



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

## ISSUE BRIEF

### **USAID Population and Reproductive Health Programs: A U.S. Foreign Assistance Success Story**

USAID's family planning program is one of the success stories in U.S. development assistance. Since the launch of the program in 1965, families in the developing world are better able to feed, clothe, educate, and provide health care for their children. Family planning programs help couples determine the number and spacing of their children, which results in healthier mothers and families, reduce unintended pregnancies, promote maternal and child health, and stabilize world population. USAID supports family planning in more than 60 countries. Countless women and children are alive today as a result of USAID assistance.

#### USAID's family planning programs:

- Provide modern methods of contraception to hundreds of millions of couples annually
- Slow population growth and reduce poverty
- Contribute to strengthening the family unit
- Helps reduce sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS

#### Family planning is an integral component of every comprehensive primary health care package.

Research results and experience show there are family planning benefits the health of women and children. Pregnancy can be risky for certain groups of women – the very young, older women, women with more than four children and women with existing health problems. For each maternal death, more than 100 women suffer illnesses related to pregnancy and childbirth. Child deaths also can be prevented through adequate birth spacing, prevention of births among very young women, and prevention of birth among women with four or more children.

**Family planning reduces abortions.** Each year, an estimated 78 million women die from abortions. Provisions of emergency health care in these instances and providing follow-up services including education and counseling about family planning will reduce the numbers of these deaths.

**Nearly half a million women die annually from pregnancy-related causes, leaving thousands of orphans.** Another 18 million women suffer long-term reproductive health complications. Family planning enables women to avoid high-risk pregnancies (such as when the mother is too young or too old) and space their children 3 years or more so that women can recover from childbirth and enter the next pregnancy in a healthy state.

**In many countries, birth spacing could prevent nearly a quarter of infant deaths.** Family planning fosters healthier children by allowing parents to space births 3 years or more. Children born less than 3 years after a sibling are more likely to die in infancy. Children who are born too close together are far more likely to suffer from low birth weight or other complications.

In 2006, after nearly four decades of support, USAID graduated one of the most successful family planning programs in the developing world – that of Indonesia. Through strong partnerships with Indonesian non-governmental organizations and faith based groups, the average family has become smaller. The decrease in family size has translated into healthier and better educated children. In a developing country context, the single most important factor in the survival of young children is a mother's ability to space out her births, and this is reflected in Indonesia. Infant mortality has undergone more than a fourfold decline, from 142 deaths per 1,000 birth live births in 1967 to 35 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000.

**There is a widespread unmet demand for family planning programs.** Millions of couples want to space their children or postpone or end childbearing so they can properly care for their families. Our experience in the field shows that providing the option of family planning to couples is responding to a deeply felt need.

**One billion young people are entering their reproductive years and another billion are right behind them.** These young people will require reproductive health services. In Africa, half of new infections are in the 15-24

age group, with young girls and women accounting for 75% of these. Young people are among the most vulnerable to STIs and HIV/AIDS and also are at risk of unintended pregnancies.

**Contraceptives provide a safe and effective way to regulate fertility and preserve health.** In order to determine the number and spacing of their children freely and responsibly, women and men need a choice of contraceptive methods appropriate to their needs. Not only are contraceptives effective in protecting against pregnancy, some have non-contraceptive health benefits including providing some protection against sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV/AIDS.

**Family planning is a low cost, highly effective health intervention.** Family planning programs in developing countries cost a modest amount, about US\$10-20 per woman each year. By reducing unintended pregnancies, family planning saves lives and costs less than maternity-care services. Maternal and child health care costs can be double that of family planning. As reduced fertility eases pressures on the environment and social systems, governments save money. (1)

**Family planning can promote development by alleviating poverty.**

With populations in many low-income countries doubling every 25 to 30 years, many countries have found it difficult to reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty. However, many countries were able to reduce poverty and improve living conditions when they adopted strong family planning programs as part of their development efforts.

Thailand once faced a high population growth. But as a result of a far-reaching family planning effort made possible with USAID assistance that was officially launched in 1971, Thailand has gained impressive control over its growth rate. Use of contraceptives among married couples has increased from 15 to 70 percent, and in 15 years Thailand's population growth rate has been cut in half, from 3.2 percent to 1.6 percent in 1992.(2)

**Updated July 2006**

(1) *Family Planning: A Development Success Story*. The World Bank Group. May 1994. (2) *Thailand: A Family Planning Success Story*, by Edorah Frazer, *Birth, Sex & Death* (IC#31), Spring 1992, Page 44, Copyright (c)1992, 1996 by Context Institute