

WHAT ARE THE POPULATION-LEVEL IMPACTS OF ENABLING PEOPLE TO EXERCISE THEIR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS?

UNITED NATIONS EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON FERTILITY,
CHANGING POPULATION TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

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Outline

- Human rights – milestones and concepts
- Reproductive rights
- Meeting unmet need for contraception
- Impacts
- Broader impacts
- Challenges
- Opportunities

Introduction:

“not just about counting people, but about making sure that every person counts”

- The milestones of reproductive rights approach:
 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 1948
 - International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1976)
 - Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
 - The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), (1979)
 - ICPD and focus on women’s empowerment 1994
 - MDG5b
- While progress has been achieved, challenges remain:
 - maternal mortality falls short of the MDG target
 - unmet need for family planning remains (in particular in Oceania, Africa, Asia)
 - high rates of unsafe abortions (mainly in Africa & LA)
 - large proportion of births at home and without adequate assistance


Human rights

- HRs are activities, conditions, and freedoms that all human beings are entitled to enjoy, by virtue of their humanity
- HRs provide an internationally recognized, legally binding code of conduct
- Human rights are inherent, inalienable, interdependent, and indivisible, meaning they cannot be granted or taken away, and they must all be respected.
- Human rights are about securing entitlements of people and empowerment in a context of respect and accountability defended by recourse mechanisms
- Implementing a human rights-based approach requires identifying the corresponding and their entitlements as well as the corresponding and their obligations;
- Involves strengthening the capacities of both rights-holders to make their claims and duty bearers to meet their obligations

Reproductive Rights

- RRs are not new rights but a constellation of HRs; they include a variety of rights and responsibilities that can only be achieved through integrated approaches
- For reproductive decisions to be truly “free” requires “enabling conditions” that can transform rights into capacities (Correa and Petchesky, 1994)

Impacts



The image contains two large, empty rectangular boxes stacked vertically. These boxes are intended for the user to input text or content related to the 'Impacts' header.

Population – level impacts

- Choosing among many reproductive rights
- Three key aspects include
 - Example 1: Meeting unmet need for family planning
 - Example 2: Expanding the proportion of births in health facilities -
 - Example 3: Ending unsafe abortion

Meeting unmet need for family planning

- Based on the

Impact

Assumes:

- R.Rights \rightarrow Use of contraception/meeting the unmet need
- Family planning programme \rightarrow fertility decline
- Both duty bearers and rights holders play their part

Impact on TFR – old evidence

- Investments in family planning, where they have been made, have helped to accelerate fertility declines in many countries (Tsui, 2001; Maudlin and Ross, 1991).

Impact

- Investments in family planning, where they have been made, have helped to accelerate fertility declines in many countries (Tsui, 2001; Maudlin and Ross, 1991).
- If all women in developing countries who currently have an unmet need for modern methods were served, then each year an estimated additional 54 million unintended pregnancies would be prevented, including 21 million unplanned births, 26 million abortions (of which 16 million would be unsafe) and seven million miscarriages; this would also prevent an estimated 79,000 maternal deaths and 1.1 million infant deaths
(Singh and Darroch, 2012)

Country	Partner or other is opposed	Unawareness of method	High cost	No source/ access problems
Burkina Faso	11	5	12	19
Benin	6	12	5	15
Ethiopia	8	11	2	15
Madagascar	6	13	4	13

Broader impacts on poverty

- Impact of enabling people to benefit from their reproductive rights is mitigated by women's ability to exercise their agency.
- Women's agency has important consequences as it translates into access to schooling and employment.
- Societies where women's reproductive rights are guaranteed are able to benefit and take advantage of additional human capital.
- Reduction in investments in reproductive health can have a dramatic effect not only on gender equality and women's empowerment, but can also hamper human capital development in countries.



Low GNP
Poor economic growth

Loss of earnings
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Closely-spaced and high parity births plus associated health care costs

Lack of care for unwanted pregnancies and unwanted children

Unsafe abortion and out of pocket costs for abortion

Lack of access to contraception

Poor educational status
Income poverty
Lack of food
Poor health



Hypothesising broader impacts on poverty



Challenges

Duty bearers:

- Quality of care (health services) and human resources

Rights holders

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Opportunities

- Upgrading of health systems is an opportunity for optimism with regards to the reproductive rights and health and development virtuous cycle.
- Universal Health Coverage might be a congruent new goal
- Expansion of primary education and improved access to secondary and tertiary education coverage of education from the MDGs are similarly an opportunity to foster a better enabling environment for extending women's agency.
- Accountability mechanisms are still in their infancy, but many advances in holding responsible actors to account both at local and national levels are likely to help to close the gap between the rhetoric on improving health systems and the realization of extending effective quality coverage.

A challenge and an opportunity

- Large cohorts of young people

Challenge: continuing low status, marginalisation, high fertility rates, note UNDER 16s

Opportunity: providing rights will have a large impact through the subsequent 'productive' age

Conclusions

- Reproductive rights have potentially far-reaching population and wider effects.
- Yet, slow progress in women's status, employment and the context for change will hold back these impacts.
- In this context, actions to extend reproductive rights to adolescents should not be slowed or even avoided.
- Future goals or targets on health need to be expressed within clear human rights language that can be understood broadly and not open to interpretation.