

## CASE STUDY

### Parliamentarians in Malawi Examine Impacts of Rapid Population Growth

#### Challenge

With an annual population growth rate of 3.2 percent, Malawi has one of the fastest-growing populations in Africa. Women give birth to an average of nearly six children, which contributes to rapid population growth, as well as increased numbers of new students entering school and young people seeking employment. This rapid pace of growth not only affects families—but poses a substantial burden on Malawi’s government and economy to provide more services. If these trends continue, Malawi will need to approximately triple the number of health care facilities, primary schools, nurses, and teachers over the next 30 years to provide adequate health services and opportunities to gain an education.

#### Initiative

Investing in family planning improves health and strengthens the impact of other initiatives in education, training, employment, and economic development. In February 2012, the Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM), with assistance from the Health Policy Project (HPP), provided a presentation on the social and economic effects of high fertility to Malawi’s Parliamentary Committee on Health and Population.

The presentation was made with an interactive software tool called RAPID, or Resources for the Awareness of Population Impacts on Development, provided by HPP. RAPID projects the social and economic effects of rapid population growth to raise awareness about the impacts on a country’s health, education, land use, and economy. HPP and its predecessor project, the Health Policy Initiative, advocate for slower population growth to promote Malawi’s social and economic development.

The entire Parliamentary Committee on Health and Population, composed of 22 members of Parliament, attended the RAPID presentation, as did the Ministry of Health’s Reproductive Health Unit and the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development. The RAPID analysis demonstrated the effects of a continued fertility rate of 5.7 live births per woman versus a reduced rate of 3.0 on key sectors, including health, education, and the economy.

#### Results

Representatives from FPAM illustrated that a slower population growth rate results in less pressure on the government budget to provide free primary education and public health services. By investing in family planning, the Government of Malawi could save U.S. \$751 million in education and U.S. \$1.5 billion in health over a 30-year period.



Malawi’s Parliamentary Committee on Health and Population and development partners meet to discuss the impacts of rapid population growth on socio-economic development.

*Photo by Tamanda Gomani*

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High turnout and enthusiasm from the participants reflected the government's increased recognition that population is a crucial issue that requires action across all sectors, signaling a stronger commitment to population and development issues. Following the presentation, the Parliamentary Committee members agreed to compile a report about the meeting and present it to all members of Parliament, lobby for a budget line for family planning, and integrate family planning messages in their political gatherings. HPP and FPAM will continue to work with the Committee Chair towards realizing these commitments and support the Parliamentary group to achieve them.

## About the Health Policy Project

The USAID-funded Health Policy Project (HPP) builds capacity around the world for improved health policy, advocacy, and governance. HPP contributes to improved health outcomes through strengthening the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of health systems. It is implemented by Futures Group, in collaboration with the Centre for Development and Population Activities, Futures Institute, Partners in Population and Development – Africa Regional Office, Population reference Bureau, RTI International, and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood. For more information, please visit [www.healthpolicyproject.com](http://www.healthpolicyproject.com) or contact [info@healthpolicyproject.com](mailto:info@healthpolicyproject.com)