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## **Money Spent to Meet Adolescents' Reproductive Health Needs Yields High Returns, Says New Report**

Investment in programmes to help young people avoid teenage pregnancy and prevent HIV infection is repaid many times over in direct savings and indirect economic gains, according to UNFPA's *The State of World Population 2003* report. Reproductive health information, education and services for the world's 1.2 billion adolescents can help to break the cycle of poverty and yield benefits for generations to come, but more funding is urgently needed.

Estimates for seven Caribbean countries, for example, show that countries would save around \$235 on average each year in direct and economic costs for each adolescent birth delayed. The return on preventing HIV infection among young people is even higher, states the report, *Making 1 Billion Count: Investing in Adolescents' Health and Rights*.

Half of all new HIV infections are among young people aged 15-24 and the report notes that the economic benefit of a single averted HIV/AIDS infection is estimated at \$34,600 for a poor country with annual per capita earnings of \$1,000. In populations with 1 per cent HIV prevalence rates, the return would be \$5 for every \$1 invested. In countries with 20 per cent prevalence rates, the ratio would jump to \$99 for every \$1 invested.

Political commitment—at the highest levels, matched with resources and sustained over time—is crucial. The countries most successful in reducing HIV/AIDS, for example, are those whose leaders took the epidemic seriously more than a decade ago, including Brazil, Jamaica, Senegal, Thailand and Uganda.

Investment in girls' education is paramount, stresses the report. In Bangladesh, for example, UNFPA supported business training for 1,100 young women and locals credit the project with raising the average age of marriage in the area from between 17 and 19 to around 24. Without the project, one 20 year-old named Shahina said that she “would probably have married by 19, had a child already, and remained poor and malnourished.” (See news feature, *An Empowered Young Woman in Bangladesh*.)

Despite the possibility for high returns, many countries lack the funding necessary to implement programmes. In 2001, international assistance for reproductive health programmes was \$2.5 billion, just 44 per cent of the amount governments agreed at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo would be needed each year. Governments need to do more to help young people and meet international development goals, the report urges.

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UNFPA's *State of World Population* report has been published annually since 1978. Chapter 7 of the 2003 report highlights the cost benefits of investing in adolescents. The full report is available online at [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org). For more information contact William A. Ryan ([ryanw@unfpa.org](mailto:ryanw@unfpa.org)).