

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

An Introduction to the Family Planning Impact Consortium

Key Points

- The incidence of unintended pregnancy and unplanned births has fallen worldwide, but many women and couples still need reliable control over their fertility, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Meeting this need requires national governments, global agencies and international donors to expand their investment in family planning.
- Family planning enables women to realize their reproductive rights and reliably control the timing, spacing and number of births. Control over fertility can improve their educational and career trajectories, and eventually their economic empowerment, with concomitant economic benefits to their families and wider communities.
- Economic benefits to women, their families and their communities, when aggregated, result in overall social and economic development for countries.
- The financial support of international donors, who have been a major funding source for family planning programs in LMICs, is dwindling, thus jeopardizing the provision of family planning services. Women, families, communities and countries are negatively impacted by the shortfall.
- Domestic governments have a critical role in ensuring funding within national budgets; championing family planning services through actionable policy statements and public education; and advancing high-quality, adequately staffed health care services and systems. Although some countries have taken steps in this direction, there is a pressing need for more domestic investment in family planning.
- A new endeavor, the Family Planning Impact Consortium (FP-Impact), will use a variety of innovative modeling techniques to quantify the impact of family planning on individual women's economic empowerment and economic development in LMICs—with particular, though not exclusive, focus on Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Donors, governments, advocates, researchers, civil society organizations and other stakeholders can use the evidence summarized in this brief and FP-Impact findings, when they are released, starting in 2024, to bolster the case for increased and sustained family planning funding from domestic and international donor sources.

An investment in family planning is an investment in social and economic development. Family planning empowers women and girls socially and economically¹⁻⁴ and boosts the national economy.^{1,5}

Family planning has been recognized as one of the most cost-effective health interventions that facilitate the achievement of many of the world's development goals.⁶ In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development, governments around the world adopted the Programme of Action supporting user-centered, voluntary family planning services to improve quality of life for all people.⁷ At its core, the Programme aimed to empower women and families to make and implement decisions about their family size; it placed women's human rights at the center of development. In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by all United Nations Member States, identified universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as essential to achieving gender equality, women's and girls' economic empowerment and overall development targets, including the eradication of poverty and extreme hunger.^{8,9} The Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the central role of family planning as a component of SRHR that is a pivotal element for achieving broader social and economic goals.

This document makes a case for investing in family planning. It highlights what research has already shown about how family planning impacts women's and families' social welfare, women's economic empowerment and national economies. It offers recommendations for ways to increase investment in family planning, and it introduces an innovative research initiative that will provide new estimates of these far-reaching impacts.

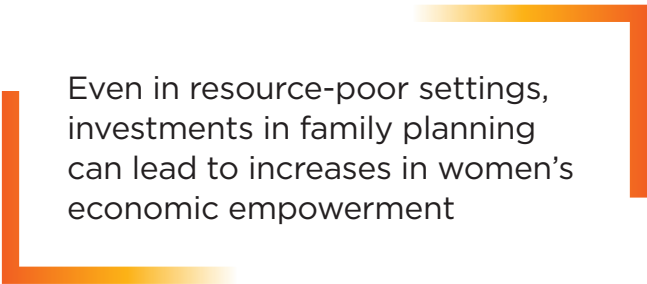
What the Current Research Shows

Family planning programs have effects at individual, household, community and national levels and can improve women's economic empowerment.

In many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, women's desired family size is smaller than their actual family size.¹⁰ This is largely due to persistently high levels of unintended preg-

nancy and unplanned births.^{11,12} Family planning enables women of reproductive age (15–49 years old) to realize their reproductive rights and reliably control the timing, spacing and number of children.¹³ Having control over these core elements of fertility allows women to attain a higher level of education and training, more job experience, a wider range of career choices and greater advancement in their careers than they otherwise would.^{1–4,14–18} Family planning enables women to not only enter the formal labor force but also attain the education needed to advance in higher-level career paths. Better education and better careers for women are key facilitators of economic empowerment.^{17,18} Even in resource-poor settings, investments in family planning can lead to increases in women’s economic empowerment,⁴ indicating that countries need not wait for broader economic development to spur women’s economic empowerment.

With access to high-quality family planning, women not only reap direct economic benefits themselves but also enhance their contributions to the national economy.⁵ In Tanzania, for example, a modeling study demonstrated how different levels and combinations of investment in family planning, economic reforms, governance, health care and education would influence the country’s future per capita GDP.¹⁹ If investments were to focus on economic reforms alone, the per capita GDP gains would be US\$5,871 by 2050. By also prioritizing family planning and other investments, Tanzania would achieve an additional US\$3,147 in per capita GDP gains, resulting in a total of



Even in resource-poor settings, investments in family planning can lead to increases in women’s economic empowerment

US\$9,018. Another modeling study assessed the impact of unmet need for modern contraception in Kenya on per capita GDP from 2005 to 2050 through effects on the relative size of the working-age population.²⁰ It determined that, if two-thirds of the unmet need for modern contraception in Kenya were met, the country would experience a 51% per capita GDP increase over the scenario in which unmet need remained unchanged.

Returns on investments in family planning have been quantified in a few global studies. Kohler and Behrman estimated that a US\$1 investment in family planning would result in a US\$60–100 return, over time, in economic growth.²¹ Furthermore, the Guttmacher Institute estimated that each additional US\$1 spent on contraceptive services in LMICs would reduce the cost of pregnancy-related and newborn care by US\$3.²² Because

of the far-reaching effects of family planning investment across the life course, this preliminary evidence shows that investing in family planning services is highly cost-effective.

Recommended Pathways to Increasing Investment in Family Planning

Inadequate financing remains a key issue in global health, particularly funding for family planning, which is insufficient in many parts of the world but most notably in LMICs. This results in an inadequate supply of family planning resources and unequal access to voluntary, high-quality family planning services. It also hinders the achievement of the social and economic gains previously described. The recommendations that follow outline feasible paths to increasing investments in family planning.

Governments and stakeholders should advocate for international donors to continue to provide, and to increase, their financial support for family planning programs in LMICs.

Delivery of family planning products and services relies on donor-funded initiatives in many LMICs. In 2019, international donors provided roughly 45% of family planning expenditures in LMICs, compared with 41% from domestic governments and 14% from users themselves.²³ In Mozambique, external donor support covered more than 80% of family planning expenditures in 2019 and 2020.²⁴ However, recent economic crises, volatility in currency exchange rates and politically driven reductions in development assistance in some donor countries have led to financing gaps for family planning. In 2021, donor funding for family planning totaled US\$1.39 billion, essentially flat compared to the 2020 level (US\$1.41 billion).²⁵ Significant decreases in funding from some large donor nations have jeopardized critical efforts to bring family planning services to areas of high need.²⁶

International donors should also recognize how neglecting family planning might hinder the effectiveness and impact of their investments in other health and development programs. Governments, multilateral and bilateral agencies, private foundations and stakeholders at all levels should advocate for international donors to sustain, and to increase, their financial support for family planning programs in LMICs.

Domestic governments should include family planning as a specific line item in national budgets.

Though funding from foreign donors is important, domestic government backing is critical. In the 2001 Abuja Declaration, African governments committed to increasing the proportion of their national budgets allocated to health to 15% annually.²⁷ However, because of competing demands for resources, many African countries are very far from meeting this health-financing target, leaving only a small percentage of national resources allocated

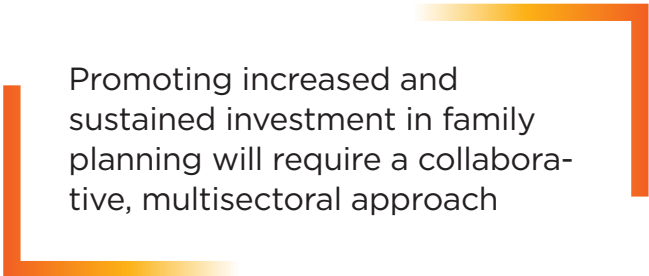
to family planning.²⁸ To uphold their commitment to the Abuja Declaration and ensure funding regardless of the economic and political environment among international donors, governments of LMICs should create a specific line item for family planning in their national budgets.

Domestic governments should champion family planning through policy statements and public education.

Through actionable policy statements and public education in support of family planning, governments of LMICs can communicate the many benefits that result from family planning. These include benefits to the health and economic well-being of women and families, women's empowerment, national levels of educational achievement and broad economic progress. Governments' explicit championing of family planning can positively influence the acceptance and uptake of family planning.

Domestic governments should ensure that family planning services are available and of high quality.

Governments can ensure the quality of family planning services by developing official guidelines that define the components of care, the roles and responsibilities of different cadres of health care providers and the processes for procuring contraceptive supplies for different levels of public sector facilities. Governments can also increase the availability of family planning information and services by building and maintaining family planning clinics, training and supporting community health workers, adding family planning services to existing health services and assisting with the process of importation and distribution of family planning products.



Promoting increased and sustained investment in family planning will require a collaborative, multisectoral approach

Civil society organizations, professional associations and other local actors should advocate for adequate funding for family planning.

Local stakeholders play an essential role in ensuring that family planning is prioritized within their countries. They should use evidence- and rights-based arguments to ensure that women have access to needed contraceptive care and can achieve the timing and number of births they want. They should reinforce the short- and long-term benefits of family planning, including better health and a higher social and economic status for women.

These stakeholders should also make the case for their countries to include family planning in universal health coverage schemes, emphasizing that such inclusion is

critical to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 5. Advocates can draw inspiration from the Centre for Reproductive Health and Education, a non-profit NGO in Zambia, and its partners, whose advocacy was pivotal in Zambia becoming the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to announce a universal health coverage benefits package that includes the full range of contraceptive methods.²⁹

Governments, donors and advocates should work together to realize sustained and increased investment in family planning.

Each of the many stakeholders involved in this effort has a specific role to play, and all are needed if the effort is to be successful. A coordinated multisectoral approach is essential to garner and sustain funding for family planning and to realize its widespread social and economic benefits.

The Family Planning Impact Consortium and Its New Modeling Approach

A few narrative and systematic reviews have been conducted,^{1,2,5} and modeling efforts undertaken,^{19,20} to make the case for investing in family planning at the national level. However, scant robust empirical evidence exists to show the effect of contraceptive use on women's economic empowerment and economic development in general. To support the previous recommendations and to strengthen the investment case for family planning, the Guttmacher Institute formed the Family Planning Impact Consortium (FP-Impact), 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, in 2022. FP-Impact brings together five groups of modeling experts from universities and research institutions worldwide to develop and disseminate new estimates of the broad social and economic benefits of family planning.

Because the success of family planning programs can depend on the context in which they are implemented,³⁰ the FP-Impact modeling groups will combine multiple innovative, empirical methodologies (e.g., Bayesian tree analysis, agent-based modeling, propensity score matching and macro simulations) in their work. This project will account for context-specific influences (e.g., level of education, age at marriage, decision-making on family planning use and fertility rates) in quantifying the impact of family planning on women's social and economic empowerment and economic development.

The evidence FP-Impact generates will help governments and donors understand the specific circumstances under which family planning programs can yield maximum returns to improve individual women's empowerment and attain macro-level socioeconomic targets. The consortium will focus on LMICs—with particular, though not exclusive,

attention to Sub-Saharan Africa, the world region with the largest additional annual investment needed for family planning and sexual and reproductive health.²²

FP-Impact's approach is at the microeconomic, or individual, level and complements the demographic dividend framework. The demographic dividend framework focuses on the macroeconomic impact of a decline in fertility on national economic growth through the rising proportion of people in the working-age population (first demographic dividend) and increased wealth accumulation (second demographic dividend).²⁰ At the microeconomic level, FP-Impact will quantify the impact of family planning use on women's empowerment through education and participation in the labor force, and the eventual contribution to the national economy. This project will provide new insights into the pathways through which fertility decline can influence the national economy, with models adapted to the context of the individual. Studies that apply the demographic dividend framework have shown that economic benefits can be achieved with a decline in fertility. FP-Impact will therefore provide a quantifiable, context-specific roadmap of how these economic benefits can be accessed.

Promoting increased and sustained investment in family planning, and realizing the far-reaching social and economic benefits, will require a collaborative, multisectoral approach. Stakeholders' early and sustained engagement among policymakers, such as the ministries of health and finance, will be critical to coordinating the allocation of adequate funding for family planning programs. (FP-Impact has created a policy brief, which can be used in engagement with policymakers.)

FP-Impact will conduct its work through 2025. Initial results will be shared in 2024 at www.guttmacher.org/fp-impact-consortium.

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