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if they could all live their dreams.

At the most basic level, all young people have the right to education, health and safety. If they are given information, choices and opportunities, they will live healthier and more productive lives. Young people worldwide are a creative and energetic resource that we must cultivate and nourish. They are the agents of change today and the leaders of tomorrow and we must support them to reach their full potential.

UNFPA is committed to investing in programmes that provide for the needs and respect the rights of young people. We hope that you will support our efforts to put young people at the top of the world agenda for social change and development.

Thoraya Ahmed Obaid
UNFPA Executive Director



No longer children, but not yet adults, young people everywhere face tremendous challenges during the transitional years of adolescence. Over one billion strong, adolescents need support to make choices that will direct them towards a promising adulthood. Unfortunately, too many young people especially those living in poverty and facing difficult circumstances believe that they have little or no control over what tomorrow will bring.

IMAGINE if all young people could develop to their fullest potential



UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, has a vision for young people. It is a vision of a world where their rights are protected and promoted for girls and boys equally. A world where they are able to develop to their fullest potential and freely express and be respected for their thoughts and ideas. A world that enables them to live free of poverty, violence and discrimination. A world that prepares them to make informed, voluntary and responsible life choices.



Investing in adolescents and youth is one of UNFPA's top priorities. Not only are we investing in their basic needs and rights as an ethical and common sense response to a critical social issue, but also because it is a highly strategic and cost-effective answer to the development challenges set forth at the International Conference on Population and Development/ICPD (Cairo, 1994), the Fourth World UN Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the five-year ICPD and Beijing reviews, the UN Millennium Declaration of 2000, the Millennium Development Goals, and the UN Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001.

Why is this investment important? Adolescents, particularly those living in poverty, have been virtually ignored in policies and programmes. But they are the ones that most need guidance and support during this particularly vulnerable life stage. It is young people that are greatly affected by unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, and unsafe abortion. Society can no longer afford to turn its back on the largest generation of adolescents in history. Many of the decisions young people make today will either set them on courses that will benefit them, their families, friends, communities and the world now and in the future... or not.

Support for young people is a critical development issue.

- Nearly half of all people in the world are under age 25. Young people, ages 10–24, comprise almost 30% of the world's population.
- Today, 87% of all young people live in developing countries.

Poverty is pervasive and fueled by illiteracy, gender inequality and lack of access to most basic information and services.

- Nearly 50% of all youth in the world survive on less than two dollars a day.
- In 2000, approximately 82 million young women and 51 million young men (ages 10–24) were illiterate.
- By age 18, girls have received on average 4.4 years less education than boys.

Gender-based violence against girls and young women, including sexual abuse and trafficking, is more common than people realize.

- An estimated 2.2 million girls between the ages of 5 and 15, mainly in Asia but throughout the world, are trafficked every year for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
- Nearly 50% of all sexual assaults worldwide are against adolescent girls aged 15 years or younger.

The majority of young people are sexually experienced by the age of 20, whether within or outside of marriage.

- Between 25% and 50% of teen girls from developing countries will have their first child by the time they turn 18.
- In some countries, half of all girls under 18 are married. Nearly 75% of girls 15–19 in the Democratic Republic of Congo are married; 76% in Niger; 54% in Afghanistan; 50% in India.
- More than 88% of unmarried urban boys ages 15–19 in Brazil, Hungary and Kenya had engaged in sexual intercourse by the time they were 18; 25% of these boys had sex for the first time before age 15.

The unintended consequences of unprotected sexual relations and early marriage – HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, early pregnancy, early childbearing and unsafe abortion – weigh heavily on the health and lives of adolescents and youth.

- Half of all new HIV/AIDS infections, over 6,000 daily, are occurring among young people 15 to 24 years of age.
- More adolescent girls die from pregnancy-related complications than from any other cause. Girls aged 15–19 are twice as likely to die in child-birth than women in their twenties.
- One-third of the 333 million new cases of curable sexually transmitted infections each year occur among people under age 25.
- Five million girls aged 15–19 undergo unsafe abortions each year.

Bottom line: The physical, psychological and emotional transition of adolescence is a fact of life, no matter what one's circumstances. But for young people living in poverty or facing other major difficulties, it can be full of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Today's generation of adolescents is the largest in history. From sheer numbers alone, one might imagine the collective power of such a group of people. If given the proper opportunities and resources, they could change the world for the better.

This is why UNFPA supports programmes throughout the developing world and in countries in transition that address adolescent and youth issues. UNFPA guiding principles for all adolescent and youth programmes clearly reflect the overarching need to:

- Safeguard the human rights of adolescents and youth
- Promote gender equality and equity, responding to the differing needs and perspectives of boys and girls
- Respond to the diversity and multi-faceted life experiences of young people
- Promote youth participation in planning, implementation and evaluation
- Promote youth leadership and strengthen the capacities of young people
- Address socio-cultural diversity
- Develop programs based on factual knowledge and actual experience
- Build partnerships across government ministries, NGOs, youth groups, community groups, media and the UN system
- Plan and aim for sustainability

In partnership with young people, their families, communities and governments, UNFPA works to empower youth to explore their options, and obtain the knowledge, skills, guidance and support needed to realize their hopes and dreams.



> In Cambodia, community leaders, teachers, parents, and monks are becoming educated on reproductive health issues in order to increase their understanding and support for adolescent issues.

> The African Youth Alliance (AYA) was formed to improve adolescent reproductive health services and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana, Ghana, Uganda, and the United Republic of Tanzania. A collaboration between UNFPA and international NGOs, AYA advocates youth participation, gender equity and sustainability in programmes in these countries. Youth are now involved in village and district level policy-making in Botswana and are working with NGOs, international agencies and the Ministry of Health in creating and delivering youth-friendly reproductive health services in Ghana.

> In the occupied Palestinian Territories, UNFPA, along with Improving Adolescent Lives in Palestine Society, has created education and media campaigns to raise awareness of the reproductive health needs of adolescents, especially girls. Reproductive health and gender equality have become integral components in school curricula and teacher training as well as in adult education programmes.

> In Bolivia, UNFPA collaborated with the Ministry of Education to set up a project addressing both reproductive health and literacy. This project has improved access by indigenous young women to reproductive health services while helping them improve bilingual skills in Spanish and in their ethnic languages, and increase self-esteem. It was awarded the International Literacy Prize from UNESCO in 2000.



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UNFPA works closely with governments at the national level to develop policies that support adolescents and youth. Political commitment at the highest level, along with the resources necessary to be sustained over time, are critical for success of programmes related to these often-sensitive issues. Governments that are open to laws and policies to foster a supportive and enabling environment for adolescents will have the best chance of creating a youth-friendly climate.



Along with government commitment, youth participation is another key ingredient in ensuring that adolescents have optimal development opportunities. Young people want it, ask for it and often demand it – because they have a right to it. They become empowered to act on their own behalf and fulfill their human right to participate in their own development as they gain access to information, skills and opportunities.

Youth participation has become increasingly accepted in many communities and societies. Involvement in social groups creates a feeling of connectedness and belonging and helps young people develop a positive self-image. Collaboration among peers who share values and ideas further contributes to youth development. It leads to active community involvement and programmes to address restrictive social norms.

Parents, teachers, spiritual leaders, employers, governments and communities must help young people address the often sensitive issues surrounding reproductive health. Socio-political systems must find ways to involve young people in developing policies that shape their lives. Policies that effectively support youth are those that are created and sustained because they have broad-based support at the community and national levels.

> With UNFPA leadership and support, Costa Rica has embarked on a groundbreaking process for the formulation of a national youth policy. Comprised of representatives 12–35 years of age from throughout the country, the National Youth Council was created to shape and approve the national policy. This is an unprecedented recognition of the right and power of young people to help create their own destiny as well as that of their country.

> Peer education – or youth-to-youth information-sharing and guidance – is a popular form of youth participation in adolescent programmes in many countries. UNFPA and its partners, have developed Y-PEER: Youth Peer Education Electronic Resource for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Bringing together over 3,300 peer educators from over 185 governmental and non-governmental organizations in 27 countries, the project promotes networking, knowledge sharing, training and mutual support among peer educators, trainers and programme managers. The web site (www.youthpeer.org), available in Russian and English, provides information and resources on sexual and reproductive health and peer education techniques.

Young people represent a very diverse population. There are no “one size fits all” answers or approaches to addressing their issues. Some are in school, others are not. Some are married, some are not. Many have children of their own, or look after their siblings. Many face the difficulties of living with HIV/AIDS or caring for someone who is. Too many are living in upheaval: relocating from rural homes to urban areas in pursuit of work or fleeing their homes and communities as war ravages their homeland. Many are economically or sexually exploited. Some live on the streets without parents or family. Because of the incredible diversity among young people, UNFPA recognizes the need to acknowledge and respond to their heterogeneity with programmes that are tailor-made to each group’s needs and particular life circumstances.

> In Nicaragua, UNFPA helped ensure that adolescents and youth were given due attention in the national Poverty Reduction Strategy process. Together with UNICEF, UNFPA facilitated a country-wide consultation with and about adolescents. This programme resulted in the adoption of a national plan on poverty reduction that addresses the specific needs of adolescents and youth.

UNFPA is dedicated to reducing gender inequities in the lives of adolescents and young people, paying particular attention to the vulnerabilities, pressures and risks faced by girls and young women. Based on their gender, girls and boys are often confronted with marked differences in opportunities and constraints. Strict gender norms can be especially harmful for girls who may find their freedom of movement, educational, personal and economic development, security, health and life prospects severely limited.



Boys, at the same time, face pressures to prove themselves in ways that may be harmful or risky to themselves or others. Sensitizing young men to respect girls and women as equals, and share rights and responsibilities in sexual and reproductive health, is an essential part of many UNFPA programmes.

> UNFPA is an active partner in the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative, a programme that seeks to accelerate educational advancement opportunities for girls by leveraging government, NGO and UN resources. Thirteen UN entities are collaborating in nearly 90 countries to end gender inequality in primary education by 2015.

> UNFPA supports innovative work currently being undertaken in Latin America, Asia and Africa to address the sexual behavior needs of boys and young men. These efforts include teaching them to respect girls and women, and to take responsibility for their own and their partner’s sexual behavior and reproductive health. The programmes also deconstruct negative gender roles.

The promotion and protection of the human rights of young people, including their gender-specific and reproductive rights, is at the core of every UNFPA supported programme. Our work is guided by international agreements and conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which recognize and safeguard the rights of children and young people. Some of these rights are the right to education and health, including reproductive health, the right to be protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation, the right not to be forced into marriage, and the right to gain access to information, to express views and to assembly. UNFPA works to raise awareness among communities, youth and policy makers about young people’s needs and rights, and about existing laws and international commitments.

> UNFPA initiatives are now in place in Sierra Leone to protect the human rights of young people affected by the country’s recent and long lasting civil war. In Freetown, Women in Crisis, a non-governmental organization, provides drop-in centers for young women who have witnessed murder of family members, or who have been raped. They offer counselling and teach women the skills necessary to rebuild their lives. Clinics make available treatment, and sexual and reproductive health services and education.



IMAGINE a world prepared for tomorrow...

by supporting youth today

UNFPA works in over 140 countries and is the world's largest multilateral source of population assistance. Since it became operational in 1969, it has provided substantial assistance to developing countries, at their request, to meet reproductive health needs and support development efforts. UNFPA works with a wide range of partners and young people to ensure that adolescents and youth can access reproductive and sexual health information and services appropriate to their age, capacities and circumstances.

What we know and continue to hear from young people in all different life situations is a collective thirst for knowledge - how to get their parents to listen, how to avoid forced marriages, how to obtain the education and job training they want and need, how to get reproductive health care and information and for far too many, how to break the cycle of poverty that has kept their families at the subsistence level far too long.

No matter what their circumstance, there is a need for dialogue and greater understanding among parents and families, communities and governments about the complex and often sensitive issues youth face. Just as adolescents need information, guidance and supportive relationships, they need institutions and organizations that respond to their individual and collective needs. This is where UNFPA, the international community and the programmes and youth serving organizations we support can and do play a pivotal role.

> In Burkina Faso, a UNFPA-supported community participation project brings young people and adults together to design health education programmes specific to adolescents. The result is improved knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, increased ability to discuss sensitive issues more openly and improved access to general and reproductive health services.

Recognizing the need for urgent action to address issues specific to adolescents and youth, UNFPA collaborates with a global network of partners - other UN agencies, governments, non-governmental institutions, donors and concerned citizens - to help young people worldwide get the information, services and support they need. Among the most important partnerships we have established are those with adolescents and youth themselves.

The programs now in place and those starting up every day are teaching us how to empower young people. More than ever, the world is realizing that young people themselves - energetic, resilient, adaptable, determined and capable - have many of the answers to the issues they face.

It is our hope that young people everywhere will have their voices heard by joining together with family, friends, community and national leaders to talk about their needs and rights as they embark on the journey towards adulthood. Only when the largest generation of adolescents in human history has the attention and support of the world, will they have the power to effect a lasting change.

> The European Union/UNFPA Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in Asia (RHIYA) is a programme with a focus on vulnerable populations and gender equity. The programme, that covers seven countries in South and Southeast Asia, seeks to increase access to and utilization of youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and build local capacity to meet the diverse sexual and reproductive health needs of young people.

> UNFPA, in collaboration with the OPEC Fund for International Development, is providing young people in especially difficult circumstances with access to effective HIV/AIDS prevention programmes in the Arab States region, Caribbean and Central America.





During the Millennium Summit in 2000, 189 world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to working toward a world in which sustaining development and eliminating poverty would be given the highest priority. Emanating from the Millennium Declaration, which was adopted by this summit, eight Millennium Development Goals were established.

By 2015, world leaders agreed to:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

UNFPA will remain vigilant in its efforts to help meet the Millennium Development Goals by supporting young people as they seek to find their place in the world. Securing gender equality and equity depends on raising our children to value mutual respect and understanding. Eradicating HIV/AIDS hinges on the success of prevention efforts among young people. Reducing child and maternal mortality and morbidity depends on delaying early marriage, early pregnancy and childbearing among young girls. Finally, reducing poverty and sustaining development unquestionably rely on our ability to educate, train and employ young people. By collectively embracing the power of young people, the world will be a much safer and healthier place to live in by 2015.

KNOW

that the difference between our world today and that of tomorrow rests in the hands of young people.



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