

# The Case for Investment in Family Planning for Women's Empowerment and Economic Development:

## An Introduction to the Family Planning Impact Consortium

Family planning enables women to realize their reproductive rights and reliably control the timing, spacing and number of births. It is recognized as one of the most cost-effective health interventions for achieving many of the world's development goals.<sup>1</sup> Family planning also empowers women and girls socially and economically,<sup>2-5</sup> and it boosts the national economy.<sup>2,6</sup> Investment in family planning, therefore, is an investment in economic development.

In many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), national family planning programs compete with other programs for funding. Investments in family planning programs are declining,<sup>7</sup> with negative effects on girls and women, families and national economies.<sup>8</sup> Many governments in LMICs rely on donor funding to finance much of their family planning programming. However, changing political agendas in donor countries and global economic crises have led to financing gaps for family planning programs and rendered the assurance of future donor funding uncertain. Governments, donors and other local and international stakeholders must reassess and reinvigorate their commitment to family planning investment in order to harness the far-reaching social and economic benefits of family planning.

### Why Is Investment in Family Planning Needed?

In the last 30 years, the incidence of unintended pregnancy and unplanned births has fallen worldwide. However, the declines vary greatly within and across LMICs, and large gaps in access to reliable means of fertility control remain. The need is particularly great in Sub-Saharan Africa, where declines in unintended pregnancy and unplanned births have been much slower compared to other world regions.<sup>9,10</sup> In this region, the proportion of women at risk for unintended pregnancy who are not using a modern method of contraception is almost twice as high as the proportion for all LMIC regions (45% compared to 24%).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, unsafe abortion remains highly prevalent in the region.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to reducing unintended pregnancy and unplanned births, access to voluntary, high-quality family planning services has other major benefits, including reduced maternal mortality and morbidity.<sup>12</sup> Family planning can give a mother more time between pregnancies and to breastfeed.<sup>13</sup> This optimizes health outcomes for mothers and infants,<sup>14</sup> and the control over the spacing between births allows women to better navigate their participation in the workforce.<sup>3</sup>

Further, family planning enables women and adolescents to realize their reproductive rights.<sup>15</sup> With reliable control over their timing, spacing and number of births, women and adolescents are able to plan and achieve goals for schooling, training and careers, leading to their social and economic empowerment.<sup>3</sup>

Investing in family planning services is highly cost-effective. It is estimated that a US\$1 investment in family planning would result in a US\$60-100 return to economic growth over time.<sup>16</sup> Each additional US\$1 spent on contraceptive services would reduce the cost of pregnancy-related and newborn care by US\$3.<sup>12</sup>

### What Are Recommended Pathways to Increasing Investment in Family Planning?

The following recommendations heed current evidence, promote sexual and reproductive health and rights and outline several feasible paths to increasing family planning investment.

- **Governments in LMICs and stakeholders should advocate for international donors to continue to provide, and to increase, their financial support for family planning programs in LMICs.** As of 2019, donors provided almost half (45%) of funding for family planning expenditures for LMICs.<sup>7</sup> If donors do not increase their support or at least sustain current funding levels, many LMICs will not be able to meet family planning needs in their countries, and the effectiveness and impact of investments in other health and development programs could be hindered.<sup>8,13,17</sup>

- **Governments in LMICs should include family planning as a specific line item in national budgets.** Allocating family planning funding to broader, related budget lines, such as sexual and reproductive health or general health care, may result in allocated funds being spent on services other than family planning. To ensure that family planning services are adequately supported, governments can secure domestic funding for family planning services and supplies by creating a specific line item for family planning costs in their national budgets.<sup>18</sup>
- **Governments in LMICs should champion family planning through policy statements and public education.** By promoting family planning and publicizing its role in increasing women's empowerment and families' economic situations, governments can increase the acceptance and uptake of family planning.
- **Governments in LMICs should ensure that family planning services are available and of high quality.** Official guidelines that define the elements of quality care, robust supply chains and well-trained health care staff can help ensure adequate provision of quality family planning services for all who need them.
- **Civil society organizations, professional associations and other local actors should advocate for adequate funding for family planning.** Local advocates play an essential role in promoting the health, rights and social and economic empowerment of women and families in their communities.
- **Governments in LMICs, donors and advocates should work together to realize sustained and increased investment in family planning.** A coordinated multisectoral approach is essential to garner and sustain funding for family planning and to realize its widespread social and economic benefits.

### What Will the Family Planning Impact Consortium Do?

Though some research exists on the impact of family planning programs on contraceptive use and fertility outcomes,<sup>19</sup> and on gains in national economic development,<sup>6</sup> there is scant robust and consistent empirical evidence that shows the effect of contraceptive use on women's social and economic empowerment and economic development in general.

The Family Planning Impact Consortium (FP-Impact) will address these research gaps and strengthen the investment case for family planning. Established in 2022 by the Guttmacher Institute, in collaboration with the African Institute for Development Policy, Avenir Health and the Institute for Disease Modeling, of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Health Division, the consortium brings together five modeling groups from universities

and research institutions worldwide to develop robust estimates of the impact of family planning on economic development.

The overarching aim of FP-Impact's work is to demonstrate how directing funding to family planning programs has far-reaching benefits for the social welfare and economic empowerment of women and their families, as well as for national economies. The consortium's research will build on the body of evidence on LMICs—with particular, though not exclusive, attention given to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The consortium will share initial results in 2024.

**Stakeholders and policymakers can follow FP-Impact's research progress and learn more about how funding reproductive rights translates to economic development at [www.guttmacher.org/fp-impact-consortium](http://www.guttmacher.org/fp-impact-consortium).**

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