



S. Colvey/IDRC

Family planning could prevent one out of four deaths from pregnancy- and childbirth-related causes.



P. Bennett/IDRC

Since 1965, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has supported international health assistance programs that provide voluntary family planning services. This support has saved the lives and health of women and children, helped stabilize world population, protected the environment, and promoted U.S. political and economic interests in the developing world. USAID is the world's largest bilateral donor contributing to such programs.

Family planning assistance is a critical public health priority – it saves lives, improves health, contributes to healthier children, and prevents abortion.

Each year, more than half a million women (at least one woman every minute of every day) die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth; 99 percent of these deaths occur in developing countries. These women leave behind at least a million motherless children whose risk of dying is great. Every day, more than 30,000 children under age 5 die – many from low birth-weight or from causes related to complications in the mother's pregnancy. Family planning could prevent one out of four of these deaths because these programs help women postpone early high-risk pregnancies, give women's bodies a chance to recover from a previous pregnancy, and provide access to contraceptives that are proven to reduce unintended pregnancies and so reduce abortions as well. Spacing births with longer intervals between pregnancies improves women's chances of surviving pregnancy and childbirth; in addition, women are healthier during and just after pregnancy. USAID-supported research has found that children spaced three years or more apart are healthier at birth and more likely to survive infancy and childhood through age 5.

Family planning is crucial in the fight to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

With years of experience in addressing individuals' and couples' reproductive

health needs, family planning programs are well placed to help prevent HIV/AIDS, help those who are HIV-negative remain negative, and keep one partner from infecting the other. Since HIV is currently incurable, prevention is vital. Half of all new HIV infections in the developing world are among women and nearly 10 percent of infections are among infants and children who become infected through mother-to-child HIV transmission.

Family planning programs can help protect the environment.

A healthy environment is vital to ensuring the health of families, and vice versa. Rapid population growth can cause environmental resources such as trees, water, and wildlife to be used up more quickly than they are replaced. Water shortages are seriously affecting people in the developing world, and encroachments on the environment have led to the appearance of new infectious diseases. The World Wildlife Fund's *Living Planet Report 2000* estimated that the earth's ecosystems and renewable natural resources had declined 33 percent over the past 30 years while demands on these ecosystems had increased by more than 50 percent. The facts speak for themselves:

- More than one-third of the world's people live in areas suffering from chronic water shortages.
- Each year, some 40 million acres of tropical forest (an area nearly the size of Washington state) disappear as trees are cleared for crops, human settlements, and fuel wood.
- Three-fourths of the world's agricultural lands are degraded, and cities are filling with people leaving rural areas because of expanding population and land degradation.

Family planning empowers women, their families, and their communities.

Family planning can expand life choices for women and girls. Postponing early marriage and delaying a young bride's first pregnancy through family planning

increases her chances of receiving a good education. Education is vital to a woman's individual development, to her child's development, and to the social, political, and economic growth of the community. Men and women who participate in USAID-supported family planning programs do so because they want to. They desire the information they need to make appropriate decisions about their family size and the spacing of their children.

Americans favor international health assistance.

A study conducted in 2000 by the RAND Corporation showed that eight in 10 Americans favor United States aid for voluntary family planning programs in the developing world. In addition, 92 percent agree that couples should have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children, and should have access to the information and means to make and carry out these decisions. The reasons for this support are diverse – improving the health of women and children, enhancing women's status, helping to alleviate world poverty, stabilizing population, protecting the global environment, promoting economic development overseas, and pursuing the economic self-interest of the United States. Another survey, taken by the Gallup organization in 2002, found that 73 percent of Americans believe the health of the world should be a concern to the United States because health is a global issue; that 67 percent believe the United States should be involved in global health policy to protect Americans' health; and that 64 percent believe we must be involved to protect America's vital interests.

USAID's family planning programs involve a range of activities, from health and social programs to technical interventions and assistance.

At the request of host governments, USAID supports programs in more than 60 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. The Agency's strategy for family planning

and reproductive health is to provide high-quality voluntary health care services that are easily available to many people. Essential elements of our programs include counseling and services, training of health workers, contraceptive supplies and their distribution, financial management, public education, marketing, and biomedical and contraceptive research and development. USAID support is based on a broad approach to reproductive health that emphasizes choice among a wide range of contraceptives, improved quality of care, and client-centered services. USAID family planning and reproductive health programs are increasingly integrated with other community-based efforts to improve maternal and child health, enhance women's status, and prevent HIV transmission and other infectious diseases.

USAID's family planning program is one of the most successful components of U.S. foreign assistance.

Since the Agency began providing family planning services in 1965, the use of modern family planning in the developing world has more than quadrupled, going from fewer than 10 percent of couples to more than 40 percent. In the 28 countries with the largest USAID-sponsored family planning programs, the average number of children per family has declined by more than one-third, from more than 6 children per family to fewer than 4. In densely populated Bangladesh, for example, the number of children per family has fallen by about half in just four decades. In the 1960s, fewer than 10 percent of women in Bangladesh used a modern family planning method and families averaged more than six children. Today, 42 percent of women use a modern method, and couples are having, on average, just above three children per family.

Early USAID investments in family planning helped stabilize population growth in such strategically important countries as Egypt and Indonesia and contributed to the strength of U.S. trading partners such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Today, American exports in one



Pathfinder/CCP

Rapid population growth can cause environmental resources to be used up more quickly than they are replaced.



Liz Gibert/JHU



N. Mckee/IDRC

Investments in family planning have helped stabilize population growth in strategically important countries and contributed to the strength of U.S. trading partners.

year to South Korea are greater in value than the total cost of USAID's past family planning assistance to the country.

In 2000, Secretary of State Colin Powell described family planning as "a wise investment ... a good use of the people's dollars to invest in activities outside our borders which affect us more and more directly every day because of the nature of the changing world and the impact of globalization. We are not alone. We are not an island anymore. And the investments we make overseas will redound to our credit in due course. This is ... the work of the American people."

This valuable work is done at low cost.

The United States spends, on average, \$425 million – or approximately \$1.70 per American – a year on international family planning programs. This represents about *one-fiftieth of one percent (0.02%)* of the country's development assistance budget. This money is well spent:

- It will provide services to 20 million women, prevent abortions, and save the lives of thousands of women and hundreds of thousands of young children.
- International family planning programs work – programs supported by the United States help millions of women in poor countries and are one of the notable success stories in our nation's efforts to reduce poverty around the world.
- Our contribution directly helps people in other countries, but it is a good long-term investment for us in the United States as well.

The need for family planning services still exists even where population growth is declining.

While there has been a decline in births in many developed countries, the goal of ensuring that all couples can voluntarily plan the timing and number of their births remains an important one. In the developing world, many people continue to have mistimed pregnancies or more

pregnancies than they desire because they lack the information and services they need. Additionally, more than 1 billion young people – the largest cohort ever – are entering their reproductive years, and their health and increased family planning needs will have to be addressed. The world's population and the needs of its people continue to grow:

- World population is now more than 6.1 billion and continues to increase by roughly 77 million people per year.
- The number of women of reproductive age (15 to 49 years old) is expected to grow to 1.8 billion by 2015, further increasing the need for family planning services.
- Couples in developing countries want smaller families. Surveys show that desired family size is smaller than actual size in almost every country, regardless of religion or culture. At least 120 million married women of reproductive age would like to postpone their next pregnancy, or have no more children, but do not have access to or are not using contraception.
- The large numbers of young people will impact world population for the next 40 to 50 years. Each year the number of young people entering their reproductive years increases by 15 million. These young people will need access to and information about family planning and reproductive health options if they are to make decisions that will benefit them, their families, and their communities.



Family Planning & Reproductive Health Programs

Saving Lives, Protecting the Environment, Advancing U.S. Interests

