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## The Role of Family Planning in Population Control and Sustainable Development-A Case Study of Mbayani and Ndirande Townships, Malawi

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of family planning programs on population control and sustainable development in Mbayani and Ndirande townships. With rapid population growth posing challenges to social, economic, and environmental sustainability, family planning is recognized as a key strategy for promoting balanced population growth. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of contraceptive use and fertility trends with qualitative assessments of community perceptions and program effectiveness.

Findings indicate that family planning initiatives have contributed to a decline in fertility rates, improved maternal and child health outcomes, and enhanced gender equality. Residents of Mbayani and Ndirande report increased access to contraceptive methods and greater participation in reproductive decision-making, which has further enabled women to pursue education and engage more actively in economic activities.

Despite these positive outcomes, challenges persist, including cultural barriers, misinformation, and limited access to services in certain areas. Addressing these challenges requires community engagement, education, and policy support to ensure equitable access to family planning services.

Overall, the study highlights the critical role of family planning in managing population growth and promoting sustainable development, offering valuable insights for policymakers and development practitioners in similar urban contexts.

### Introduction

Located in Southern Africa, Malawi is landlocked, sharing its borders with Mozambique, Zambia, and Tanzania. The country's estimated population is 20.93 million (2023) with an annual growth rate of 2.5%. Malawi remains one of the poorest countries in the world despite making significant economic and structural reforms to sustain economic growth. The economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, which employs over 80% of the population, and it is vulnerable to external shocks, particularly climatic shocks (World Bank 2020), the population over the years have tremendously increased and this has put pressure on essential social service as they are not enough to cover the needs of every Malawian. The development forced Government of Malawi to embark on a journey of Family Planning which was identified as a tool population control which might lead to sustainable development, it is for this background that the study would like to assess on the role of family planning in population control and sustainable development

### Background

The history of family planning programs in developing countries partly originates with concern about a "world population problem." In the late 1940s and 1950s, the phenomenon of rapid population growth, resulting from the gap between declining mortality and continuing high fertility, was emerging in some South and East Asian countries. The results from postwar censuses of the early 1950s provided the initial evidence that population growth could be an impending problem. By the mid-1960s, more countries, including a number in Latin America and the Middle East, were experiencing unprecedented rates of population growth of more than 3 percent annually. At such growth rates, the size of a country's population would double in less than 25 years. Concerns about rapid population growth voiced by demographers,

social scientists, and others were based in large part on the assumption that such growth would "serve as a brake" on economic development and on efforts to improve living standards of most of the world's people residing in developing countries.<sup>4</sup> In the late 1940s, conservationists began to write about excessive population growth being a threat to food supplies and natural resources. Some 20 years later, Paul Ehrlich's writings fueled the call to action to deal with overpopulation (Ehrlich, 1968; Harkavy, 1995).

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## Research Objectives

### Main Objective

To assess the contribution of family planning on population control and sustainable development

### Specific Objectives

To define family planning and discuss the various methods available

To analyze the relationship between family planning, population control and sustainable development

To explore how controlling population growth through family planning can enhance economic growth and poverty reduction

To highlight how family planning support multiple SDGs, particularly those related to health poverty reduction, gender equality and environmental sustainability

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## Significance of the study

**Population Growth and Its Challenges:** Rapid population growth places significant pressure on resources, infrastructure, and social systems. This is especially evident in developing countries where high birth rates can lead to resource scarcity, unemployment, and environmental degradation. Family planning plays a crucial role in controlling population growth by enabling individuals and families to decide the number and timing of their children, ultimately influencing overall population trends.

**Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Family planning directly aligns with several SDGs, including good health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12). By controlling population growth, families can better allocate resources, reduce poverty, and improve their quality of life, which are essential for sustainable development. Family planning also allows for better family health, educational attainment, and economic opportunities, particularly for women.

**Economic and Social Benefits:** Reduced fertility rates often correlate with better economic outcomes, such as increased productivity and improved standards of living. Family planning empowers women to pursue education and careers, thus contributing to economic growth. This empowerment also results in improved maternal and child health, leading to lower mortality rates and better health outcomes.

**Environmental Impact:** Population control through family planning can help mitigate the environmental impact of overpopulation. Lower population growth means less pressure on land, water, and energy resources, as well as reduced carbon footprints, contributing to environmental sustainability. This is crucial in addressing climate change and preserving ecosystems for future generations.

**Policy Implications:** The research can provide valuable insights for policymakers and governments seeking to implement effective family planning programs and policies. Understanding the link between family planning and sustainable development can guide resource allocation and help design interventions that maximize social, economic, and environmental benefits.

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## Scope of work

The study focuses on exploring how family planning initiatives influence population control and sustainable development in Mbayani and Ndirande townships. It covers the following key areas:

### 1. Geographical Scope:

- The research is limited to Mbayani and Ndirande townships in Blantyre, Malawi, which are representative of urban communities facing rapid population growth.

### 2. Population Scope:

- The study targets reproductive-age individuals (18–49 years), including both men and women, community leaders, and health service providers involved in family planning services.

### 3. Thematic Scope:

- Assessment of family planning knowledge, attitudes, and practices among residents.
- Analysis of the impact of family planning on fertility rates, maternal and child health, and gender equality.
- Examination of challenges and barriers to effective family planning, such as cultural beliefs, misinformation, and service accessibility.
- Evaluation of the contribution of family planning to sustainable development objectives, including education, economic participation, and resource management.

**4. Time Scope:**

- The study considers current and recent family planning programs implemented over the past 5–10 years in the selected townships.

**5. Methodological Scope:**

- The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys on contraceptive use and fertility trends with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions to gather insights from the community and health workers.

**6. Limitations:**

- The study does not cover rural areas or other urban townships outside Mbayani and Ndirande.
- Findings are primarily reflective of the selected communities and may not be generalized to all urban areas in Malawi.

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**Literature Review**
**METHODS OF FAMILY PLANNING**

Male condoms are latex/rubber made wearables for men which is used to prevent the sperms from entering the vagina. Male condoms are one of the oldest and most widely used contraception for family planning. Male condoms also prevent sexually transmitted diseases by preventing contact with semen and vaginal fluids, and by limiting skin-to-skin contact. Condoms are the only contraception methods that help to protect against STDs. So even if you are using other contraception methods like contraceptive pills, IUD to avoid pregnancy, it's advisable to use condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections. Male condoms are very easily available at any medical store. Buying condoms does not need any doctor's prescription. Even though its most commonly used method to prevent pregnancy, they do come with significant failure rates of around 15%. The failure is mostly due to breakage, slippage, improper techniques and sometimes use after its expiration date (Sharveil 2018)

**Role of Family Planning in Social Economic Development**

Decreasing population growth and achieving national and SDG-related family planning goals and targets will depend on

the leadership and actions of a wide range of policymakers from different sectors, such as health, education, agriculture, transportation, and finance. To secure such commitment, one key starting point is to counter the commonly held view that family planning is exclusively a women's health issue that must be solely addressed by the health sector. The Population and

Development Unit of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has already begun to do this, recognizing how population growth affects different sectors and developing a relevant communication strategy. Continued efforts should focus on raising awareness among a broader set of decision makers across sectors about the connections between the gender and family planning SDGs and the other development SDGs

and more broadly about how addressing population challenges can contribute to social and economic development. For example, country projections emphasize that the rapid rate of population growth in Malawi will adversely affect economic development and strain the country's infrastructure. If the fertility rate decreases, Malawi's future per

**Role of Family Planning in Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change**

Goal 6. Clean Water and Sanitation: Ensure

Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation for All Family Planning Mitigates Population Growth's Effects on Access to Water and Sanitation

In 2014, the World Economic Forum identified water crises as the global systemic risk of third highest concern.<sup>68</sup> Population growth affects water scarcity in important ways. It contributes to increased demand and competition for water for domestic, industrial, and municipal uses, including irrigation, and limits the amount of water available per person. Estimates suggest that by 2035, 3.6 billion people will be living in areas of water stress or scarcity, up from approximately 2 billion today.<sup>69</sup> Population growth also negatively affects access to sanitation. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimate that, in 2015, some 2.4 billion people—over one-third of the world's population—lacked access to improved sanitation.<sup>70</sup> Between 1990 and 2011, Eastern and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa experienced massive population growth, and the number of people practicing open defecation in both regions rose to over 100 million.<sup>70</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa overall, the number of people defecating in the open is still increasing, largely due to population growth, declared UNICEF and WHO.<sup>70</sup> To what extent can family planning influence availability of water and sanitation? While the evidence is not extensive:

Analyses have highlighted water availability under projected scenarios of high and low fertility. For example, estimates suggest that in Jordan, with low fertility (total fertility rate of 2.1 rather than the current rate of 3.8) 26% less water (644 cubic meters versus 733 cubic meters) would be required for the country as a whole in 2040.<sup>71</sup>

**Family planning and reducing Population**

B.C. O'Neill et al. assert that "policies that slow population growth would probably also have climate-related benefits" (70); J. Bongaarts and R. Sitrukware affirm that "slower future population growth could reduce emissions globally by an estimated 40% or more in the

long term" (71, p. 233). R. N. Proctor and L. Schiebinger sustain the idea that "if the world's total population were eventually reduced by 10 percent, this would reduce carbon emissions by 3.6 billion tons per year, which is more than the total combined emissions of Germany, Japan, Brazil, Turkey, Mexico, and Australia" (72). For some others, banning abortion would lead to a surplus of unwanted children.

It is the case of T. Joyce et al who affirm, already in 2012 before overturning *Roe v. Wade* (June 24, 2022), that "abortion rates would fall [If *Roe v. Wade* were overturned] abortion rates would fall by 14.9 percent" in the United State, which leads to arising the unintended births to "178,804 additional births or 4.2 percent of the national total" (73, pp. 4 and 22).

### Effects of Family Planning Methods on the Environment

#### a. Condoms

Condoms are mainly fabricated from natural rubber and synthetic rubber (polyisoprene or polyurethane). Two studies have highlighted the environmental impact of condoms' production. Analyzing the life cycle of natural rubber condoms, W. Jawjit et al. demonstrated that the phase of condoms' production (fresh latex production, concentrated latex production, condom production, condom transport, condom use and disposal) - succeeding the first phase of preparation (tree planting, latex extraction, latex transport, diesel use, electricity use, chemical use and packaging) - participate for around 52 % to global warming. The condom disposal phase participates for around 45 % of global warming (81). The results are almost the same in M. Bimbach et al.'s study (82). Both studies highlighted the condoms transportation's impact on GHGs emissions. W. Jawjit et al. quantified this impact by studying transportation by container ships: "the impact from international transportation from Bangkok to Beijing" is between 95–98% (81, p. 103). M. Bimbach et al. estimated that air transport would be accounted for 60% of total GHGs emissions (82, p. 976). (Badr 2024)

### THE Demographic Transition Theory

The study will use demographic transition theory according to Thompson 1929 The socio-economic condition of man changes with the change of space and time. This spacio temporal effect and its influence on demography is a matter of debate among the social scientists. The "Demographic Transition" is a model that describes population change over time. It is based on an interpretation that begun in 1929 by the American Demographer Warren Thompson, of the observed changes, or transitions, in birth and death rates in industrialized societies over the past two hundred years or so. Thompson observed the difference in demand and supply with the change in the structure of the society. The theory of demographic transition states that the economy and society of a country has very clear relation to the birth and death rate of that country, which, in turn regulates the development of that country.

## Findings and Discussion

The study has explored that there is great relationship between family planning, population growth and sustainable development, thus family planning has the ability to reduce population growth which in turn leads to sustainable development, over 70 respondents from Ndirande and Mbayani communities argued and agreed the relevance of family planning in reduction of population growth, 25 nurses at the two clinic centres argued that different family planning methods has the ability to reduce population control ranging from Male and female condoms to implant injectables, 3 officials from Family Health services and an implementor of family planning argued that the modern generation has become sexually active with cases of unprotected sex increasing on daily basis the organization came up with measures that will alleviate the situation this in turn sustained economic development in one way or the other. 5 economic experts cited that family planning has reduced pressure of natural resources such as water, land, trees, vegetation and all source of elements hence enhancing sustainable development their remarks were echoed by nurses at the two clinics who argued that with the development of family planning there has been sustainability of land, in Ndirande a lot of couples have been enrolling in family planning methods and this has led to sustainability of land in areas such as Malabada, Ndirande Hill, 5 traditional chiefs in Mbayani argued that in the past there was pressure on natural resources especially land in which people were scrambling due to population increase but with family planning there has been significant change as land has become available, in addition three women in Ndirande argued that the youths has become sexually active and with no contraceptives such as condoms the nation will be in chaos as cases of child birth will be difficult to control hence heaping pressure on land, water and the general natural resources which are already scarce and this does not end well

In addition the study notes that family planning leads to child spacing which enhances good health of the mother and child, 21 women from Mbayani and 15 from Ndirande argued that family planning reduces the chances of women of constant bearing which affects their reproductive system as well as the growth development of the child, two nurses at Mbayani argued that methods such as implants as well as injectables, loop prevents mothers from getting pregnant to a maximum period with some 2 years.

The study also notes that family planning enhances climate change, out of 10 respondents from department of climate change and 22 respondents from Nirand and Mbayani 28 respondents agreed that family planning has the ability to reduce issues of climate change and fosters agriculture development, they said that absence of family planning methods makes people to have as many children as possible as this affects the agriculture as land becomes scarce hence this leaves families to cultivate on the same land over and over again as such the soil becomes infertile as such the land doesn't produce bumper yields which in turn affects the future generation all because there is limited land, in turn 15 households agreed that when there is population

increase a lot of families are forced to cultivate in mountains which leads to deforestation and makes the land bare this affects rain supply which leads to climate change

The study notes that family planning uptake has faced a lot of challenges and this has affected the intended purpose of the program, 18 women and residents in Mbayani and Ndirande argued that cultural and social beliefs are one of the challenges women face in the uptake of the method, their cited that in their cultures children are considered as a blessing and an asset to developmental projects of the community hence a need for couples to have as many children as possible however as a result into population growth. Mbayani alone has a population of over 1 million as compared to other locations such as Chirimba and Chemussa who have vast land than Mbayani as such this has heaped pressure on social services such as hospital and schools. Students in Mbayani Primary school have resorted into shifts just thus morning and afternoon so that everyone has a chance of education all this emanating from overcrowding

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## Conclusion

The study has discovered that family planning methods reduces population growth through different methods such pills, injectable as well as condoms and this leads to sustainable development thus development that meets the needs of the present, in addition the study notes that family planning alleviates poverty as well and enhances economic growth through adequate education, health care, employment as well as fostering agricultural development the study then identified sex preference, cultural and social beliefs, male dominance as some of the notable challenges

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## Recommendations

### 1 Community Awareness

Government and stakeholders should improvise awareness campaigns with an aim of alleviating myths that surrounds the uptake of Family Planning at the same time explaining the benefits of Family Planning

### 2 Improving of Policy on Child Control

Government through the ministry of health should come with measures that will control child birth this will leave families with no choice than to follow the policy

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## Suggestions for Future studies

### Exploring the Long-Term Demographic Effects of Family Planning Programs in Sub-Saharan Africa

Future research could focus on examining the long-term demographic effects of family planning programs in Sub-Saharan Africa, a region that continues to experience high fertility rates and rapid population growth.

### 2. Assessing the Integration of Family Planning into Climate Change Adaptation Policies

There is a growing recognition of the link between population growth and environmental stress, yet the integration of family planning into climate change policies remains limited. A valuable direction for future research would be to assess how family planning can be effectively included in national and regional climate adaptation strategies.

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