Unintended Pregnancy and Abortion in Uganda

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Background – Uganda

- Population of nearly 35 million:
  - One of the highest population growth rates in the world (>3%)
  - 8 million women of reproductive age

- GNP per capita: $510
  - Lower than Sub-Saharan average
Background – Uganda

- Heavily rural population
  - 20% of women 15–49 live in urban areas

- Educational attainment is improving
  - 28% of women had at least some secondary education in 2011 compared with 18% in 2000
In 2008 More Than Half of All Pregnancies Were Unintended

2.2 Million Pregnancies

- Intended: 44%
- Unintended: 56%

Source: DHS, 2012
Nearly One-Third of Unintended Pregnancies End in Abortion

1.2 Million Unintended Pregnancies, 2008

Source: DHS, 2012
More Than Four in 10 Births Are Mistimed or Unwanted

% of births that were unplanned, 2011

- National: 32% Unwanted, 12% Mistimed
- Rural: 32% Unwanted, 12% Mistimed
- Urban: 30% Unwanted, 9% Mistimed
- Poor: 33% Unwanted, 12% Mistimed
- Nonpoor: 29% Unwanted, 11% Mistimed
- ≤ primary: 31% Unwanted, 13% Mistimed
- ≥ secondary: 32% Unwanted, 7% Mistimed

Source: DHS, 2012
Levels of Unplanned Births Vary by Region

% of births that were unplanned, 2011

- National: 43%
- Kampala: 31%
- Central 1: 37%
- Central 2: 46%
- East Central: 47%
- Eastern: 50%
- North: 54%
- Karamoja: 12%
- West Nile: 49%
- Western: 44%
- Southwest: 36%

Source: DHS, 2012
Unintended Birth Rates Are High

• On average, Ugandan women have nearly two children more than they would like to have.

• This is one of the highest gaps between desired and actual fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa.
Rural and Poor Women Struggle to Meet Their Fertility Goals

Number of children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Wanted fertility rate</th>
<th>Total fertility rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest Wealth quintile</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Wealth quintile</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DHS, 2012
Premarital Sex Is Increasingly Common

- More than one in three never-married women aged 15–24 have had sex
- On average, age at first sex is more than a year earlier than age at first marriage
- One in five unmarried women are sexually active
Young Women Are Particularly Vulnerable

- Coercive sexual experiences are common
- Young women and girls are less likely to negotiate contraceptive use in these situations
- Premarital sexual activity is taboo, often resulting in reluctance to get contraceptive services and information
Contraceptive Use Remains Low

% women using contraceptives, aged 15–49

Source: DHS, 2012
There Are Deep Disparities in Modern Method Use

- Nationally, 26% of married women use a modern contraceptive method.
- However, only 13–15% of Ugandan’s poorest and least educated women use a modern method compared with 37–39% of the wealthiest and most educated women.
Levels of Unmet Need Vary by Residence, Wealth and Education

% married women 15–49 with unmet need for contraception

- **Total**: 33
- **Rural**: 35
- **Urban**: 21
- **Poor**: 40
- **Non-poor**: 28
- **≤Primary**: 35
- **≥Secondary**: 23

Source: DHS, 2012
Unmet Need Is Prevalent

• About one in three married women do not want a child soon or at all but are not using any method of contraception

• 39% of unmarried, sexually active women have an unmet need for contraception
Barriers to Contraceptive Use

• Lack of access to family planning services is common

• Rural women are twice as likely as urban women to cite lack of access as a reason for nonuse

• Male partners may discourage or disallow contraceptive use

• Many women fear side or health effects
Unsafe Abortion Is Common

- Nearly 300,000 clandestine abortions occurred in Uganda in 2003
- The abortion rate was 54 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age
- This was considerably higher than the abortion rate in Eastern Africa, 36 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age
Level of Risk Varies by Socioeconomic Status

- Wealthier women can often access safer abortion providers and methods.
- Poor and rural women are most likely to suffer complications compared with wealthier, urban women.
Abortion Is a Leading Cause of Maternal Death

• The Ugandan Ministry of Health estimates that 26% of all maternal deaths are due to unsafe abortion

• In Eastern Africa as a whole, 18% of maternal deaths are due to unsafe abortion

• For every maternal death, many more Ugandan women experience injuries, some severe and permanent, from unsafe procedures
Abortion Laws and Policies Are Unclear

- Ugandan laws and policies on abortion are unclear and are often interpreted inconsistently.
- Abortion is permissible in cases of fetal anomaly, rape and incest, or if the woman has HIV.
- However, because interpretations of the law vary, medical providers often fear legal consequences.
Investments in Modern Contraceptives Can Improve Maternal Health

• A 2009 study estimated that $81 million would be saved annually in pregnancy-related medical care if just 50% of unmet need for modern contraception were met.

• $162 million would be saved if all unmet need for modern contraception were met.

• The typical cost of postabortion care is five times greater than a year’s worth of modern contraceptive services.
Recommendations

• Ensure that free or affordable family planning services are available to all women, especially those that are poor or young

• Expand and improve the quality of postabortion care services

• Improve health care providers’ ability to offer abortion services within the confines of the law
Available Materials

• In Brief: Abortion in Ghana
• Facts on Abortion in Ghana
• Facts on Contraception and Unintended Pregnancy in Uganda

For more information, please visit www.guttmacher.org