

Worldwide: Pandemic-Related Contraceptive Shortfalls Threaten Economic Development

The COVID-19 pandemic is limiting contraceptive access in the developing world and will probably undermine efforts to address population pressures there that are hindering economic development.

Before the pandemic, populations in 54 developing countries—such as Egypt, Nigeria, and Pakistan—were growing at rates that typically strain governments' capacity to provide jobs, education, and health care, according to the UN and academic research, and persistent interruptions to regular family-planning services would exacerbate these demographic trends.



(U) A woman in Cote d'Ivoire holds a newborn baby.

- Since March, factory shutdowns and shipping delays have disrupted family-planning supply chains across Africa and Asia. In Malaysia, social-distancing requirements forced the world's largest condom supplier to cut output by half—or 300 million contraceptives—between March and May, contributing to shortages in Sub-Saharan Africa, judging from Western NGO and press reports.
- (U) Pharmaceutical companies in India—the country that exports most of the world's generic medicines—said in March that the pandemic was constraining efforts to obtain inputs for the manufacture of contraceptive drugs, according to a Western NGO.
- Travel restrictions, reduced NGO outreach, and patient concerns about contracting COVID-19 have curtailed in-person visits for reproductive health care in at least 26 developing countries, judging from reporting from the UN, Western NGOs, and international press. Pakistan, Sudan, Uganda, and Zambia have each closed more than 100 reproductive health clinics since March, according to a Western NGO, probably to divert medical resources toward treating COVID-19 and limit routine doctor visits during the pandemic.

Extended family-planning shortfalls would probably prompt higher birth rates and dampen economic prospects in countries struggling to support large populations. Government officials in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and a local NGO in Nigeria have said that they expect the pandemic to cause an uptick in births that could worsen demographic pressures in their countries, according to local, regional, and Western press reports.

- (U) The UN projects that pandemic-related constraints to contraceptive access could result in as many as 15 million additional unintended pregnancies across low- and middle-income countries during the next year. Similar disruptions during the Ebola outbreak in 2014-16 caused teenage pregnancies to increase by 65 percent in some Sierra Leonean communities.
- Between 1990 and 2019, increased contraceptive prevalence caused Sub-Saharan Africa's fertility rate to drop from 6.3 to 4.6 children per woman, according to the UN; family-planning disruptions threaten these gains and related efforts to improve economic outcomes. An increase in unintended pregnancies in African and other developing countries would perpetuate poverty, strain household budgets, and limit disposable income for consumer goods, including US exports.
- Coordinated international efforts that diversified supply chains, expedited the manufacture and delivery of contraceptives, and raised public awareness of available reproductive health resources could alleviate some family-planning shortfalls, according to Western NGOs. For example, a Western NGO last month

launched a smartphone game that provides teens in Sierra Leone with reliable information on how to obtain family-planning services during the pandemic, according to a regional press report.

[REDACTED] COVID-19 Pandemic Jeopardizing Women's Health, HIV Prevention

[REDACTED] *Pandemic-related gaps in reproductive health care will probably fuel increases in maternal and infant mortality and HIV infections in the developing world. Stay-at-home orders and clinic closures could prevent 1.8 million women in low- and middle-income countries from obtaining treatment for pregnancy-related complications during the next year, resulting in about 200,000 preventable maternal and neonatal deaths, according to a Western NGO.*

- [REDACTED] *Extended condom supply disruptions would undermine US and international-led HIV prevention efforts across Sub-Saharan Africa and lead to an increase in infections. Limited contraceptive availability during West Africa's Ebola outbreak in 2014-16 almost certainly increased HIV transmission rates there, judging from academic research and information from a Western NGO.*

(U) For additional information:

[REDACTED] *Worldwide: Demographic Spread of Severe COVID-19 Cases Overwhelming Most Aging Countries (17 March 2020)*

[REDACTED] *Sub-Saharan Africa: Rapid Population Growth Hampering Development (23 October 2017)*

(U) *Produced by the Directorate of Analysis, Office of Global Issues.*

DOCUMENT DETAILS

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Produced By: DA **Product Type:** World Intelligence Review **Document Number:** WIRe2020 [REDACTED]

Publication Date: 08 Jul 2020

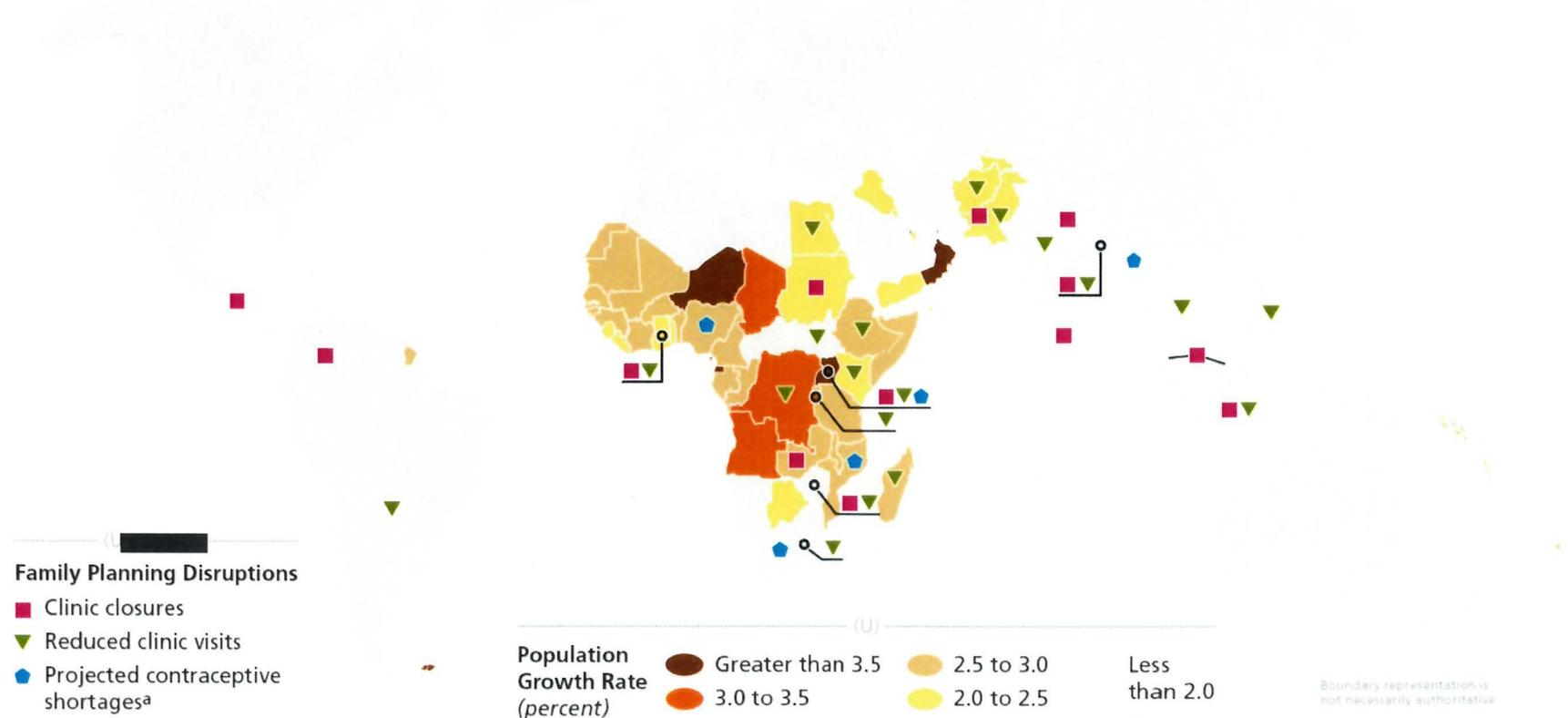
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COVID-19 Limiting Family Planning Access

Since March, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted regular access to family planning resources in more than a quarter of countries experiencing rapid population growth. During the next year, fast-growing developing countries—particularly those in

Sub-Saharan Africa—face an elevated risk of persistent contraceptive shortages because of high demand, unreliable supply chains, and weak health systems, judging from information from Western NGOs.



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