

# Ipas *in Africa*

## ***Reproductive health in Africa***

There are more than 4 million unsafe abortions each year in Africa. More than half of the almost 67,000 global deaths from unsafe abortion occur here, and the risk of death from this practice is greater here than anywhere else in the world. According to the World Health Organization, the number of deaths from unsafe abortions is rising in Africa — even as they decrease in other parts of the world — as is the overall number of abortions. In fact, unsafe abortion accounts for 13 percent of maternal deaths in Africa. For African women who experience unsafe abortions and survive, short- and long-term injuries and disabilities, such as uterine perforation, chronic pelvic pain and secondary infertility, are all too frequent.

Several factors contribute to these sobering statistics: women in Africa face a limiting cultural and religious climate and often have a lower social status than men; limited access to health care, particularly contraceptives; and a lack of properly equipped medical facilities. The laws and policies governing access to safe abortion in Africa vary, ranging from very restrictive, such as in Kenya, where abortion is permitted only to save the life of the woman, to liberal, such as in South Africa, where abortion is permitted through the 12th week of pregnancy or later, in certain circumstances. The cost of both contraception and safe abortion is often beyond the economic reach of African women. Left with no better option, women often resort to life-threatening methods to terminate unintended pregnancies.

### **Ipas in Africa**

Ipas works to overcome these obstacles through training, advocacy and research. Ipas also works to improve services for special-needs groups, such as youth and people living with HIV/AIDS. Ipas has program offices in four African countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa, and the Ipas Africa Alliance in Kenya is extending Ipas's influence across the continent. Ipas's global and regional objectives include the creation of environments that enable training and service-delivery improvements, law reforms, the advancement of women's reproductive rights and an increase in health-care providers' access



to life-saving manual vacuum aspiration (MVA) equipment. Some examples of this work include:

- Ipas Ethiopia worked with other nongovernmental organizations, the Ministry of Health, advocates and provider groups to influence the reform of the Ethiopian penal code, which governs the provision of abortion. In 2004, the code was reformed to allow abortion in cases of rape, incest and when the woman's health and mental health would be negatively affected.
- In Ghana, Ipas researchers demonstrated that with appropriate training, midwives can effectively offer postabortion care (PAC), freeing doctors to provide more specialized services and significantly expanding women's access to needed services in their communities.
- In Kano and Sokoto, Ipas Nigeria and its partners have trained and equipped all specialized hospitals with ob-gyn facilities and 90 percent of all district-level hospitals to provide safe abortion services.
- Ipas South Africa and other advocates worked to ensure the passage — despite opposition and an unfavorable court ruling — of the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Act, which expedites the designation of facilities certified to perform abortions, extends the pool of service providers and clamps down on illegal practitioners.

### Vital Statistics for Sub-Saharan Africa

**Population:** 788 million

**Total fertility rate for women ages 15-49:** 5.5

**Percentage of women currently married or in a union using modern contraception:** 16%

**Number of abortions each year:** 5.6 million

**Number of unsafe abortions each year:** 5.5 million

**Maternal mortality ratio:** 905/100,000 live births

### Statistics of Interest

In Africa, there are approximately 650 deaths for every 100,000 abortions, compared with fewer than 10 per 100,000 procedures in developed regions.

For every 1,000 abortions in East Africa, 39 are unsafe.

Africa is home to 34 of the world's 49 least-developed countries.

In South Africa, deaths from abortion decreased by 91% after the abortion law was liberalized in 1996.

### Resources

Hill, Kenneth, et al. 2007. Estimates of maternal mortality worldwide between 1990 and 2005: An assessment of available data. *Lancet*, 370:1311-1319.

Population Reference Bureau. 2007. *2007 World population data sheet*. Washington, DC, PRB.

Sedgh, Gilda, et al. 2007. Induced abortion: estimated rates and trends worldwide. *Lancet*, 370:1338-45.

World Health Organization. 2007. *Unsafe abortion: Global and regional estimates of the incidence of unsafe abortion and associated mortality in 2003*. Geneva, WHO.



Protecting women's health  
Advancing women's reproductive rights

P.O. Box 5027 • Chapel Hill, NC 27514 USA  
1.919.967.7052 • [ipas@ipas.org](mailto:ipas@ipas.org)  
[www.ipas.org](http://www.ipas.org)

Photo Credits: Martin Adler / Panos Pictures

The photographs used in this publication are for illustrative purposes only; they do not imply any particular attitudes, behaviors or actions on the part of any person who appears in the photographs.

♻️ Printed on recycled paper.