

An Impactful Investment: Why sexual and reproductive health deserves a place in your portfolio

Few investments are more impactful than contraception to improve the health of women, families, and communities. The Copenhagen Consensus declared that investments in family planning would contribute to expanded access to education, women's empowerment, the prevention of HIV, poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability, making it one of the most cost-effective global health and development interventions.

By investing in sexual and reproductive health and rights, we invest in women's futures. Evidence has consistently found it to be a development best-buy, contributing to numerous Sustainable Development Goals like No Poverty (Goal 1); Good Health and Wellbeing (Goal 3); and Gender Equity (Goal 5).

Every \$1 invested in contraception generates over \$8 in health and socio-economic gains, and in 2022, it is estimated that MSI's services saved \$849 million in direct healthcare costs.

Over the last decade, awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights – and its benefits – has increased significantly. In the same period, the number of women and girls reaching their reproductive years has grown by over 100 million – currently more than 1 billion in low and middle-income countries. So as community awareness and need continue to rise, we have seen an unprecedented demand for high-quality sexual and reproductive health services.

Yet expanding access to sexual and reproductive health has been challenging due to weak political commitment, inadequate resources, persistent discrimination against women and girls, and an unwillingness to address issues such as abortion and comprehensive sexuality education. There are multiple economic, social, political and cultural barriers blocking women from the reproductive healthcare they want and need. This holds women and girls back from fulfilling their economic and political potential and can perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequity.

Reproductive healthcare advances gender equity

- Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will not be possible without universal sexual and reproductive health and rights. For women and girls to lead healthy lives, and be free to participate in social, economic and political life, they need access to quality services, information and education, and for their reproductive rights to be protected.
- Nearly half the world's population is under 25, and the largest generation of young people in history (1.8 billion young people) is approaching their reproductive years. We need to support them to reach their potential, follow their dreams, and contribute to economic, political and social progress.
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights enable women to plan their families, and in many cases, this directly determines what other opportunities you can pursue and the entire course your life takes.
 - **Research shows that contraceptive use is linked with an increase in women's health, earnings, and participation in paid employment.**

Reproductive healthcare alleviates poverty

- When women have access to contraception, they're better able to participate in paid employment and gain skills that will increase their earnings.
In one study in Bangladesh, women in villages with a contraceptive outreach programme reported **monthly earnings that were 40% higher than in other villages**. Families with access to contraception also reported **greater household assets**.
- When families are able to choose the number of children they want, they're better able to invest in their children's wellbeing. Better nutrition, living conditions, and education sets children up for future success.
- Contraception helps countries to realise a 'demographic dividend.' This is a boost in economic productivity that occurs when there are fewer unintended pregnancies each year, growing numbers of young people in the workforce and falling numbers of dependents. This provides a country with a window of opportunity for rapid economic growth if the right social, governance and economic policies are invested in.

Reproductive healthcare saves lives

- Reproductive health empowers women to decide if or when to have children. By decreasing the number of unintended pregnancies, we can avoid the health risks of pregnancy, reduce healthcare costs, and help women lead the lives they want.
 - The Guttmacher Institute estimates that if all **218 million women** from low- and middle-income countries with an unmet need for modern contraceptives were to begin using contraception, **unintended pregnancies would drop by ~68%**.
- Preventing unintended pregnancies dramatically lowers pregnancy-related deaths, including deaths from unsafe abortion.
 - In 2022, MSI's sexual and reproductive healthcare services prevented more than seven million unsafe abortions, **saving the lives of over 42,000 women and girls**.

Teenage pregnancy and the need for reproductive choice

- Teen pregnancy is the **leading cause of death for adolescent girls** aged 15-19 worldwide.
 - Pregnancy is particularly risky for adolescents, with **higher rates of complications** and greater risk of low birth weight and pre-term birth.
 - An estimated 20 million adolescents aged 15-19 still have an unmet need for contraception, with **around 3.2 million adolescents resorting to unsafe abortion annually**.
- Families benefit, too.
 - By spacing births, contraception reduces child and infant mortality, **allowing children to have a healthier start**.

As threats to humanity continue to mount – the climate crisis, the rise of authoritarianism, extreme income inequality – funding women and girls' health and futures is a sustainable and holistic investment, meaning women and girls are in the best position to drive change and find solutions.

Investing in sexual and reproductive health for women and girls is a vital force for social change. With bold partnership from philanthropy, its impact will be even more **transformational**.