



Access to family planning is an essential human right that unlocks unprecedented rewards for economic development, says new UNFPA report

Making voluntary family planning available to everyone in developing countries would reduce costs for maternal and newborn health care by \$11.3 billion annually, according to [The State of World Population 2012](#), published today by [UNFPA](#), the United Nations Population Fund.

Increased access to family planning has proven to be a sound economic investment. One third of the growth of Asian "tiger" economies is attributed to a demographic shift in which the number of income-generating adults became higher than those who depended on them for support. This shift, says the report, was a consequence of family planning and brought increased productivity, leading to economic development in the region.

One recent study predicts that if the fertility rate fell by just one child per woman in Nigeria in the next 20 years, the country's economy would grow by at least \$30 billion.

And the benefits are not just economic. The report finds that the costs of ignoring the right to family planning include poverty, exclusion, poor health and gender inequality. Failing to meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents and young people in Malawi, for example, contributed to high rates of unintended pregnancy and HIV. In the United States, the report showed that teenage motherhood reduces a girl's chances of obtaining a high school diploma by up to 10 per cent.

Family planning delivers immeasurable rewards to women, families, and communities around the world. By enabling individuals to choose the number and spacing of their children, family

planning has allowed women, and their children, to live healthier, longer lives. Looking ahead, if an additional 120 million obtained access to family planning, the report estimates 3 million fewer babies would die in their first year of life.

"Family planning has a positive multiplier effect on development," said UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin. "Not only does the ability for a couple to choose when and how many children to have help lift nations out of poverty, but it is also one of the most effective means of empowering women. Women who use contraception are generally healthier, better educated, more empowered in their households and communities and more economically productive. Women's increased labour-force participation boosts nations' economies."

The State of World Population 2012 says that governments, civil society, health providers and communities have the responsibility to protect the right to family planning for women across the spectrum, including those who are young or unmarried.

Nevertheless, the report finds that financial resources for family planning have declined and contraceptive use has remained mostly steady. In 2010, donor countries fell \$500 million short of their expected contribution to sexual and reproductive health services in developing countries. Contraceptive prevalence has increased globally by just 0.1 per cent per year over the last few years.

However, there are signs of progress. Last July, at the London Summit on Family Planning, donor countries and foundations together pledged \$2.6 billion to make family planning available to 120 million women in developing countries with unmet needs by 2020. Developing countries themselves also pledged to increase support.

But, according to the report, an additional \$4.1 billion is necessary each year to meet the unmet need for family planning of all 222 million women who would use family planning but currently lack access to it. This investment would save lives by preventing unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions.

However, money is just one part of the solution. To ensure that every person's right to family planning is realized, the report also calls on governments and leaders to:

Take or reinforce a rights-based approach to family planning

Secure an emphasis on family planning in the global sustainable development agenda that will follow the Millennium Development Goals in 2015

Ensure equality by focusing on specific excluded groups

Raise the funds to invest fully in family planning.

"Family planning is not a privilege, but a right. Yet, too many women—and men—are denied this human right," said Dr. Osotimehin. "The pledge we made in July in London to increase access to family planning will improve the lives of millions and will each year help avert 200,000 maternal deaths. As we approach the target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, I call on all leaders to build on this momentum, close the funding gap, and make voluntary family planning a development priority."

**Source:** [United Nations Population Fund](#)