizations.
- A key goal for both USAID and UNFPA is to build local capacity and move countries toward self-reliance, such as the Republic of Korea, which has now become a donor country itself. Among other countries that no longer need USAID family planning assistance are Colombia, Tunisia, Thailand, and Mexico.

A low cost investment for saving lives

- Total U.S. funding for USAID and UNFPA has averaged \$437 million annually between fiscal years 1995 and 2000. For fiscal year 2001, the Administration seeks to restore USAID funding to its fiscal year 1995 level of \$541.6 million, without the harmful policy restrictions enacted last year. An additional \$25 million is proposed for UNFPA -- for a total of \$566.6 million, an amount equivalent to about 4 cents per week per American.

<p>This fact sheet was prepared by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of State. April 2000</p>
