



ISSUE BRIEF

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Children Ensuring Safe Pregnancy and Birth for Women around the World

For many years, Gorette Nyabenda, a mother and wife living in northern Burundi, lived as a virtual prisoner to her husband—not allowed to socialize with other women or even leave the house. But Gorette wanted a better life for her and her six children and eventually convinced her husband to allow her to participate in a local women’s savings and loans group. Because of her participation in the group, Gorette has been able to successfully build a small business, is learning to read and write and regularly visits a health clinic. She also has become an equal partner with her husband, voicing her opinion on critical issues around her family’s health, including deciding with her husband the size of her family.

“I was president of my village savings and loans group and considering running for an elective office for my province,” Gorette said. “The only way I could do that was because I had learned about planning my family. My youngest child was four at the time and if I didn’t have that education, I would have spent the last four years in my house being pregnant and having babies instead of learning and working.”

Gorette is lucky. More than 200 million women wish to delay or prevent a pregnancy but do not have access to voluntary family planning services. **One woman dies nearly every 90 seconds during pregnancy or childbirth—and millions more are left with life-altering disabilities.** Many of these are girls 19 or under; in fact, **pregnancy is the leading cause of death for young women aged 15 to 19 worldwide.** By using comprehensive family planning many of these deaths can be prevented. In addition, family planning helps parents plan for families which they can support, further reducing childhood death.

As an organization with more than 50 years of experience successfully implementing maternal and child health programs globally, CARE knows that simple, inexpensive interventions can reduce maternal and child deaths substantially. In more than 25 projects in 20 countries, CARE is delivering health services proven to save women’s lives, including access to emergency obstetric care, skilled care at birth and post-partum care, and voluntary family planning.

But what is family planning? Family planning is a comprehensive multi-step approach that allows women and their husbands to access voluntary tools and education to help them determine when and if they will have children. While there is no one tool that will completely eliminate maternal mortality, by utilizing the following components together a woman can better protect her life and the life of her child.

The Tools Needed to Plan Responsibly TRAINING AND COMMUNICATIONS

In many communities around the world there is a desperate need for trained health care providers. Where trained health care providers do exist, women are often not allowed to speak directly to them about their own care. By educating both



Learning about family planning allowed Gorette Nyabenda to balance children, life as an entrepreneur and community leader.

health care providers about the effective proven interventions for healthy pregnancies and births as well as recipients about their health care rights, infant, child and maternal mortality can be reduced.

EDUCATION AROUND BIRTH SPACING

Learning about the importance of birth spacing to reproductive health is critical for women of reproductive age. **The timing of births has a powerful impact on both a child's and a mother's chances of survival.** Research shows that children born less than two years after the previous birth are about 2.5 times more likely to die before age five than children born three to five years after the previous birth. When a pregnant woman has not had time to fully recover from a previous birth, the new baby is often born underweight or premature, develops too slowly, and has an increased risk of dying in infancy or contracting infectious diseases during childhood. **In addition, women who space births three to five years apart not only have healthier babies, but are also more likely to survive pregnancy and childbirth.** By preventing high-risk pregnancies, it is estimated that family planning currently prevents 215,000 maternal deaths each year, including those from unsafe abortion.

CONTRACEPTION

More than 200 million women wish to delay or plan for child bearing, but do not have access to the contraceptive methods that would allow them to make these decisions. Fully addressing the unmet need for contraceptives alone would prevent an additional 53 million unintended pregnancies each year and reduce maternal deaths due to unsafe abortion by 82 percent.

EDUCATION AND VOLUNTARY DECISION-MAKING

CARE seeks to involve men and women in dialogue around equity in couples' decision making, including education about family planning and parenthood based on the social and cultural norms of the countries and communities in which we work. **A woman's decision to use family planning is always voluntary.**

Impacts of Successful Planning

Family planning significantly reduces infant, child and maternal mortality and improves their health. And including family planning into maternal and child health interventions provides greater impact and is more effective and less costly than focusing on either intervention independently. Meeting the unmet need for family planning would:



- Cut maternal deaths by more than two-thirds from the current global level of 356,000 to 105,000
- Reduce newborn deaths by more than half, from 3.2 million to 1.5 million
- Reduce unintended pregnancies by more than two-thirds, from 75 million to 22 million

Helping women access modern family planning methods in the developing world delivers far more than health benefits. From an economic perspective, **meeting these needs would lower the cost of providing maternal and newborn health services by \$5.1 billion**, according to the Guttmacher Institute, because roughly 50 million fewer women would become pregnant unintentionally.

In addition, family planning can actually reduce abortions in countries where abortion is legal. Approximately 87 million unintended pregnancies occur each year; more than half result in abortion and 18 million of those take place in unsafe conditions. About 68,000 women die from unsafe abortions annually; thousands more suffer serious complications. Studies in several countries show that increased contraceptive use contributes to dramatic declines in abortion rates, thereby reducing abortion-related deaths. **By taking a comprehensive approach to sexual and reproductive health, and educating women like Goretti in developing countries about the tools needed to plan their families, we can ensure healthier families for generations to come.**

Sources: Singh S et al., *Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health*, New York: Guttmacher Institute and United Nations Population Fund, 2009; Patton GC, Coffey C, Sawyer SM, Viner RM, Haller DM, Bose K, Vos T, Ferguson J, Mathers CD. Global patterns of mortality in young people: a systematic analysis of population health data. *Lancet*, 2009. 374:881-892; Setty-Venugopal, V. and Upadhyay, U.D. *Birth Spacing: Three to Five Saves Lives*. *Population Reports*, Series L, No. 13. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Population Information Program, Summer 2002; Singh S et al., Unintended pregnancy: worldwide levels, trends and outcomes, *Studies in Family Planning*, 2010, 41(4):241-250; Amy Deschner and Susan A. Cohen, *Contraceptive Use Is Key to Reducing Abortion Worldwide*, The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy, October 2003, Volume 6, Number 4.

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