

Since 1969, UNFPA has been supporting developing countries in addressing their population and development challenges. UNFPA is the largest international source of population assistance to some 145 countries worldwide. The Fund focuses on three main programme areas: reproductive Health (including family planning, sexual health, prevention and treatment), population and development strategies, and advocacy. UNFPA programmes address gender issues and information, education and communication as concerns that cut across the core programme areas.

References to **EDUCATION** in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population & Development (Cairo, 1994) and its Five-Year Review in 1999

- To improve the welfare of the girl child, especially in regard to health, nutrition and education. ICPD, para 4.16
- Governments and non-government organizations should generate social support for the enforcement of laws on the minimum legal age at marriage, in particular by providing educational and employment opportunities. ICPD, para 4.21
- There is a close and complex relationship among education, marriage age, fertility, mortality, mobility and activity. The increase in the education of women and girls contributes to greater empowerment of women, to a postponement of the age of marriage and to a reduction in the size of families. When mothers are better educated, their children's survival rate tends to increase. Broader access to education is also a factor in internal migration and the composition of the working population. ICPD, para 11.3
- The education and training of young people should prepare them for career development and professional life in order to cope with today's complex world. It is on the content of the educational curricula and the nature of the training received that the prospects of gainful employment opportunities depend. ICPD, para 11.4
- To achieve universal access to quality education, with particular priority being given to primary and technical education and job training, to combat illiteracy and to eliminate gender disparities in access to, retention in, and support for, education, ICPD, para 11.5(a)
- To promote non-formal education for young people, guaranteeing equal access for women and men to literacy centers, ICPD, para 11.5(b)
- To introduce and improve the content of the curriculum so as to promote greater responsibility and awareness on the interrelationships between population and sustainable development; health issues, including reproductive health; and gender equity. ICPD, para 11.5(c)
- The eradication of illiteracy is one of the prerequisites for human development. All countries should further strive to ensure the complete access to primary school or an equivalent level of education by both girls and boys as quickly as possible, and in any case before the year 2015. Attention should also be given to the quality and type of

education, including recognition of traditional values. Countries that have achieved the goal of universal primary education are urged to extend education and training to, and facilitate access to and completion of education at secondary school and higher levels. ICPD, para 11.6

- Investments in education and job training should be given high priority in development budgets at all levels, and should take into account the range and level of future workforce skill requirements. ICPD, para 11.7
- Countries should take affirmative steps to keep girls and adolescents in school by building more community schools, by training teachers to be more gender sensitive, by providing scholarships and other appropriate incentives and by sensitizing parents to the value of educating girls, with a view to closing the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005. Countries should also supplement those efforts by making full use of non-formal education opportunities. Pregnant adolescents should be enabled to continue their schooling. ICPD, para 11.8
- To be most effective, education about population issues must begin in primary school and continue through all levels of formal and non-formal education, taking into account the rights and responsibilities of parents and the needs of children and adolescents. To ensure acceptance of population education programmes by the community, population education projects should emphasize consultation with parents and community leaders. ICPD, para 11.9
- Include at all levels, as appropriate, of formal and non-formal schooling, education about population and health issues, including sexual and reproductive health issues. ICPD+5, para 35 (b)
- With due respect for the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the adolescent and their right to reproductive health education, information and care, and respecting their cultural values and religious beliefs, ensure that adolescents, both in and out of school, receive the necessary information, including information on prevention, education, counseling and health services to enable them to make responsible and informed choices and decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health needs, in order, to reduce the number of adolescent pregnancies. ICPD+5, para 73 (e)

COVER PHOTOS:

1. Adolescent boys learning communication skills at a youth center in Asmara, Eritrea (supported by UNFPA).
2. Teaching English to a Tibetan refugee girl in a secondary school in Nepal.
3. Adolescent girls reading "Love" newspaper, the most popular teen publication in Mongolia with a quarterly distribution of 150,000 copies.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



Enabling Choices...Promoting Empowerment

Prepared by the Technical Support Division under INT/02/PMI (Finnish Contribution to Adolescent Reproductive Health).

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UNFPA AND EDUCATION

UNFPA's mandate is anchored on the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) which considers education is an integral part of its work in population, gender and reproductive health.

Education is a key factor in sustainable development: it is at the same time a component of well-being and a factor in the development of well-being through its links with demographic as well as economic and social factors. The reduction of fertility, morbidity and mortality rates, the empowerment of women the improvement in the quality of the working population and the promotion of genuine democracy are largely assisted by progress in education. (ICPD, PoA 11.2)

The ICPD Programme of Action devoted an entire chapter to education. UNFPA integrates education activities in all its programmes on population, reproductive health, gender and HIV/AIDS, with emphasis on the needs of young people. UNFPA works with various partners to implement the goals of ICPD and to ensure its links with the Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, and follow up actions to other relevant international conferences.

Specifically, the ICPD Programme of Action aims to achieve universal access to quality education, to combat illiteracy and to eliminate gender disparities in education as well as promote non-formal education for young people, guaranteeing equal access for women and men to literacy centers.

Mainly through its advocacy efforts, UNFPA helps keep education of women and girls high on international and national agendas and continues to be a strong advocate and supporter of Education for All. Inter-agency collaboration takes place at global, regional and country levels to support global initiatives such as the UN Special Initiative on Girls Education and the UN Decade for Literacy.

At country level, support to education includes both in-school and out-of-school activities, curriculum development and teacher training in areas such as population/family life education, reproductive health, life skills development, peer education, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. UNFPA contributes to improvements in the quality of education by introducing more relevant curricula and more effective teaching strategies, and establishing links between education on reproductive health and access to health services and other interventions.

EDUCATION ENABLES RESPONSIBLE CHOICES AND DECISION MAKING

The ICPD Programme of Action also emphasizes the need for reproductive health education especially for young people who need accurate information and skills to make responsible choices. This is important for their healthy development and enables them to choose healthy lifestyles, to prevent HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, teen pregnancy, sexual abuse and violence. In the absence of a cure for AIDS, education remains the best defense against this pandemic.

Experience in many countries shows education to be an essential factor in developing health-seeking behaviors and decision making on reproductive health and exercising the right to make use of these health services. Education prepares young people to respond to life's challenges, to make sound decisions and feel self-confident.

Education is important for everyone, but it has special significance for girls. Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later, and to have smaller, healthier families. Education informs and empowers girls to delay pregnancy until they are physically and emotionally mature. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls to know their rights and to gain the confidence to claim them. Literacy programmes for women have increased utilization of health services. Access to relevant information and services can protect and improve women's health and help them achieve their reproductive rights.

Education when combined with other social investments such as health and employment opportunities, can have the greatest impact on society's economic development.

EDUCATION PROMOTES EMPOWERMENT, ESPECIALLY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

UNFPA believes young people are a powerful force for positive change. It is committed to the ICPD goal of protecting and promoting their rights to the highest attainable standards of health, including reproductive health education, counseling, health promotion and services that will enable them to make healthy choices and realize their full potential. In order to attain this goal, young people must be given the necessary life skills and opportunities to ensure their healthy growth and development and to reduce their vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infection.

Include at all levels, as appropriate, of formal and non-formal schooling, education about population and health issues, including sexual and reproductive health issues, in order to further implement the Programme of Action in terms of promoting the well-being of adolescents, enhancing gender equality and equity as well as responsible sexual behaviour, protecting them from early and unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, and sexual abuse, incest and violence. (ICPD+5, 35b)

UNFPA advocates and supports policies, programmes and legislation that address empowerment of young women and girls, guarantee equal access to education and skills building, the elimination of traditional discriminatory and harmful practices as well as the elimination of all forms of violence against them. Efforts include promotion of legislation to increase the age at marriage while ensuring respect for their rights to choose if, when and whom to marry, so that girls can complete their schooling and have opportunities for personal growth.

UNFPA promotes outreach programmes to sensitize boys and young men to share responsibility for reproductive health, respect girls as equals, and discourage harmful notions about masculinity that perpetuate negative attitudes towards women and girls.

Reproductive health is a lifetime concern for both women and men, from infancy to old age. UNFPA supports programming tailored to the different challenges they face at different times in life.

PROGRAMME EXPERIENCES IN PROMOTING REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

- In Bolivia, UNFPA collaborated with the Ministry of Education to set up a project addressing reproductive health and literacy. The project has helped women and men improve their awareness of their reproductive rights, through improving bilingual skills as well as strengthening self-confidence, cultural identity and gender equality. In 2000, this project was awarded the International Literacy Prize from UNESCO.
- In Iran, the government and UNFPA worked closely to introduce population education as a subject in 1000 schools in 5 provinces. This has been a positive step towards implementing population education in a Muslim context.
- In Angola, a peer education approach designed for adolescents was used in counseling centers to sensitize and train health personnel in addressing adolescent needs adequately. The programme has helped to institutionalize population and family life education within the formal education system by supporting the incorporation of these subjects into school curricula at primary and pre-university level.
- In Bangladesh, the government has been successful in institutionalizing a revised population education curriculum at the primary school level, by developing communication materials and by launching innovative activities through youth clubs and rural women's cooperatives.
- In Cambodia, there have been successful efforts to improve access to reproductive health information, education, counseling and services through community-based initiatives in selected provincial capitals. Peer education and outreach programmes have been developed and expanded to reach young people. Community leaders, teachers, parents and monks are being informed and educated on reproductive health issues as part of advocacy efforts to increase their understanding of adolescent issues and to gain their support for such programmes.
- In Yemen, UNFPA helps facilitate women's access to reproductive health information and provide them with the skills to successfully market products or services in their community. The programme has promoted women's empowerment by raising their literacy levels.
- In Bhutan, the curricula of grades 6-8 have been revised to include reproductive health issues into the social studies and science textbooks. A manual on adolescent issues and guidebooks on school instruction for reproductive health issues have also been developed.
- In Botswana, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) used a proactive strategy to have peer educators, especially in secondary schools, interact and educate other young people on sexuality, HIV/AIDS and related

topics to promote responsible choices and decisions about reproductive health.

- In Columbia, the government has implemented policies to make sexuality education obligatory in primary and secondary schools. Teachers are trained and provided with teaching and learning materials on reproductive health and gender issues.
- In Vietnam, UNFPA supports initiatives focused on integrating HIV/AIDS prevention into the curriculum on adolescent reproductive health using self-learning manuals for secondary school teachers.
- In Kazakhstan, the introduction of a Family Life Curriculum has been successful in convincing teachers and parents on the importance of this initiative. There has been expressed interest to continue and expand these programmes.
- In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, reproductive health and gender equality have become integral components in school curricula and teacher training, as well as in adult education programmes. Production of educational booklets and teacher training on effective communication techniques have helped to promote reproductive health and gender concepts to students and to develop local specialists on population education.
- In Mongolia, reproductive health education, along with teacher training was adopted by the Ministry of Education in secondary schools. There has also been an increase in availability of reproductive health information, counseling and services for out-of-school young people.
- In Kenya, UNFPA works with local groups to help promote girls' education and inform them about the dangers of female genital cutting, and to encourage them to demand an end to this harmful traditional practice. UNFPA has promoted alternative rites of passage for girls.
- In Senegal, there have been efforts to improve access to reproductive health information, education and counseling for youth and adolescents at the national level. Family life education has been introduced in high schools throughout the country and in 15 Koranic schools.
- In Turkey, UNFPA provides support to youth-friendly reproductive health services at selected institutions and for integrating reproductive health education in formal and non-formal education programs. UNFPA also collaborates with the Ministry of Education in integrating reproductive health education in curricula of selected primary and secondary schools and out-of school youth programmes.
- In Guatemala, the government has approved the inclusion of themes like reproductive health and family planning in school curricula. Teachers, pupils and parents have collaborated to promote education that could help improve the quality of their personal, family and social life.
- In Albania, UNFPA supports a project for the prevention of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS among young people. This programme is focused on peer education and other activities in and out of schools to raise awareness of these issues among young people.