

### About the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

- Since 1969, UNFPA has been supporting developing countries in addressing their population and development challenges. UNFPA is the largest international source of population assistance, and focuses in three main programme areas: Reproductive Health (including family planning and sexual health, prevention and treatment) Population and Development Strategies, and Advocacy. UNFPA programmes address gender issues and behaviour change communication and education as cross-cutting concerns.
- UNFPA is guided by the principles of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and its five-year review (1999), as well as related international agreements such as the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the World Programme of Action for Youth for the year now and beyond, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In particular, UNFPA affirms its commitment to the promotion of reproductive health, reproductive rights, gender equality, and the empowerment of women and young people. UNFPA follows the UN agreed definitions of adolescence (10 to 19 years of age), youth (15 to 24) and young people (10 to 24).
- UNFPA believes young people are a powerful force for positive change. UNFPA is committed to protect and promote the rights of adolescents to the highest attainable standards of health, including reproductive health education, counseling, health promotion and services that safeguard their rights to privacy, confidentiality and informed consent. UNFPA therefore places priority on meeting the ICPD goal of providing young people with universal access to sexual and reproductive health information, education, counseling and services by the year 2015 that will enable them to make healthy choices and realize their full potential. This includes the development of life skills required to reduce their vulnerability to STDs and HIV infection, and provision of education, training, employment and livelihood opportunities to prepare them for adult life and enable them to cope with today's complex world.

### References to employment in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994)

- Poverty is often accompanied by unemployment, malnutrition, illiteracy, low status of women, exposure to environmental risks and limited access to social and health services, including reproductive health services. ICPD, para 3.13.
- The unusually high number of young people, a consequence of high fertility rates, requires that productive jobs be created for a continually growing labour force under conditions of already widespread unemployment. ICPD, para 3.15
- Investments in human resource development, in accordance with national policy, must be given priority in population and development strategies, with programming specifically directed at increased access to information, education, skills development, employment opportunities, and high quality general and reproductive health services. ICPD, para 3.17, ...with special attention to income generation and employment strategies directed at the rural poor. ICPD, para 29.b

- Promoting the fulfillment of women's potential through education, skill development and employment, giving paramount importance to the elimination of poverty, illiteracy and ill health among women. ICPD, para 4.4.b
- Governments and non-governmental 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 4.21
- In many urban environments, millions of children and youths are left to their own devices as family ties break down, and hence are increasingly exposed to risks such as dropping out of school, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. ICPD para 5.7
- The ongoing and future demands created by large young populations, particularly in terms of health, education and employment, represent major challenges and responsibilities for families, local communities, countries and international community. ICPD para 6.6.
- To meet the special needs of adolescents and youth, especially young women, with due regard for their own creative capacities, for social, family and community support, employment opportunities, participation in political processes, and access to education, health, counselling and high quality reproductive health services. ICPD para 6.7. b
- Countries should aim to meet the needs and aspirations of youth, particularly in the areas of formal and non-formal education, training, employment opportunities, housing and health, thereby ensuring their integration and participation in all spheres of society, including participation in the political process and preparations for leadership roles. ICPD para 6.13
- Governments should formulate, with the active support of non-governmental organization and the private sector, training and employment programmes. Primary importance should be given to meeting the needs of young people, improving their quality of life, and increasing their contribution to sustainable development. ICPD para 6.14
- Overall for young women, early marriage and early motherhood can severely curtail educational and employment opportunities and are likely to have a long term adverse impact on their and their children's quality of life. ICPD para 7.41
- In order to improve the plight of the urban poor, many of whom work in the informal sector of the economy; Governments should improve their income earning capacity. Child care centres and special protection and rehabilitation programmes for street children should be established. ICPD, para 9.15
- 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 in the content of the educational curricula and the nature of training received that the prospects of gainful employment depend. ICPD para 11.4

### Cover Photos

- Youth counselors in Indonesia
- Youth being trained in vocational skills in Cambodia
- Young worker in the AIDS research center in Botswana
- Young people working in backyard garden for herbs and spices in Jordan

Photo credits: TSD/IERD

# REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & EMPLOYMENT:

## Implications for Young People



Almost all United Nations global conferences in the last decade have recognized that youth unemployment is a growing problem that needs to be addressed, and that placing youth at the centre of the development agenda is a key to sustainable development. Youth unemployment, especially among girls, is linked to problems of poverty, ill-health, illiteracy. Hence, preparing young people for productivity and healthy integration into their changing societies calls for attention to their economic, health and basic social needs.

## Unemployment

- Globally, there are over 1 billion young people between 15 and 24 years old. With a world population of 6.1 billion, it means that one person in six is between the ages of 15 and 24 years. This age group, usually referred to as youth, accounts for more than 40 per cent of the world's total unemployed, and youth unemployment rates are typically two to three times higher than the rates for adults.
- Youth unemployment has reached staggering proportions worldwide. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, youth unemployment has reached alarmingly high levels and is worsening. It ranges from 56 percent in South Africa to 34 percent in Jamaica. Among others, long-term economic decline, international debt, low commodity prices and poor results from structural adjustment policies have all been compounded by violent conflicts contributing to increased unemployment and youth have borne the brunt of this.
- In 2000, the majority of young people, 85 per cent, were living in developing countries, with approximately 60 per cent in Asia alone. By 2020, the number living in the developing world will grow to about 89 per cent. Although the proportion of youth in the world is estimated to fall to about 16 per cent in 2020, their absolute number will still continue to increase over the 20-year period from 1.06 billion in 2000 to about 1.2 billion in 2020. However, lower birth rates in today's developing countries offer the possibility of a demographic bonus in the next 15-20 years, as a "bulge" of young people comes into the workforce while fewer children are born. If jobs can be found for them, the "workforce bulge" can be the basis for more investment, greater labour productivity and rapid economic development. (UNFPA, State of World Population, 1998).
- For most young people in many cultures, finding a productive and rewarding work is a symbol of coming of age that marks a transition from childhood to adulthood. With employment, young women and men become independent and free to make choices about their lives. Unfortunately, employment opportunities for millions of young people are limited making it inevitable for them to remain dependent on their families. In many urban environments, millions of children and youths are left to their own devices as family ties break down, and hence are increasingly exposed to risks such as dropping out of school, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

The ongoing and future demands created by large young populations, particularly in terms of health, education and employment, represent major challenges and responsibilities for families, local communities, countries and international community. (ICPD para 6.6). To meet the special needs of adolescents and youth, especially young women, the challenge is to give due regard for their own creative capacities, and to provide social, family and community support, employment opportunities, participation in political processes, and access to

- While overall, globalization has enabled most young people to have access to information, education and employment opportunities not otherwise available or accessible to them within their physical, school and community settings; nevertheless, the benefits of the global market and knowledge economy have not reached many young people, especially those living in developing and least developed countries.

## Poverty

- In the least developed countries and many other parts of the developing world, extreme poverty persists with more than 1.2 billion persons existing on less than \$1 a day. The implications of rapidly growing population remain far-reaching for these poor countries, which, also have large numbers of unemployed and underemployed youth. Youth unemployment is often concentrated in geographical areas of severe economic deprivation. The millions of vulnerable young women and men living in such areas lack real choices, opportunities and basic services to improve their conditions. In such situations, young people, especially girls, become vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation. Where they have been able to find employment, these young girls have sometimes been victims of sexual harassment and abuse. In many developing countries, sexual trafficking of minors remains a serious concern for governments and law enforcement entities.

The youth population in the least developed countries was approximately 130 million in 2000 and is projected to reach about 213 million in 2020.

- World Population Prospects The 2000 Revision, United Nations Population Division, 2000.

- Poverty is closely correlated with poor sexual and reproductive health. Early pregnancy is often associated with inter-generational cycle of poverty. Without education or employable skills or support programmes, pregnant girls may be forced to drop out of school, may be ill-prepared to take on the responsibilities of childrearing, and face diminished income prospects. Overall for young women, early marriage and early motherhood can severely curtail educational and employment opportunities and are likely to have a long term adverse impact on their and their children's quality of life (ICPD para 7.41) This can have implications for their life options and often, aggravate already severe conditions of poverty.
- In many developing countries, poverty has often led to a steady flow of large numbers of people, including young women and young men, from rural to urban areas. Urban authorities are striving to provide basic social services and economic opportunities to cope

education, health, counselling and high quality reproductive health services.( ICPD para 6.7. b). Health, including sexual and reproductive health, is an important consideration in the employability of young people. At the same time, employment can improve young people's access to health and other social services. Thus, securing their health and rights will enhance efforts to provide young people, especially girls and women with education, employment, and lifeskills that will benefit them as individuals, their families and society at large.

with the development and socio-economic implications of the growing numbers of people. The challenge they face include providing employment to large numbers of unemployed and underemployed urban young people, many of whom live in squatter settlements.

## Sexual and Reproductive Health, including HIV/AIDS

- Sexual and reproductive health conditions and decisions made by young people have immediate and long-term consequences in terms of their participation in the labour market. For instance, an unintended pregnancy can irrevocably disrupt a young girl's life by standing in the way of further schooling and employment. Contracting HIV in an unprotected sexual encounter can jeopardize a young person's prospects for employment and a productive and promising future. Neglecting the sexual and reproductive needs of young people will inevitably undermine investments made in other areas of youth development.
- It is important to note that girls and young women are vulnerable to more reproductive health problems than their male counterpart for both biological and social reasons, and often have little say over the conditions of sexual relations and childbearing. Unwanted pregnancy can be devastating for a female adolescent. Childbearing is much more dangerous for women under 18 than for fully-grown adults, with greater probability of maternal death. The combination of immature bodies, poverty, lack of education and lack of access to medical care are factors that gravely increase the risks. Early marriage, still the norm in some regions in the world, can also close many opportunities for young women's education, employment and learning. The prospects of curtailed educational and employment options can severely limit their future potential and personal development overall, as well as their children's future, if they do not receive adequate support. Securing reproductive health and rights will enhance efforts to provide girls and women with education and employment opportunities.
- Over ten million young people worldwide are HIV infected or have AIDS. It is projected that up to half of today's 15 year olds may die in hardest hit countries. The labour force in many countries where HIV rates are very high is decimated on account of AIDS related deaths. Seeing that every five minutes, five people between the ages of 10 and 24 are infected with HIV, there is an urgency to inform and protect young people, especially those who are most vulnerable. In many developing countries, girls are becoming infected at younger ages than men. Up to 7000 new infections occur among

young people, about 67% of them are in young girls, 15-24 year olds. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, HIV infection rates among teenage women are over five times higher than rates for teenage males. It is imperative to address the gender dimensions of the epidemic, especially in relation to the greater vulnerability of girls and young women.

- AIDS imposes both direct and indirect costs on national economies. ILO notes that the cost of treating individuals infected with HIV and AIDS exceeds per capita GDP in a number of countries. AIDS also weakens economies indirectly. Resources allocated to combat AIDS may mean lower investments in education and health care, with consequences for the labour market and long-term economic growth. AIDS is particularly devastating to economic growth because it strikes at the working-age population and threatens to spawn a new wave of AIDS orphans and child labourers.

## Education

- It is estimated that approximately 96 million young women and 57 million young men are illiterate, most of them in developing countries. It is unfortunate that despite progress towards universal primary education in many regions, access is still limited in some countries and more so for some groups. It also reflects the poor quality and relevance of basic education in many developing and poor countries, as well as gender discrepancies for accessing education. Youth illiteracy is much higher in rural than in urban areas.
- Serious obstacles to girls education still exist in many countries. This lack of education inhibits young women from acquiring productive employment. Girls also constitute the majority of the millions of children who drop out of schools to be married, to work, to care for families decimated by AIDS, because they are pregnant or simply because their education is not valued. Primary school lays a critical foundation but girls must attain higher levels of education if they are to compete in the labour force and contribute fully and equally to society.
- Reducing illiteracy and improving the coverage and quality of education for young women and young men are essential to raising their productivity and improving their employability in the often highly competitive labour market. The quality and appropriateness of education and training have an impact on the employability of young people. Preparing young men and women for future employment, social participation, entrepreneurship and lifelong adaptation to changing economic and social circumstances increasingly requires higher levels of education, supportive mentors and appropriate curricula.
- Schooling has a profound and positive effect in delaying marriage and increasing age at first birth. Yet around the world, schoolgirls who become pregnant struggle with competing pressures from school and home, often leading to poor school performance, expulsion or decisions to drop out.
- Young parents, especially girls, are often compelled to leave school, resulting in limited economic opportunities that may adversely affect their well being and that of their children. As the world economy changes, more wage-paying jobs requiring formal education are displacing traditional occupations. Young parents whose education is interrupted have fewer opportunities to earn money for their families.
- 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 in the content of the educational curricula and the nature of training received that the prospects of gainful employment depend. ICPD para 11.4

## Gender Disparities

- Young women who face discrimination from the earliest stages of life often have less access to education and health services and have much less opportunities for employment in the labour market than young men.
- In many developing countries, discrimination in access to education and job opportunities is widely evident with young women often facing higher unemployment rates than young men or having lower participation rates, although the situation varies considerably between countries. In many countries, girls are outperforming boys at school, but this does not necessarily translate into greater labour market success. For example, in Suriname the youth unemployment rate for women between 15-24 was about 45% in 1998 while it was only 13% for young men. In Pakistan, the 1997 figures show 20.6% of unemployment for young girls and just nearly 8% for young men. Even in some developed countries, a similar tendency can be seen. In 1999 in Italy and Spain, for instance, the unemployment rate for young women is 38% and 37% while for

young men it is much lower at 28.6% and 21.7%, respectively.

(Source: ILO, Millennium Indicators)

- With limited access to education and training, many young women are disproportionately forced into the informal sector and subsistence-oriented activities, which can be harmful, because they are unregulated and unprotected sectors. Underemployment is also high among many young women, who work in household production units in the rural and urban informal sectors. The widespread stagnation and decline of employment opportunities in the formal sectors of most developing countries has intensified the problem in recent years, with young women bearing a disproportionate burden.

## Looking Ahead

- It is important to note that youth unemployment is linked to problems of poverty, ill-health, illiteracy and the often doubly disadvantaged position of girls and young women. Young people, especially the most economically and socially disadvantaged, generally face greater difficulties in securing jobs. They are less likely to attain good basic education and training, have limited access to sexual and reproductive health information and services and are often discriminated against based on age, race, social class and gender, among others.
- Sexual and reproductive health and behaviour of young people is closely linked with their educational and economic options. Teen pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, have enormous social and personal impact in terms of educational and livelihood opportunities. The importance of HIV prevention education among young people, both boys and girls, need to be continually stressed and addressed. At the same time, the entry of young women and men into the labour market and the employment opportunities they have are critical in determining not only future opportunities for social and economic mobility, but also exposure to health risks, fertility outcomes, and overall well-being. Considering that access to economic resources is a major concern of many young people, especially those who are married, UNFPA acknowledges the significance of linking health and education programmes and policies to employment and livelihood opportunities.
- Educated women have more options-in employment, marriage and child-bearing- and more control over their lives. They also tend to have fewer children, and the children they have are healthier and better educated. Similarly, increasing women's economic opportunity and control of assets like land and credit is a key step in working towards gender equity and equality, and a clear route out of the cycle of poverty, high fertility and powerlessness that continues to afflict women throughout the world. Increasing women's empowerment in employment and decision-making depends on support for their education, and respect for social and political rights.
- Developing countries that have invested in health and education, have registered faster economic growth than those that have not. Today the greatest deficits in access to health services can be found in the poorest segments of the population. The present generation of young people, which is the largest ever, requires significant public and social investment to prepare it for economic and social participation. For a majority, economic life begins in the adolescent years. Investments in their abilities to acquire skills and become productive, healthy members of society and the future workforce are critical. Ignoring the needs of youth incurs high costs in terms of lost development opportunities.
- World leaders at the UN Millennium Summit committed themselves to develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work.

## Let us keep our promise...

## Millennium Development Goal

### Relevant Target

**Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development**

**Target 16: Develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.**