

Emerging Challenges and Opportunities in the Area of Women's Reproductive Agency as An Element of Women's Empowerment

Jocelyn E. Finlay, Harvard University

Family Planning Impact Consortium

A Conceptual Framework Connecting Family Planning to Women's
Economic Empowerment

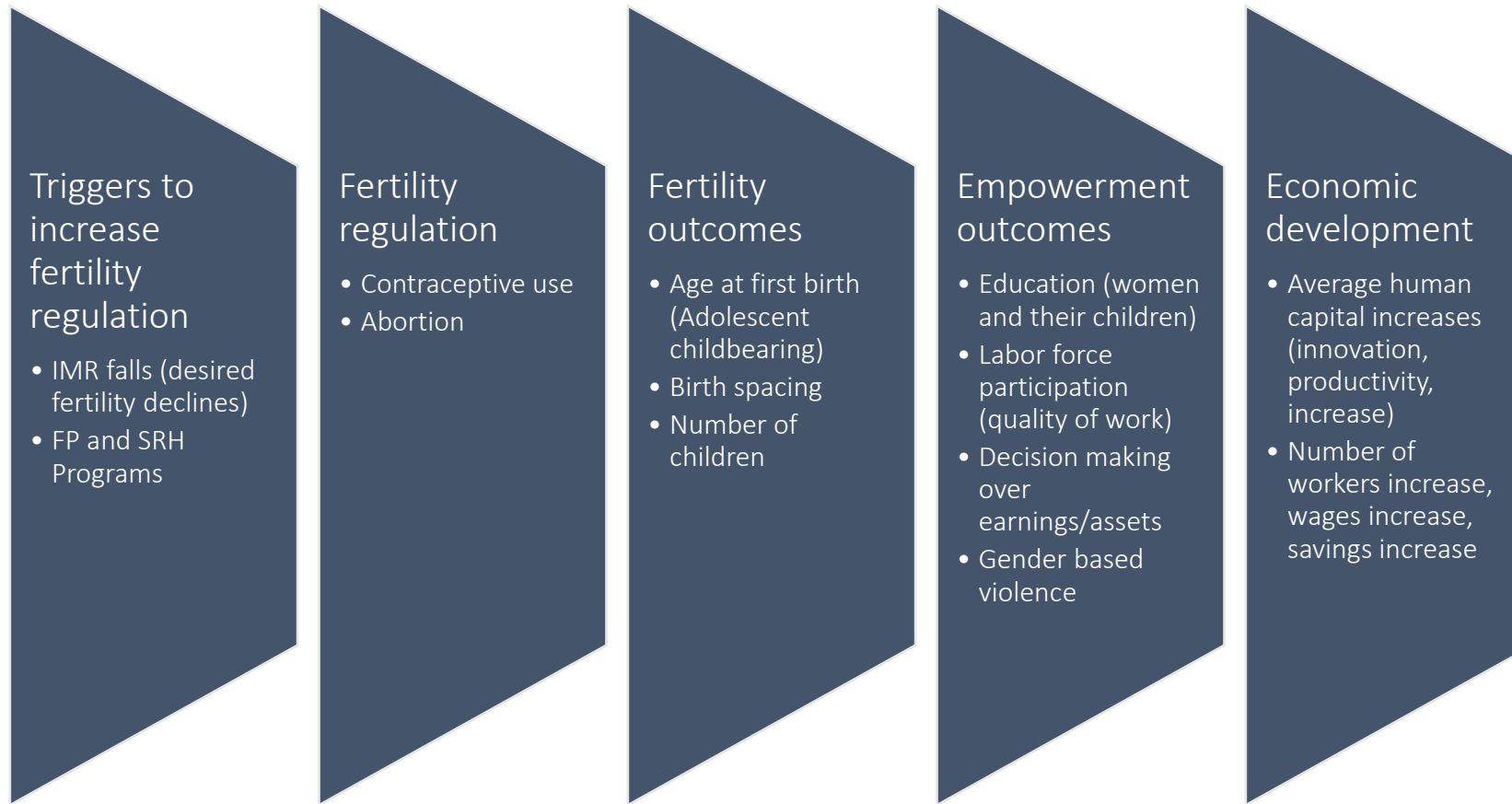
What are the **main research and data needs** to better understand the role of reproductive agency as it relates to population dynamics and socioeconomic development?

- Family planning (reproductive agency) and women's economic empowerment (socioeconomic development) have intertwined the rights-based approach and empirical (economics) approach to research and data.
- This intertwining often results in research findings asserting the normative (what should be) with little scant evidence to support the facts.
 - "Family planning saves lives" based on one paper
 - "Family planning is a cost-effective government investment for economic development" based on one report
- Systematic reviews report of the relative abundance of medium to low quality research. High quality research is limited to six or so papers (Joshi and Schultz, Ashraf, Debpuur, Baird, Goldin (USA), Bailey(USA)).
- Research focuses on one step in the RH->....->ED chain. Finding the connection between RH and ED involves a patchwork of evidence (muddling context).

FP-Impact modeling aim

- FP-Impact will **generate** robust, stakeholder-informed **estimates** of how family planning and abortion services, policies and behaviors affect people's well-being across the life course and a range of social and economic domains.
- Rather than focusing on macro-level concepts such as fertility decline, this evidence will center on supporting **women's FP and abortion intentions as a path to women's empowerment** and general wellbeing.
- These new estimates will help **expand the framing of the value of investing in FP and abortion** from primarily a health or burden of disease rationale (e.g., reducing maternal morbidity and mortality) to a framing that includes the longer-term impacts of investing in FP and abortion on overall wellbeing, gender equality, and economic development.
- In short, the evidence is expected to show the value of investing in FP and abortion not only for surviving but also for **thriving** over the life course and throughout various social and economic domains.
- Evidence that illustrates cross-sectoral benefits of family planning and abortion is expected to be relevant to international and national **stakeholders** outside of the health sector (e.g., Ministry of Finance and other key decision-makers) and would help to make the case for consistent and stable donor and national government annual resource allocations to FP and abortion activities to meet population needs.

FP-Impact Conceptual Framework



Conceptual framework

- Family planning enables women of reproductive age (15-49 years old) to reliably control the timing, spacing and number of children.
- Women who can realize their reproductive rights are able to plan schooling and careers, leading to their economic empowerment (Finlay 2021).
- Family planning enables...
 - 1) Control over timing of their first birth: adolescents can complete school, higher education (Ardington, Menendez, and Mutevedzi 2015) pursue higher quality careers (Goldin and Katz 2002; Sarah Baird et al. 2015).
 - 2) control over the spacing between births to minimize human capital loss (Adda, Dustmann, and Stevens 2017; Gough 2017).
 - 3) women to realize their desired family size and participate in the paid labor force (Bloom et al. 2009; Clarke 2018).
- Family planning enables women not only to step into the labor force, but to advance within the labor force with better education and higher-level career paths.
- Family planning enables women's contribution to the economy as a whole to be enhanced, which in turn increases economic development (Canning and Schultz 2012).

Research and data needs FP-Impact will aim to address

- Modeling approach (not reliant on lengthy data collection rounds)
- Robust estimates (not normative statements)
- Full arc from RH->...->ED to estimate the long-term outcomes of RH (not just one step in the chain)
- Sensitive to context specific variation in pathways, starting with intersectionality analysis by location
 - Next step would be to adopt an intersectional lens to understand how factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and other social determinants interact with reproductive agency and the pathway to socioeconomic development