



Achieving the MDGs

The contribution of family planning *Yemen*



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

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 Yemen and many other developing countries that are not “on track” to meet the goals by the target date of 2015. 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 Yemen and other developing countries in Asia and the Near East, 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 Yemen, 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 Yemen, women are having, on average, more

Meeting unmet need for family planning not only allows families to space and limit their births when desired; it can also reduce the costs of meeting the MDGs and directly contribute to the reduction of maternal and child mortality.

than 6 children each. Half of the married women ages 15-49 surveyed in 2003 said they wanted to space or limit births but were not currently using any method of family planning. If all these women were able to meet their desire to space or

limit births, Yemen’s population would grow more slowly, in turn reducing the costs of meeting five of the eight MDGs:

- Achieve universal primary education
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

This analysis estimated the extent of the cost savings for five of the eight MDGs. Costs were calculated under two scenarios: (1) if unmet need for family planning remains constant at the 2003 level; and (2) if all unmet need for family planning is gradually met by 2020. Because the level of unmet need for family planning is very high, it may take Yemen longer than 15 years to satisfy all unmet need. What is clear is that reducing the unmet need for FP services can help Yemen significantly reduce the costs of meeting the five selected MDGs.

For example, the cost of achieving the MDG for universal primary education is influenced by the number of children 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—\$60 million would be saved by 2015. Although these potential savings for education are substantial, these savings are much lower than those projected in a previous analysis based on 1997 data because Yemen’s fertility levels have remained high.

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 the MDGs, revealing cost savings in meeting the immunization, water and sanitation, maternal health, and tuberculosis targets (see Figure 2). The cost savings in meeting the five MDGs by satisfying unmet need for family planning outweigh the additional costs of family planning by a factor of 8 to 1.

Improving Maternal and Child Health

In addition to the cost savings incurred by reducing unmet need for family planning, greater use of FP services can contribute directly to the MDG goals to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health. Family planning helps to reduce the number of high-risk pregnancies that result in high levels of maternal and child illness and death. Meeting the unmet need for FP in Yemen could be expected to avert more than 3,700 maternal deaths and more than 316,000 infant and 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 this 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 five MDGs by satisfying unmet need for family planning outweigh the additional costs of family planning by a factor of 8 to 1. Yemen cannot afford to delay responding to the unmet need for FP among its population.

Figure 1. Cumulative primary education cost savings, 2010–2015 (in millions)

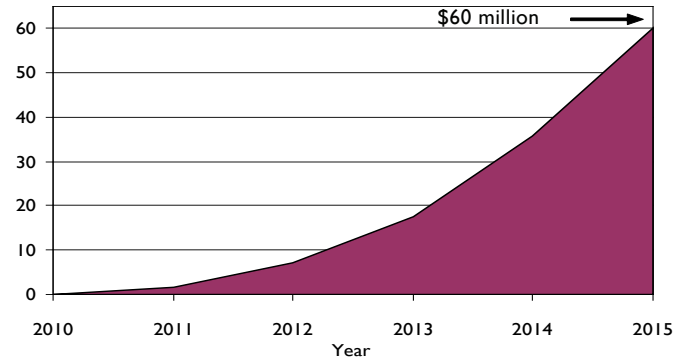
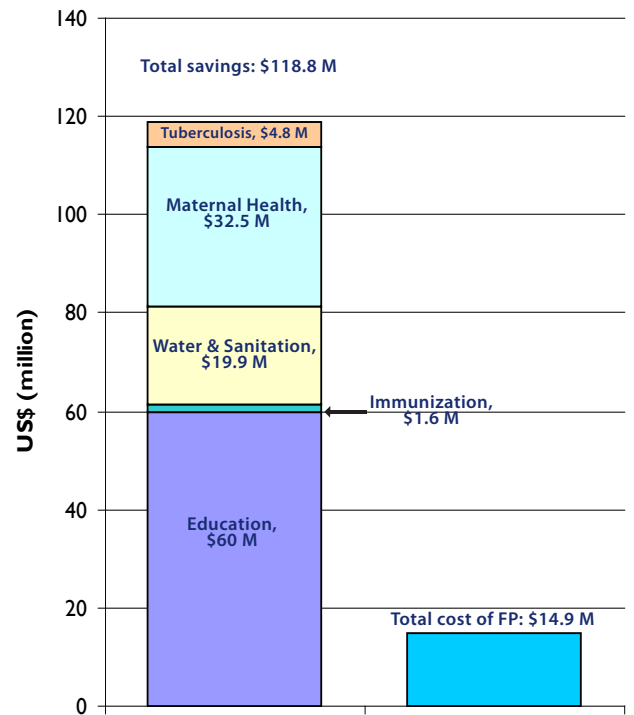


Figure 2. Social sector cost savings and family planning costs in Yemen



July 2009, based on the 2003 Yemen Family Health Survey

Photo credits (in order): (1) A young Yemeni midwife vaccinates an infant against polio at a clinic in Sanaa, Yemen. © 2006 Ben Barber, Courtesy of Photoshare. (2) A woman in Yemen shares her personal testimonial for Arab Women Speak Out (AWSO), a documentary, training, and advocacy project. © 1997 CCP, Courtesy of Photoshare. (3) Three boys take a break from playing soccer next to a road in Amman, Jordan. © 2006 Basil A. Safi/CCP, Courtesy of Photoshare.

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