



## Global Partners in Action: NGO Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development

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### Young People

Of the 6.7 billion people in the world, more than 1.5 billion are between the ages of 10 and 24 – the largest youth generation in human history. About 70 percent of them live in developing countries, and they are just entering their prime reproductive years.

Their world is radically different from the one their parents knew as young people. Transformations in the economy, education, communication, demographics, the environment, technologies and culture have revolutionized what it means to be young. So have the spread of HIV/AIDS, armed conflict and migration.

Investing in young people, providing them with education and offering them the information and services they need to make informed decisions about their lives is key to the planet's future.

#### The Situation

- > Young people around the world are mobilizing into regional, national and global coalitions to promote and protect their reproductive and sexual health and rights in decision-making bodies at all levels.
- > More than half of young people live in poverty, on less than US\$2 per day. Many also face social inequality, poor schools, gender discrimination, unemployment and inadequate health systems.
- > Women ages 15 to 19 are twice as likely to die from maternal causes as older women: many are physically immature, which increases their risk of suffering from obstetric complications.<sup>1</sup>
- > Every day, 5,000 young people age 15–24 become infected with HIV – almost two million new infections each year. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than half of all new infections are among young people, who are one in every four of the estimated 40 million people living with HIV worldwide.<sup>2</sup>
- > In sub-Saharan Africa, 76 per cent of young people living with HIV are female. Yet women know less than men about how HIV is transmitted and how to prevent infection.
- > What young women do know about AIDS is often useless because of the discrimination and violence they face and their relative powerlessness to refuse sex or negotiate safer sex, especially if they are married.<sup>3</sup>
- > In 2007, 101 million children of primary school age were not in school.<sup>4</sup> Worldwide, 130 million young people are illiterate.<sup>5</sup> One in five adults is not literate, and two-thirds of them are women.<sup>6</sup>
- > Of the world's 200 million refugees and asylum-seekers, 44 percent are children under 18.<sup>7</sup>
- > Child marriage jeopardizes the health and limits opportunities for women, usually disrupts their education and often violates their human rights.
  - Both married and unmarried adolescent girls often find it difficult to obtain reproductive health services.
  - Despite a shift towards later marriage, 82 million girls in developing countries who are now between 10 and 17 will be married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>8</sup>
  - Some 14 million women and girls between 15 and 19 - married and unmarried - give birth each year. For this age group, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death, with unsafe abortion being a major factor.
  - Pregnancy-related disability is much more common for young women than for older ones, including obstetric fistula, a devastating and socially isolating condition that leaves women incontinent.<sup>9</sup>
- > Every day, 182 women die from complications of unsafe abortion, and nearly 46 percent of them are under 24. Deaths of mothers from unsafe abortion make orphans of about 220,000 children each year.<sup>10</sup>
- > Comprehensive sex education and HIV prevention programs have been proven to delay sexual initiation, reduce frequency of sex and increase use of condoms and contraception. Long-term impacts include lower rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.<sup>11</sup>

- > No evidence to date supports claims that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs bring about their desired long-term behavioral changes – such as delays in sexual activity and reductions in unintended pregnancies and STIs.<sup>12</sup>

### The ICPD Commitment

A central principle of the Cairo Consensus of the 1994 Conference on International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was that meeting the needs of current generations should not occur at the expense of future generations. Countries agreed to involve young people in finding solutions to the issues that affect their own lives and our common future.

The Programme of Action spotlights major challenges created by the huge proportions of children and young people in the populations of many developing countries. It urges countries to give high priority to their protection, survival and educational development; to combat the adverse effects of poverty on them; to enact and strictly enforce laws against economic exploitation and physical and mental abuse or neglect; and to create policies to discourage and eliminate child marriage.<sup>13</sup>

### Areas for Action

- > Investing in the education, health and safety of young people is required as an investment in the future leaders of families, communities and nations.
- > Age- and culturally appropriate sexual and reproductive health education should be offered to all young people in a safe and confidential environment.
- > Young people must be provided with access to the tools and information they need to safeguard their sexual and reproductive health.
- > Young people deserve respect and consultation. Their leadership and participation should be encouraged in decisions that affect them, including the economic and social development plans of their communities.
- > The most successful reproductive and sexual health programs for adolescents involve them in the programs' design, implementation and evaluation.

<sup>1</sup> Population Reference Bureau, "Family Planning Saves Lives," Washington, D.C., March 16, 2009, <http://www.prb.org/pdf09/familyplanningsaveslives-backgroundunder.pdf>, p. 2 (accessed Aug. 18, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> UNAIDS, *Global AIDS Report 2006*, UNAIDS, Geneva, 2007

<sup>3</sup> UNFPA, "Gender Dimensions of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic," UNFPA, New York, NY, <http://www.unfpa.org/gender/aids.htm> (accessed Aug. 10, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2009*, UNICEF, New York, NY, 2008 pg. 23

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, "International Youth Day – 130 million young people still illiterate," June 6, 2009, [http://www.unesco.org/en/education/dynamic-content-single-view/news/international\\_youth\\_day\\_130\\_million\\_young\\_people\\_still\\_illiterate/back/9195/](http://www.unesco.org/en/education/dynamic-content-single-view/news/international_youth_day_130_million_young_people_still_illiterate/back/9195/) (accessed Aug. 13, 2009)

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, Education, Literacy: <http://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/> (accessed Aug. 13, 2009)

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, the UN Refugee Committee, *2008 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons*, New York, NY, 2008, pg. 2

<sup>8</sup> UNFPA, "Promoting Gender Equality: The Gender Dimensions of the AIDS Epidemic," UNFPA, New York, NY, 2009, <http://www.unfpa.org/gender/aids.htm> (accessed Aug. 10, 2009)

<sup>9</sup> UNFPA, "Promoting..." (accessed Aug. 10, 2009)

<sup>10</sup> Ipas, "Ensuring Women's Access to Safe Abortion: A Key Strategy for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals," Chapel Hill, NC, 2009, [http://www.ipas.org/Publications/asset\\_upload\\_file557\\_2458.pdf](http://www.ipas.org/Publications/asset_upload_file557_2458.pdf) (accessed Aug. 13, 2009)

<sup>11</sup> McKeon, Brigid, "Effective Sex Education Fact Sheet," Advocates for Youth, Washington, DC, 2006, <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/fssexcur.pdf> (accessed Aug. 10, 2009)

<sup>12</sup> Advocates for Youth, *Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs: Ineffective, Unethical, and Poor Public Health*, Washington, DC, July 2007, [http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=597&Itemid=177](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=597&Itemid=177) (accessed Aug. 11, 2009)

<sup>13</sup> UNFPA, *Summary of the ICPD Programme of Action*, <http://www.unfpa.org/icpd/summary.cfm> (accessed Aug. 10, 2009).