

## Family Planning Empowers Women and Communities

### USAID Global Health



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With functional health care systems and medical technology, pregnancy- and childbirth-related deaths have become rare in the developed world. But in many developing countries, they are among the most frequent causes of mortality in women of childbearing age. Each year, some 356,000 women die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, with 99 percent of these deaths occurring in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Teenage pregnancies in girls under age 15 are dangerous, with a fivefold to sevenfold risk of death compared to women aged 20 to 24. Women at the other end of the age scale are at a higher risk, as well. Having too many and too frequent births endangers both the health of mothers and increases the infant mortality rate. Unintended pregnancies can end in clandestine abortions, causing another estimated 46,000 deaths.

USAID is a global leader in the effort to provide voluntary family planning services and programs that allow couples to freely choose the number and spacing of their families. When men and women can determine their fertility, most couples choose smaller families. Countries with greater contraceptive prevalence among women are also more likely to have a more highly educated and paid female population. Women are less likely to be viewed as property in that they have more autonomy and are less tied to household and family roles.

USAID currently supports comprehensive reproductive health programs that serve more than 25 million women in more than 50 developing nations. These programs focus on service delivery; contraceptive security, which ensures that people can choose, obtain and use high-quality contraceptives; operational and biomedical research; and education and information campaigns, along with work to improve host-country policies related to family planning products and service provision.

Since the inception of USAID's family planning programs in 1965, the use of modern family planning methods in the developing world has quadrupled – from less than 10 percent to more than 39 percent today. In the 39 countries with the largest USAID-supported programs, the average number of children per family has dropped – by choice – from more than six to close to four.

USAID's work in family planning is a key component in a comprehensive development program.

Family planning:

- Enables couples to choose the number and spacing of births
- Helps reduce maternal and child mortality
- Helps reduce the spread of HIV, particularly mother-to-child transmission
- Reduces abortions
- Improves women's economic opportunities
- Ensures families are better fed, clothed and educated
- Mitigates the impact of population growth on the environment, the economy and state stability

**June 2011**