

## Executive Summary - Unmet Need for Contraception in the 21st Century: Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's highest rate of natural increase in population, 2.5 percent per year. Its population is projected to grow 132 percent by 2050, from about 700 million to 1.6 billion people. This large growth stems from the high total fertility rate (TFR) in sub-Saharan Africa of 5.6 children per woman, which is twice the world average.

### Projected Population Change 2002-2050

Sub-Saharan Africa	132%
Northern Africa	68%
Asia (excluding China)	57%
Latin America and the Caribbean	53%
Oceania	47%
North America	41%
China	9%
Europe	-11%

The global trend of fertility decline in the last 50 years is much less pronounced in Africa. The TFR for the entire continent (i.e. sub-Saharan Africa and northern Africa) fell from 6.6 children per woman in 1950 to 5.2 in 2002. North Africa has lower fertility rates (3.5 children per woman) than the 5.6 in sub-Saharan Africa; its fertility is similar to that of the rest of the developing world.

### Reasons for High Fertility Rates

\* The high fertility rates in sub-Saharan Africa primarily reflect a desire for large families. When married women were asked to specify their ideal number of children, their answers ranged from an average of 4.1 children in Kenya to 8.5 children in Chad and Niger. South Africa was the only exception; there 3.3 children were considered ideal. In comparison, in developing countries outside of Africa, the range was 2.5 to 4.5 children.

\* Opposition to contraception and a low prevalence of contraceptive use (see next section) are major contributors to the high fertility rates.

### Contraceptive Prevalence

\* Mainly because of the large number of desired children, contraceptive prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest in the world. Thirteen percent of married women aged 15-49 use a modern method of contraception, and only 19 percent use any contraceptive method. Use of contraception exceeds 30 percent of married women in just eight countries: Cape Verde, Kenya, Mauritius, Reunion, Zimbabwe, Gabon, Botswana and South Africa.

\* Contraceptive use is higher among women who live in cities, who are exposed to radio and television, and who have higher levels of education.

### Unmet Need and Demand for Family Planning

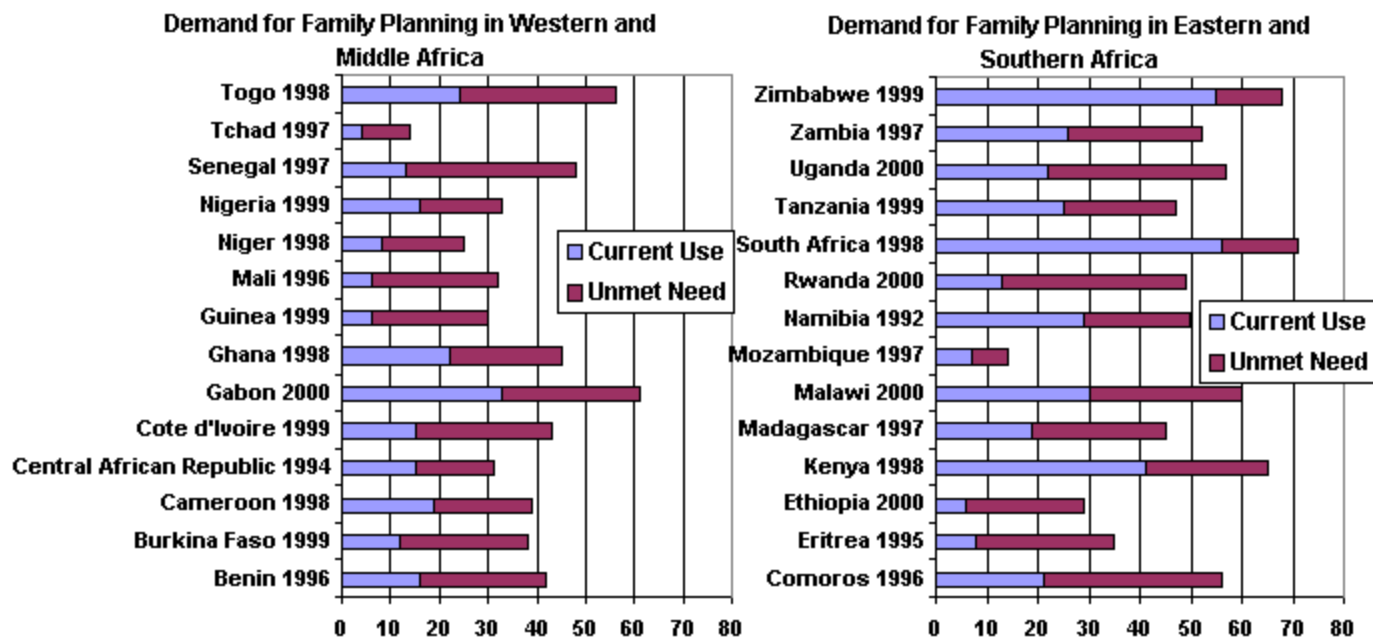
\* The percentage of married women aged 15-49 that desire no more children (28 percent) is much greater than the percentage using contraception. (Westoff, DHS Comparative Reports #2) Thus there is significant likelihood of unwanted births, constituting an unmet need for contraception. The overall unmet need, which includes unmet need for spacing births, averages 25 percent.

\* The total demand for family planning in sub-Saharan Africa averages 44 percent of married women. Three-fifths of this demand is for spacing, rather than limiting, births.

\* Unmet need has been decreasing. In western and middle Africa, this is due to a decrease in unmet need for spacing births, while in eastern and southern Africa, it is due to a decrease in unmet need for limiting births.

\* Among women aged 15-49 who had never been married but had sex, 74 percent wanted to avoid pregnancy. Unmet need for contraception among these women averaged 18 percent. There is no sign of a decline in unmet need for this group.

### Regional Differences



Source: Westoff, DHS Comparative Reports #1

\* Although contraceptive prevalence and average fertility rates in sub-Saharan Africa deviate sharply from the rest of the world, there are still notable differences within the region. In general, contraceptive prevalence is higher and fertility rates are lower

in eastern and southern Africa than in western and middle Africa. The total demand for family planning averages 38 percent in western and middle Africa, and 50 percent in eastern and southern Africa.

\* The average ideal number of children for currently married women in western and middle Africa is 6.3 children, while in southern and eastern Africa it is 5.4 children.

\* The proportion of unwanted births in southern and eastern Africa is about double the number in western and middle Africa. In all countries in western and middle Africa, less than nine percent of births were unwanted, and the average for the region was 5.2 percent. In southern and eastern Africa, in contrast, an average of 11.9 percent of births are unwanted.

### **Influence of Husbands**

\* Men's fertility preferences differ significantly from those of their wives. With the exception of Rwanda, men desire more children than women. The number by which they differ ranges from one child in several countries to seven children in Chad. In nearly all sub-Saharan countries, men's average ideal number of children was greater than the average number of children they reported fathering.

\* The ideal number of children among men is decreasing over time. The degree of the decline varies by country.

\* In countries outside of sub-Saharan Africa, the ideal number of children differs very little (from 0.0 to 0.5 children) between men and women.

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This insert was prepared by Becca Jones of the Population Resource Center in September 2002 and reviewed by Dr. Charles Westoff of Princeton University. Sources include: *Unmet Need at the End of the Century*, by Charles F. Westoff, DHS Comparative Reports No. 1, 9/01; *Reproductive Preferences in Developing Countries at the Turn of the Century*, by Charles F. Westoff and Akinrinola Bankole, DHS Comparative Reports No. 2, 4/02; and the *2002 World Population Data Sheet*, Population Reference Bureau. For further information, please contact the Center at (202) 467-5030; 1725 K Street NW, Suite 1102 Washington, DC 20006.