



Family planning: the unfinished agenda

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Summary

Promotion of family planning in countries with high birth rates has the potential to reduce poverty and hunger and avert 32% of all maternal deaths and nearly 10% of childhood deaths. It would also contribute substantially to women's empowerment, achievement of universal primary schooling, and long-term environmental sustainability. In the past 40 years, family-planning programmes have played a major part in raising the prevalence of contraceptive practice from less than 10% to 60% and reducing fertility in developing countries from six to about three births per woman. However, in half the 75 larger low-income and lower-middle income countries (mainly in Africa), contraceptive practice remains low and fertility, population growth, and unmet need for family planning are high. The cross-cutting contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals makes greater investment in family planning in these countries compelling. Despite the size of this unfinished agenda, international funding and promotion of family planning has waned in the past decade. A revitalisation of the agenda is urgently needed. Historically, the USA has taken the lead but other governments or agencies are now needed as champions. Based on the sizeable experience of past decades, the key features of effective programmes are clearly established. Most governments of poor countries already have appropriate population and family-planning policies but are receiving too little international encouragement and funding to implement them with vigour. What is currently missing is political willingness to incorporate family planning into the development arena.

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