

Proposal for New IUSSP Scientific Panel: 2022-2025

Title: Rethinking family planning measurement: Bringing in a rights and justice lens

Overview:

International family planning measures, such as contraceptive prevalence, unmet need and demand satisfied, serve as critical indicators for tracking progress and assessing the impacts of family planning (FP) policies and programs. Some or all of these measures are used by the Family Planning 2030 (FP2030) initiative, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the UNFPA's ICPD+25 goals. Though these population-based measures are widely used and have been for decades, a strong and growing body of research offers compelling critiques, calling for clarified terminology and correct interpretation of current measures, and the development of new measures.¹⁻¹⁰ With the implementation of a more global and decentralized approach to FP2030 and increasing calls for revising key indicators used in FP, now is the time to revisit, reconceptualize and improve measures and measurement approaches that are consistent with a reproductive rights and justice framing.^{11,12}

To do this, it is imperative to bring together a diverse pool of researchers, policy makers, and program planners from different regions and countries to navigate a path forward. With the overall goal of improving the ways we collect, measure, assess, and communicate progress and gaps in FP programming, this Panel will critically examine a set of interrelated questions, including but not limited to:

- How does the family planning community define “progress” in the context of reproductive rights and justice? How could this definition be reflected in family planning measurement?
- Are changes needed to existing population-based measures and/or how they are communicated? How might new or updated measures be understood by the broader community?
- If yes, what changes are required? How might such changes affect data collection? How would they affect trend analyses?
- What new measures are prioritized for further research and validation?
- How might feasibility of data collection impact measure selection?
- What impact might new measures have on the direction and support for family planning programming? Will new measures affect the focus of family planning policies?

Objectives:

The overall objectives of this Panel are to critically review global family planning indicators through a person-centered lens informed by a reproductive justice and rights frameworks^{11,12}. The specific objectives are as follows:

- 1) Engage a broad set of stakeholders and researchers from different regions and countries to examine strengths and limitations of current family planning indicators.
- 2) Identify and assess new and modified indicators with a rights and justice lens, including identifying opportunities for further testing and validation.
- 3) Interrogate and make recommendations for what measures to keep, what to eliminate, what to modify, and what to adopt.
- 4) Develop a plan for presenting and communicating new and modified measures to inform diverse audiences.

Justification:

With the growing availability of FP methods and programs, there is increasing attention to supporting equitable access to FP services globally. Yet the measures the FP field and researchers rely on are not appropriate to capture important aspects of equity and person-centered preferences and behaviors. A key indicator that has been monitored since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) is unmet need for family planning – that is the percentage of fecund women who report a desire to delay or limit childbearing but are not using contraception. As part of the Millennium Development Goals (and later the Sustainable Development Goals), unmet need was included among the key indicators for assessing success toward the goal of universal access to reproductive health. Further, in 2012, in recognition of inequitable access and use of FP in many low- and middle-income countries, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the UK Government launched the London Summit on Family Planning. Out of the London Summit came a global initiative called Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) that sought to accelerate progress on global family planning. Eighteen core indicators were used to assess progress of the FP2020 partnership; these included unmet need for modern family planning, demand satisfied with modern methods, the contraceptive prevalence rate, and the number of additional users of modern methods. With the transition from FP2020 to Family Planning 2030 (FP2030), several of these indicators will continue to be annually reported on to monitor the partnership’s progress.

Numerous studies (and commentaries) have identified problems with key family planning indicators, including contraceptive prevalence, unmet need, and demand satisfied^{1–9,13} and concerns have been raised with other core indicators used to monitor progress on different international initiatives (FP2030) and political commitments. Problems identified include those with conceptualization (e.g., stability of fertility intentions), questionnaire design (e.g., respondent understanding of “current use”), measurement (e.g., who is in the numerator or denominator), interpretation, mathematical models, data gaps, the periodic exclusion of traditional methods, failure to consider the user (or non-user) perspectives, and relevance across contexts, including low contraceptive use settings.

While there has been a long history of critique of these measures^{3,8}, the debate has been growing in recent years, including two recent commentaries^{1,2} and a number of papers at the most recent Population Association of America 2022 Annual Meeting^{9,14–16}. Many of these researchers make the case for the urgency to revisit fertility and family planning indicators with a person-centered, reproductive justice and rights framing. One limitation of the current debate taking place around family planning measurement is that this debate is largely among researchers and institutions based in high-income countries. Situating this debate within an IUSSP Scientific Panel will necessarily broaden the conversation to include a more diverse group of researchers and stakeholders that should be central to this effort moving forward. Further, as an IUSSP Scientific Panel, the discussion and development of new global family planning indicators will benefit from the multi-disciplinary insights and work conducted by the large group of population scientists that make up IUSSP’s membership.

The proposed Panel on rethinking and revising key family planning indicators complements well some of the other IUSSP Panels that have been underway but goes in a different direction by layering on a reproductive justice and rights framing. In particular, this Panel complements well the Abortion Research Panel, which focuses on pregnancy-related outcomes whereas our Panel is specific to strengthening family planning measurement and supporting the global monitoring and tracking of progress with a novel framing; these family planning measures will benefit from the insights from the Abortion Panel on the measurement of pregnancy and pregnancy intentions. The proposed Panel will also pull from the learnings from the Panel on Family Planning, Fertility and Urban Development, which

will be concluding soon; it also includes on the Panel one of the early career fellows from the Urban Panel. This Panel also compliments the work of the Union of African Population Studies (UAPS) Panel on the Capability Approach to Population Studies and Programs in Africa that employs Sen's Capability Approach to consider person-centered framing in population research and programs.

Duration:

We are proposing that this Panel lasts for a three-year period. This will give it time to undertake activities (see below) that include recommendations for strengthened measurement and opportunities for those measures to be validated by other partners in multiple contexts. Further, this will permit overlapping with the 2025 IUSSP meeting in Brisbane, Australia to have a gathering that shares preliminary lessons learned and provides an opportunity to engage additional IUSSP members who may not have participated prior to the conference (i.e., through a side event and/or solicited presentations).

Activities:

The activities presented below are planned so that they can be carried out predominately through virtual engagement, to account for uncertainties in funding and COVID-related impacts. However, depending on funding and interest, in-person or hybrid events could also be held and the Panel would link, to the extent possible, to other meetings or conferences. When an in-person meeting is proposed, we would also include remote engagement (e.g., hybrid), if appropriate and feasible. Below, we outline each activity, its intended participants, the format for the activity, and relevant outputs. Final determination of activities and approaches would be undertaken by the full Panel in collaboration with the IUSSP Council Liaison. Where possible, we will engage other collaborators, including early and mid-career professionals, in the organization, presentation, and outputs of these activities. Throughout the course of the Panel, we will also organize virtual meetings and consultations with key stakeholders across various geographies and organizations, to get additional insight regarding proposed measures, data use considerations, and data gaps.

(1) Debate on utility of current demand-side measures vs. the need for novel measures

- Purpose: Kick-off work of the Panel by bringing the current debate to the fore for all participants and to ensure all sides and views are represented, including those calling for new measures as well as those defending current measurement frameworks. Debates provide a more engaging and fun approach to engage a larger audience in the initial discussions. We will use the larger publicity of this first event to launch an open call for papers as part of Activity 2.
- Participants: All IUSSP members and global measurement community
- Format: Planned as virtual

(2) Expert group meeting on family planning measurement and the development of person-centered measures of family planning

- Purpose: Bring together researchers and other key stakeholders to assess current challenges with family planning measures and share research on new measures being tested. Topics covered will include:
 - Reproductive justice and rights framing for fertility and family planning measurement purposes
 - Appropriate family planning measures for different data sources (e.g., routine vs. survey data)
 - Measures to capture desires, wants, needs, and demands for fertility and family planning measurement

- Current measurement approaches for demand-side indicators
- New demand-side measures of family planning being tested, including person-centered measures
- Life course considerations for demand-side family planning measurement
- Participants: Open call for papers (to IUSSP and non-IUSSP members)
- Format: Virtual 2-day meeting (with possibility of in-person/hybrid), with panel presentations and discussant model.
- Output: Meeting report covering sessions and new research presented.

(3) Workshop to develop a new set of recommended demand-side family planning indicators

- Purpose: Bring together a subset of individuals from the expert group meeting to discuss and review measures and topics covered at the earlier meeting and work towards a set of recommended demand-side indicators for family planning that incorporate a rights and justice lens, including making recommendations for testing of novel measures. Objectives of the meeting will be to:
 - Propose what should be maintained or modified in current demand-side family planning indicators
 - Develop a list of new or modified indicators that are validated and could be incorporated into survey and routine data collection
 - Develop a list of new indicators that require further testing and validation
- Participants: Smaller group of participants from the Expert Group Meeting who will be invited to participate in the workshop and support the development of a special-issue journal presenting their research and the Panel's recommendations.
- Format: In-person meeting, with presentation of updates on research, extended periods for facilitated discussion and sessions to brainstorm new measures. We would identify a host institution for logistical and technical support (e.g., FP2030 Regional Hub or Ouagadougou Partnership country site).
- Outputs: Special issue of a journal on research challenges with current measures and proposed new demand-side indicators. This would serve as a 10-year follow to the last [IUSSP Panel special issue journal on unmet need](#), showing how our understanding and reliance on unmet need has evolved and changed since the last Panel. An introductory paper in the special issue will provide an overview of the panel's work and a description of the recommended set of measures discussed throughout the supplement.

(4) Disseminate Panel's learnings and recommendations

- Purpose: Share lessons learned from the Panel through various approaches to reach a wide audience. Some of the approaches used will include:
 - IUSSP Webinar on Reproductive Justice, Rights and Fertility and Family Planning Measurement
 - N-IUSSP paper that summarizes lessons learned from the Panel (recognizing that some of the findings might represent published papers on the topic)
 - Presentations and dissemination at 2025 Brisbane IUSSP meeting (including through a side event and/or solicited presentations)
 - Share panel findings with survey data collection platforms such as DHS, PMA, MICS

The current focus of the Panel is on improving demand-side family planning indicators; however, there are many other sexual and reproductive health measures that could be examined using a rights and justice lens. If time/funding permits, we could pursue a series of round tables and/or debates (mostly virtual) with specific topics identified and coordinated by the Panel Members. These roundtable conversations will be used to shape future directions and next steps for the Panel if a renewal was available.

Some possible topics for these round tables and/or debates include:

- Measurement of method satisfaction and preferences
- Measurement of autonomy and equity (notably, other groups are undertaking this work so we would call on those groups to lead/engage on this topic)
- Quality of care from a patient-centered perspective
- Measurement of traditional method use as part of family planning program indicators
- Non-contraception focused indicators - holistic vision of family planning measurement
- Gendered measurement of family planning incorporating men and couple considerations
- Measurement of contraceptive hesitancy, building from lessons learned by the immunization community

Dissemination of findings: The Panel will share its findings through a range of products discussed above. This includes (1) a report on recommendations for research and use of new measures, (2) a special issue journal on the topic, and (3) at least one N-IUSSP article submission.

Panel chairs: Elizabeth Sully (*Guttmacher Institute*) and Ilene Speizer (*University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill*) will serve as the initial co-chairs for this Panel. As the Panel membership is finalized, one of two initial co-chairs will transition to a Panel member role, and the co-chair role will be filled by an IUSSP member and family planning researcher from another geographic region.

Panel members: The following individuals have been identified as potential Panel members, selected to ensure diverse geographic, generational, and gender representation. While not all are currently IUSSP members, to participate on the Panel, they will be required to become IUSSP members. Some of the Panel members have not been confirmed, but many have been approached about potential engagement and are interested in being involved if the Panel is selected by IUSSP.

1. Asia -- Niranjan Saggurti (*Population Council India*)
2. LAC -- Jose Miguel Guzman (*El Colegio de México and NoBrainer Data – former UNFPA and DHS*) or Suzana Cavenaghi (*Independent Researcher*)
3. Africa Survey researcher -- Fredrick Makumbi (*PMA and Makerere University School of Public Health*)
4. Researchers challenging current framework -- Madeleine Short-Fabic (*USAID*)
5. Reproductive justice/rights perspective -- Chi-Chi Undie (*Population Council in Kenya*)
6. Early career researcher -- Abdoul-Moumouni Nouhou (*GRADE Africa in Niger*)

Institutional partnership: When or if we have in-person meetings, we will seek to undertake these in partnership with organizations affiliated with Panel members or through other potential institutional

partners. Given the close connection of this Panel with the work of FP2030, their regional hubs may also be an ideal host organization for in-person activities. We have reached out to our contact at FP2030 (Jason Bremner), and he was enthusiastic about this potential partnership and providing relevant technical support for in-person activities through a regional hub. An additional potential institutional partner would be the Ouagadougou Partnership that could help with supporting activities in francophone West Africa.

Funding: We have had preliminary discussions with donors about this Panel and are optimistic about interest in funding this work. The two key donors we will seek funding from for this Panel include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation. Both donors are interested in moving the measurement field forward with a reproductive justice and rights framing. We will aim to raise between \$100,000 - \$200,000 USD for the Panel, which will support some in-person activities. Further, the funding would help to support development of outputs such as special journal articles/issues.

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