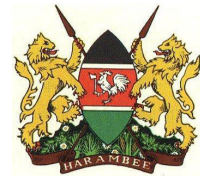


Faith and Families for a Healthier Kenya

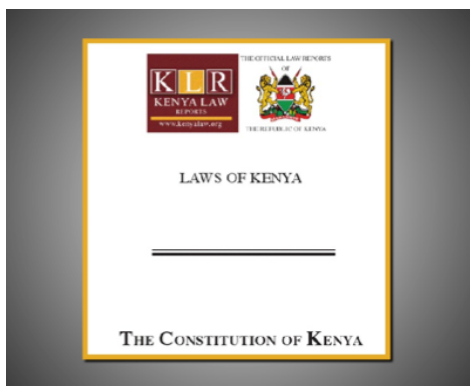


Key Messages

This man is a religious leader who is on a mission to improve people's lives. He has seen a lot of mothers and children die in his village during childbirth, and he knows that these deaths could be prevented with family planning.

When they were young, he and his wife chose to use family planning in accordance with their faith which made it easier for them to plan and space the births of their children, to be healthy, to achieve their education and career goals, and to provide for their family.

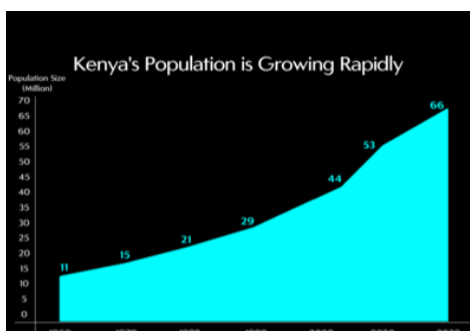
Today, they reach out to their neighbors to talk about the links between faith and family planning. They want everyone to have access to this lifesaving health care and the opportunities it can provide for families, the community, and the nation.



The people of Kenya recognize the importance of reproductive health. According to our constitution:

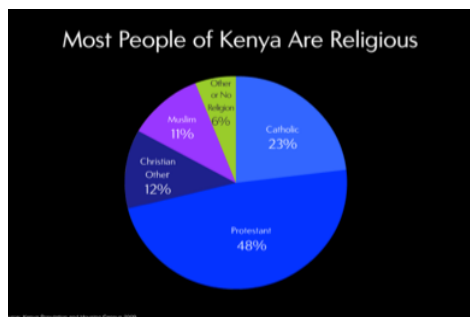
“Every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, which includes the right to health care services, including reproductive health care.”

A central component of reproductive health is family planning. The term “family planning” refers to the planning of when to have children, and efforts to regulate healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy using a variety of medical and natural methods.¹



Today we have the largest number of people in history in need of reproductive health and family planning services because our population is the largest it has ever been.

Kenya's population has grown rapidly from 11 million people in 1969 to about 44 million people today. Even if fertility declines to just below four children per woman, the population of Kenya is still expected to grow to over 66 million people by 2030!²



The vast majority of Kenya's population is religious. The most common religions are Christianity and Islam.³

When we marry, gender roles and relationships, education, where we seek health care, and the timing and spacing of childbearing are often influenced by religious beliefs.

Religious leadership is essential for providing accurate information about family planning.



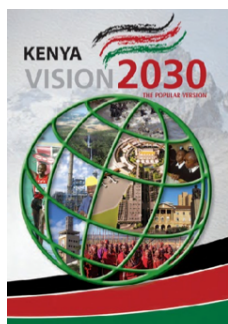
Some religious leaders in Kenya, including Christian and Muslim clerics, have helped foster a supportive environment for family planning.⁴

Among health facilities managed by a faith-based organization today, more than two out of three offer either natural or medical family planning services.⁵



But there are still challenges for family planning.

For example, nearly one out of four children is born less than two years after a previous birth, increasing their risk of health complications or death.⁶



Research demonstrates that family planning lays the groundwork to:

- Strengthen families.
- Improve health for mothers and children.
- Achieve national development, including the goals of Kenya's Vision 2030.

These family planning outcomes are aligned with the goals of religious communities.⁷



Family planning has numerous benefits for families.

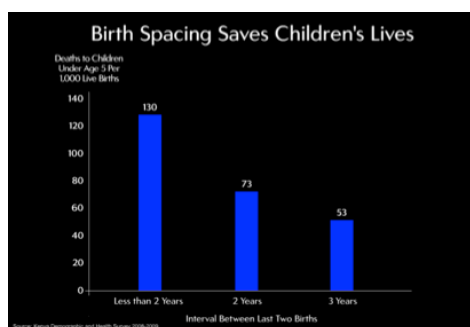
For fathers and mothers, family planning can make it easier to achieve education and career goals through healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy. The resulting higher household income enables parents to have more resources for each child.

Family planning also helps to strengthen marriages by engaging both parents in childbearing decisions and increasing opportunities for women.



For mothers, family planning saves lives because of healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy. It also reduces mother-to-child transmission of HIV by preventing unintended pregnancies among HIV-positive couples, and it improves health and nutrition status.

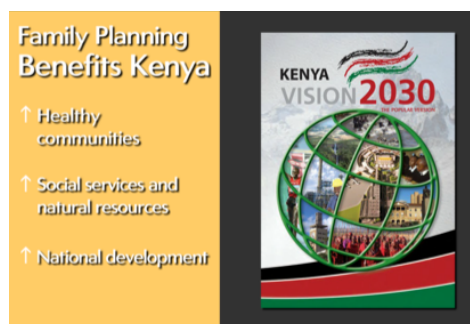
By enabling parents to wait three years after giving birth before becoming pregnant again, family planning increases child survival. It also lays the groundwork for improved child health and nutrition, and educational attainment, and well-being.



Family planning saves children's lives.

In this bar chart, we see an example of the relationship between birth spacing and child survival.

Children born less than two years after a previous birth are more than twice as likely to die before age 5 as children born after birth intervals of three years.⁸



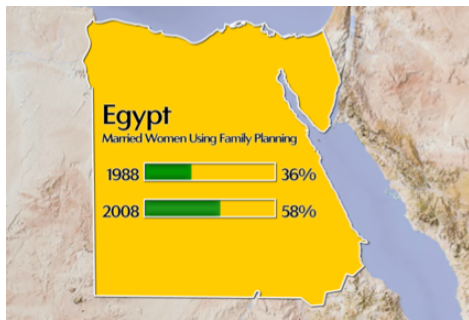
The benefits of family planning are felt throughout Kenya. By helping families improve health, achieve higher levels of education and employment, and accumulate more savings, family planning leads to healthier and wealthier communities.

With these improvements family planning allows governments to save money and invest in social services and natural resources, and the infrastructure needed for Kenya to achieve its development goals, including Vision 2030.⁹



Egypt is an example of a country where religious leaders have been actively engaged in family planning initiatives.

In 1988, only 36 percent of married women were using family planning. The government increased support for family planning throughout the 1990's, and recognizing the strong influence of religion in the country, chose to engage religious leaders. Large religious centers gave guidance in favor of family planning that was used in the government's sensitization activities, and religious leaders were trained to promote family planning.



At the same time, the government invested in health, education, and employment. By 2008, family planning was widely available in Egypt and 58 percent of married women were using modern family planning. Maternal and child death declined while women's educational attainment and gross national income increased.¹⁰



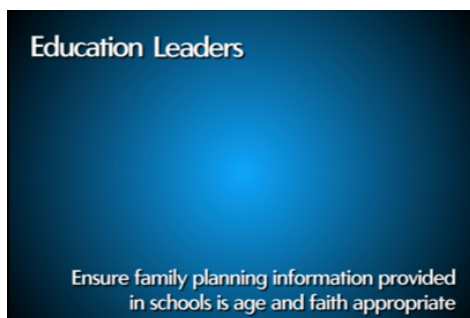
In Kenya, religious leaders should relay accurate information about the benefits of family planning with messages that are consistent with religious values and ensure health and well-being.



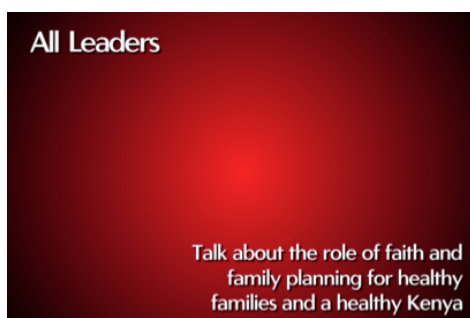
Government officials and political leaders should increase support and leadership for family planning. This includes partnering with religious leaders on family planning sensitization activities, and allocating family planning resources for religious communities.



Health care leaders should work with service providers to ensure family planning services are available, and sensitive to diverse religious beliefs.



Leaders in education, including teachers, should ensure that family planning information provided in schools is age and faith appropriate.



Leaders at all levels, including civic leaders, elders, parents, and youth leaders should talk about the role of faith and family planning for healthy families and a healthy Kenya.



When family planning is available for everyone—and combined with investments in health, education, and employment—the impact is felt throughout the nation.

Health is improved, the family is strengthened, the economy is stronger, and national development is in place.¹¹

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Acknowledgements

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