

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

Family Planning

According to the Malawi Demographic and Health Surveys (MDHS), fertility in Malawi is high with an estimated rate of 6. In just over 40 years Malawi's population has increased from 4 million people in 1966 to 13.1 million in 2008 to near 15 million today. (National Statistical Office- NSO)

The population will continue to increase if the fertility rate remains as high as it is. The more children we have per family the more rapidly our population will continue to grow.

The use of modern family planning methods is currently at 42 percent among married women, but the use of long-acting family planning methods is low among women in the country.

Women should be encouraged to use the long term family planning methods to slow down population growth, which is likely to hit 40 million by the end of 2040.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To educate listeners about the benefits of planning their families
- To explain the difference between long-acting and short-acting family planning methods
- To promote discussion and dialogue between listeners and other community members about Malawi's rapid population growth and how that is connected to the country's tradition of having large families

The Problem: Little Use of Long-Term Family Planning Methods

Several medicines and devices are available to provide long-term, reversible contraception for women.

Selecting the most appropriate long-term contraceptive for your needs will depend on your individual preferences and circumstances.

For example, you should consider when and if you plan to have a pregnancy in the future, as well as your previous and current general and reproductive health.

Family planning methods that work over a long period of time are designed to be used by women who do not want to become pregnant in the near future or (ever).

These long-acting methods that are reversible include implants, which can work for up to three years, and intrauterine devices that can last for five to 10 years.

These methods work well mostly because a woman does not have to remember to take a pill every day, for example. Injectables work for three months, but they are subject to stock-outs, so when a woman gets to a clinic, if she cannot get her shot, she becomes vulnerable to unplanned pregnancy.

According to a recent Malawi News Agency-MANA report most women in Malawi avoid the long-acting family planning methods.

The paper quoted Sitingawawo Kachingwe from a USAID funded global project, RESPOND, as saying research shows that most women in Malawi prefer to use the short-acting methods, such as pills and condoms. More than 25 percent of married women prefer injectables, making that the most commonly used method.

Activities for Journalists

Use your community radio station to help listeners understand the family planning methods which are classified as the long-acting, reversible family planning methods. These include:

- Implant, which works for up to three years
- Intrauterine device-IUD, also called the loop, which works for five to 10 years
- Injectables are sometimes included in the long-acting group, though these shots work for three months

It will also be important to let the listeners know if they are not planning to have more kids soon, trying to space their children, or feel that their family is complete, a long-acting family planning method may be an option for them.

The listeners should be made to understand that while some methods of family planning can be used only once or have to be continuously remembered, long acting methods allow a user not to think about birth control for a long period of time.

Deciding which family planning method is best is an individual decision, based on a woman's desires as well as her health and other factors. The best method is one which you will use consistently, other factors to consider include:

Also remind your listeners that no birth control

method is perfect. You must balance the advantages of each method against the disadvantages and decide the method which you prefer.

Have an interview with at least three women from your community and find out what kind of family planning method they use. If you find a woman who does not use long term family planning methods, ask them why they prefer the short term methods.

Interview another woman who is using one of the long term family planning methods and ask her why she decided to be using this kind of method and its benefits.

Interview a nurse from your community and ask her which method between long term and short term family planning methods is preferred by women in your area. If you find out that women prefer the short term methods, ask the nurse to explain why this is happening and he/she should talk about the advantages of long term family planning methods,

NOTE: in subsequent bulletins we will be looking at the specific long term family planning methods and how they work.

Community Engagement

Urge listeners to send SMS, call or stop by the radio station to talk about the advantages of long term family planning methods.

Useful Contacts

- Sitingawawo Kachingwe- Program Manager; RESPOND project +265 1755 722
- Sandra Mapemba- Population Reference Bureau- 0999 219 789
- www.healthywomen.org
- www.plannedparenthood.org
- www.manoonline.gov.mw/index.php/national/development/itemlist/user/991-chikondichimala



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