

ADDING IT UP

The Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health Care



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustained and increased investment in sexual and reproductive health services in developing countries promises tremendous benefits to women, families and societies. In addition to improved health, sexual and reproductive health services contribute to economic growth, societal and gender equity, and democratic governance. To better appreciate the substantial returns on sexual and reproductive health investments, policymakers need both a fuller accounting of these broad benefits than has been available to date and more complete information about costs.

Sexual and reproductive health services encompass three main areas: contraceptive services, maternal health services and services related to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, and other gynecologic and urologic problems. Their benefits fall into two large categories—medical and nonmedical.

The medical benefits of improved sexual and reproductive health are the most obvious and perhaps the easiest to measure.

- Sexual and reproductive ill health accounts for one-third of the global burden of disease among women of reproductive age and one-fifth of the burden of disease among the population overall.
- HIV/AIDS accounts for 6% of the global burden of disease.
- The need for sexual and reproductive health services, and thus the potential benefit of meeting the need, is greatest among the poorest women, men and children in the world's lowest-income countries.
- Satisfying the unmet need for contraceptive services in developing countries would avert 52 million unintended pregnancies annually, which, in turn, would save more than 1.5 million lives and prevent 505,000 children from losing their mothers.
- The cost of providing contraceptive services to the 201 million women in developing countries with unmet need (those using traditional methods or no method) would be \$3.9 billion per year.

Understanding the full benefits of sexual and reproductive health services requires looking beyond medical outcomes to broader individual, family and societal benefits.

- Improved sexual and reproductive health underpins all of the Millennium Development Goals.
- By keeping young adults healthy and productive, by allowing parents to have smaller families and thus devote greater time and financial resources to each child, and by reducing public expenditures on education, health care and other social services, sexual and reproductive health services contribute to economic growth and equity.
- By enabling young women to delay childbearing until they have achieved education and training goals and preventing stigmatizing medical conditions, sexual and reproductive health services contribute toward improving women's social position and increasing their community and political participation.

Turning back the HIV/AIDS pandemic, helping women balance work and family, and preventing maternal deaths depend on mobilizing new resources for sexual and reproductive health services.

- More than three-quarters of spending on sexual and reproductive health care is currently provided by individuals, governments and nongovernmental organizations in developing countries.
- Donors in developed countries, in particular, have fallen far short of their commitments made at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. In 2000, these countries provided \$2.6 billion for sexual and reproductive health services—less than half of what they had pledged for that year.

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