



Achieving the MDGs

The contribution of family planning

El Salvador



The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—a set of eight important, time-bound goals ranging from reducing poverty by half to providing universal primary education—represent a blueprint for global development agreed to by member states of the United Nations and international development institutions. However, achieving them will be a major challenge for El Salvador and many other developing countries. As stated by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, it will take time and commitment to mobilize the necessary resources, train the required personnel, and establish the needed infrastructure to meet the MDGs.

In El Salvador and other Latin American countries, one major factor contributing to the challenge is the continued rapid growth of the population. The number of people in need of health, education, economic, and other services is large and increasing, which, in turn, means that the amount of resources, personnel, and infrastructure required to meet the MDGs is also increasing. In light of this fact, development efforts in support of the MDGs should not overlook the importance and benefits of slowing population growth.

This brief looks at how one strategy—*meeting the need for family planning*—can reduce population growth and make achieving the MDGs more affordable in El Salvador, in addition to directly contributing to the goals of reducing child mortality and improving maternal health.

Reducing MDG Costs

High rates of population growth are largely the result of frequent childbearing or high fertility—often corresponding with a large unmet need for family planning (FP). In El Salvador, women still have, on average, about 3 children each, and surveys show that the unmet need for FP services is high (about 8.9 percent of married women of reproductive age want to space or limit births but are not currently using any method of family planning). If access to family planning services was increased, this unmet need

could be met, therefore slowing population growth and reducing the costs of meeting the MDGs.

This analysis estimated the extent of the cost savings for four

of the eight MDGs. Costs were calculated under two scenarios: when unmet need for family planning remains constant and when all unmet need is gradually met by 2020. Although it may take El Salvador longer than 15 years to satisfy all unmet need what is clear is that reducing the unmet need for FP services can help El Salvador significantly reduce the costs of meeting the four selected MDGs, including:

- Achieve universal primary education
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Ensure environmental sustainability

For example, the cost of achieving the MDG for universal primary education is influenced by the number of children

Millennium Development Goals

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

needing education. Fulfilling unmet need for family planning would result in fewer children requiring education, and as a result, there would be lower costs for universal primary education. Figure 1 shows the cumulative cost savings to the education sector from satisfying unmet need—\$29.2 million would be saved by 2015. Because the effects of family planning are not immediate, long-term benefits would be even larger if the timeline were extended past 2015. Similar methodology was applied to other sectors working to meet MDGs, revealing cost savings in meeting the immunization, water and sanitation, maternal health, and malaria targets (see Figure 2).

Improving Maternal and Child Health

In addition to the cost savings incurred by addressing unmet need, greater use of FP services can contribute directly to the MDG goals to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health; family planning helps reduce the number of high-risk pregnancies that result in high levels of maternal and child illness and death. The study shows that addressing unmet need in El Salvador could be expected to avert 95 maternal deaths and about 20,000 child deaths by the target date of 2015.

Conclusion

Increasing access to and use of family planning is not one of the MDGs; however, as analysis has shown, it can make valuable contributions to achieving many of the goals. Increased contraceptive use can significantly reduce the costs of achieving selected MDGs and directly contribute to reductions in maternal and child mortality. ***The cost savings in meeting the four MDGs by satisfying unmet need outweigh the additional costs of family planning by a factor of 13 to 1.***

Figure 1. Cumulative primary education cost savings, 2007–2015 (in millions)

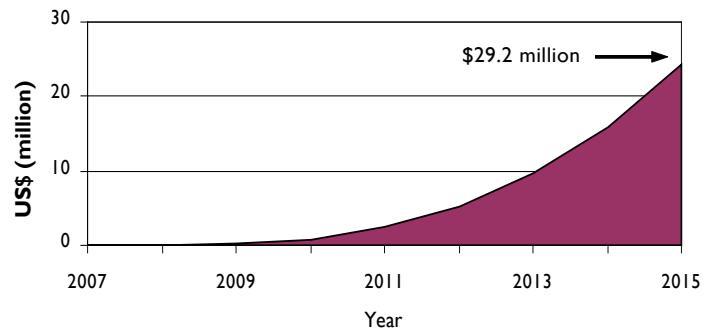
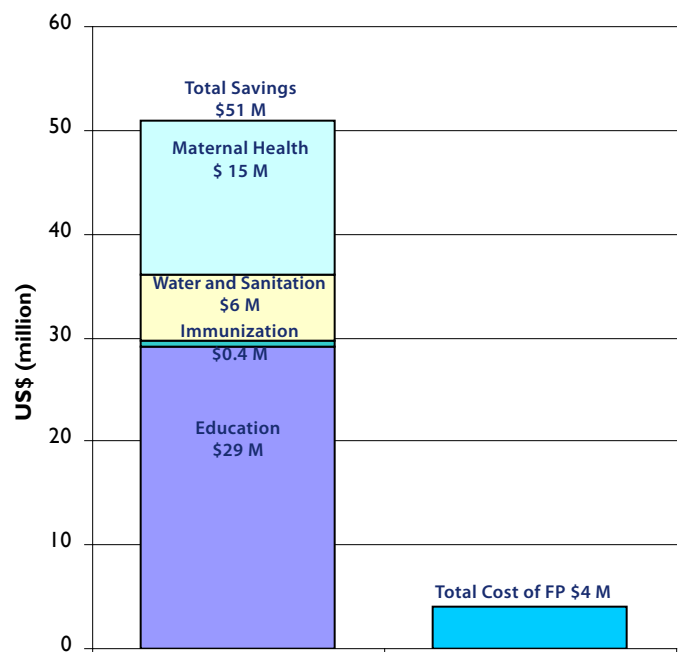


Figure 2. Social sector cost savings and family planning costs in El Salvador, 2005-2015



Updated July 2009, based on the 2002-2003 El Salvador FESAL

Photo credits (in order): (1) Three boys wait for their friends to finish seeing the dentist. © 2002 John Curley, Courtesy of Photoshare. (2) Ebenilda Osprio Campo, whose family was affected by Hurrican Mitch, stands in the doorway of her home in San Pablo, El Salvador. © 2001 Jim Stipe/Lutheran World Relief, Courtesy of Photoshare. (3) School girls at the Instituto Escolar de la Paz, a public school in Cuscatancingo, El Salvador. © 2000 Lavina Velasco, Courtesy of Photoshare.

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