

ADDING IT UP:

Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals

In the September 2000 Millennium Declaration, world leaders agreed to a broad agenda aimed at reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. By 2002, this agenda had been refined into eight concrete goals, each paired with a set of measurable targets. Improved sexual and reproductive health directly underpins goals 3–8 and indirectly affects the achievement of goals 1 and 2.¹

1. *“Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”*

Smaller families and wider birth intervals as the result of contraceptive use allow families to invest more in each child’s nutrition and health, and can reduce poverty and hunger for all members of a household. At the national level, fertility reduction may enable accelerated social and economic development.

2. *“Achieve universal primary education”*

Families with fewer children, and children spaced further apart, can afford to invest more in each child’s education. This has a special benefit for girls, whose education may have lower priority than that of boys in the family. In addition, girls who have access to contraceptives are less likely than those who do not to become pregnant and drop out of school.

3. *“Promote gender equality and empower women”*

Controlling whether and when to have children is a critical aspect of women’s empowerment. Women who can plan the timing and number of their births also have greater opportunities for work, education and social participation outside the home.

4. *“Reduce child mortality”*

Prenatal care and the ability to avoid high-risk births (e.g., those to very young women and those spaced closely together) help prevent infant and child deaths. Children in large families are likely to have reduced health care, and unwanted children are more likely to die than wanted ones.

5. *“Improve maternal health”*

Preventing unplanned and high-risk pregnancies and providing care in pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period save women’s lives.

6. *“Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases”*

Sexual and reproductive health care includes preventing and treating sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. In addition, reproductive health care can bring patients into the health care system, encouraging diagnosis and treatment of other diseases and conditions.

7. *“Ensure environmental sustainability”*

Providing sexual and reproductive health services, and avoiding unwanted births, may help stabilize rural areas, slow urban migration and balance natural resource use with the needs of the population.

8. *“Develop a global partnership for development”*

Affordable prices for drugs to treat HIV/AIDS and a secure supply of contraceptives would greatly advance reproductive health programs, and are especially needed in the least-developed countries.