

Evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth 2008-2015



UNFPA Evaluation Office

2016

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Foreword

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, the Executive Director of UNFPA, has said that to achieve sustainable development, young people must have the right *“to participate in the political, economic and social life of their communities and countries, and to freely make informed choices regarding their bodies, sexuality and reproduction without discrimination, violence or coercion”*.

Building on the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and its twenty year review, held in 2014, the recently agreed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reaffirmed the historic opportunity facing the international community to put adolescents and youth at the very heart of achieving sustainable development.

In this forward-looking spirit, I am pleased to present the independent evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth (2008-2015). With its broad time-span and complex themes, this evaluation is particularly important for UNFPA: it sheds light on the organisation’s contribution in the area of adolescents and youth and how its work has evolved since 2008. The evaluation also corresponds to a period of significant shifts in the global development community. The rights and needs of adolescents and young people are now better understood, as is the contribution they can make to social and economic development.

The evaluation covers all countries to which UNFPA provided support to adolescents and youth from 2008 to 2015 and is the first thematic evaluation to make full use of financial data from the improved results-based management systems introduced by UNFPA in recent years. It was highly participatory and included, importantly, adolescents and youth themselves.

Participation, in fact, was an important feature. The evaluation team regularly engaged with diverse groups that provided valuable input throughout the exercise. Working with a varied range of stakeholders also helped to improve the findings.

Underscoring the sharpened focus on adolescents and youth over the period, the evaluation surfaced a myriad of positive results. UNFPA was found to be a highly acknowledged and respected leader in the area of adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health and is considered exceptionally well-placed to provide leadership.

Renowned for supporting increasingly accessible sexual and reproductive health services, education and information, UNFPA has also proven essential to promoting the respect of, protection for and fulfillment of the human rights of adolescents and youth, especially adolescent girls. Indeed, particularly strong evidence was found for this area, in which UNFPA has been a leading advocate. In supporting youth leaders, youth-led organisations and networks, UNFPA has been widely recognised for developing the leadership and participation of young people within global and regional development processes.

The evaluation identified several areas for attention, which, once addressed, will consolidate and further build on the strong record of achievement to date. It called for the development of a unified, operational framework for adolescents and youth, supported by an overarching theory of change. The evaluation also noted that improved use of data and evidence would drive forward programming. This means that monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems should continue to be strengthened.

During discussion of the evaluation by the UNFPA Executive Committee in November 2016, it was noted that many of the conclusions and recommendations could equally apply to the work of other development partners involved in this area. I therefore hope that the evaluation will be useful, not only to UNFPA staff and management and the Executive Board, but will also be of wider interest, contributing to the rather limited body of evidence available at present in this important area.

The evaluation was undertaken by the independent UNFPA Evaluation Office together with a multidisciplinary team of consultants from the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute and national consultants. It resulted from a fruitful and sustained collaboration among many dedicated and committed institutions and individuals, including those in the Evaluation Reference Group, to whom we are very grateful.

Andrea Cook
Director, UNFPA Evaluation Office

1. Introduction

This is the first time that UNFPA has undertaken an independent evaluation of its support to adolescents and youth. The exercise was conducted from 2014 to 2016 by the independent Evaluation Office in collaboration with an external, multidisciplinary team of evaluators and thematic experts from the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute. The team was guided by the Evaluation Reference Group.

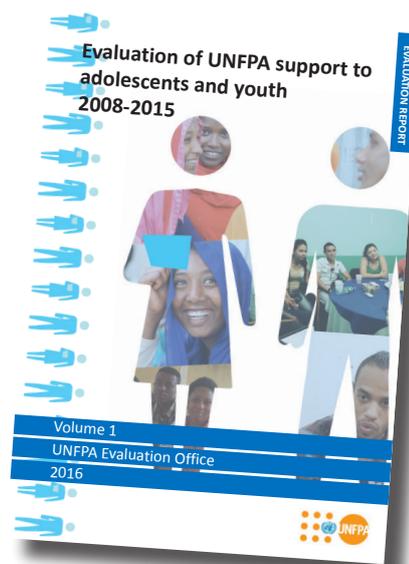
In total, nine country case studies were conducted: five field (**Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan and Nicaragua**) and four extended desk (**Lao PDR, Mozambique, Nepal and Niger**). **Nepal** was scheduled as a field study, but was converted to an extended desk study due to the devastating earthquake in 2015. Three regional reviews were also conducted.

The evaluation focused on the following thematic areas:

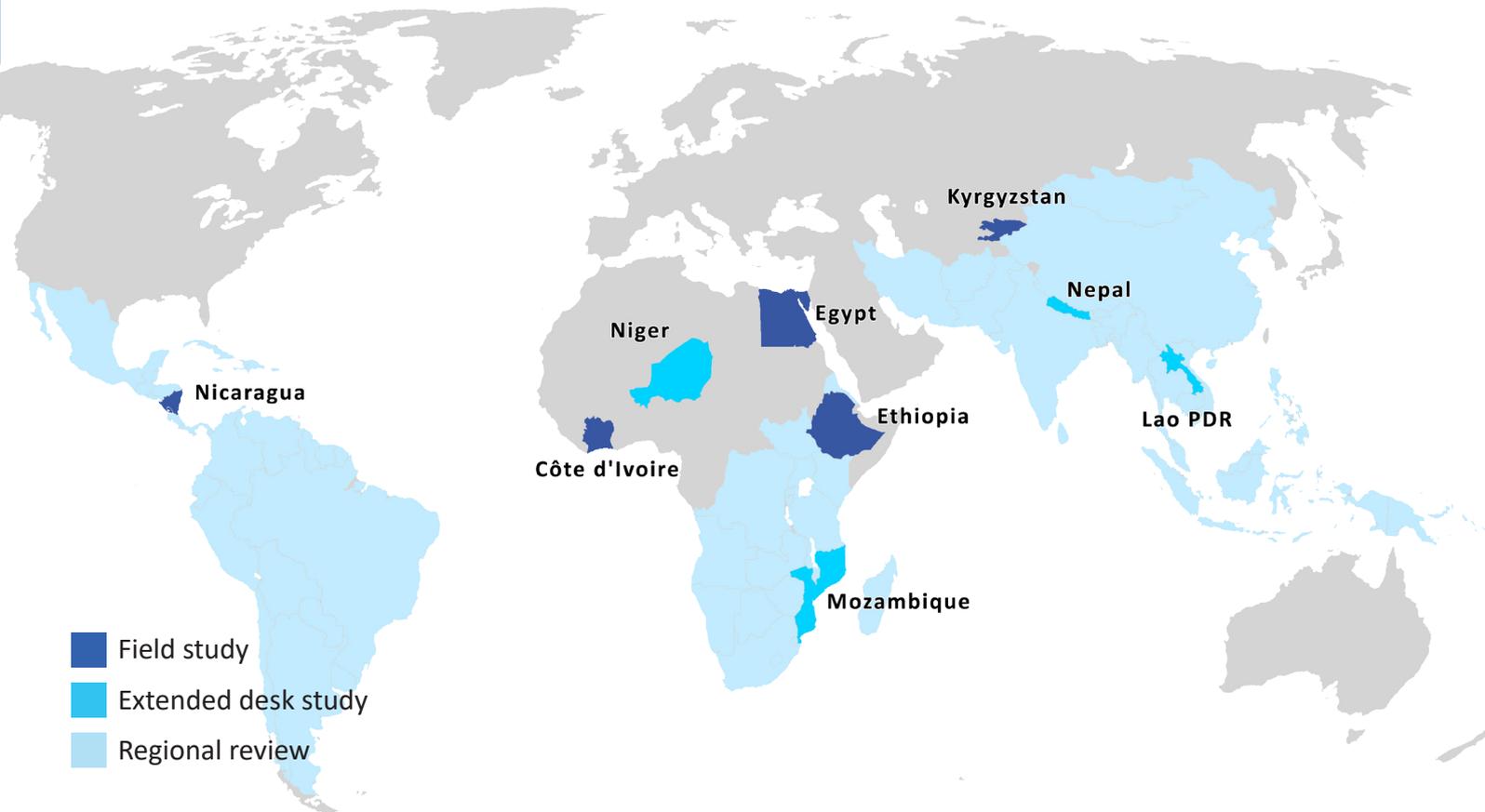
- ▶ Evidence-based advocacy for development, investment and implementation
- ▶ Sexual and reproductive health education and information for adolescents and youth
- ▶ Sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents and youth (including contraception and HIV)
- ▶ Initiatives to reach marginalised and disadvantaged adolescents and youth, especially girls
- ▶ Youth leadership and participation in policy dialogue and programming

The evaluation had three primary objectives:

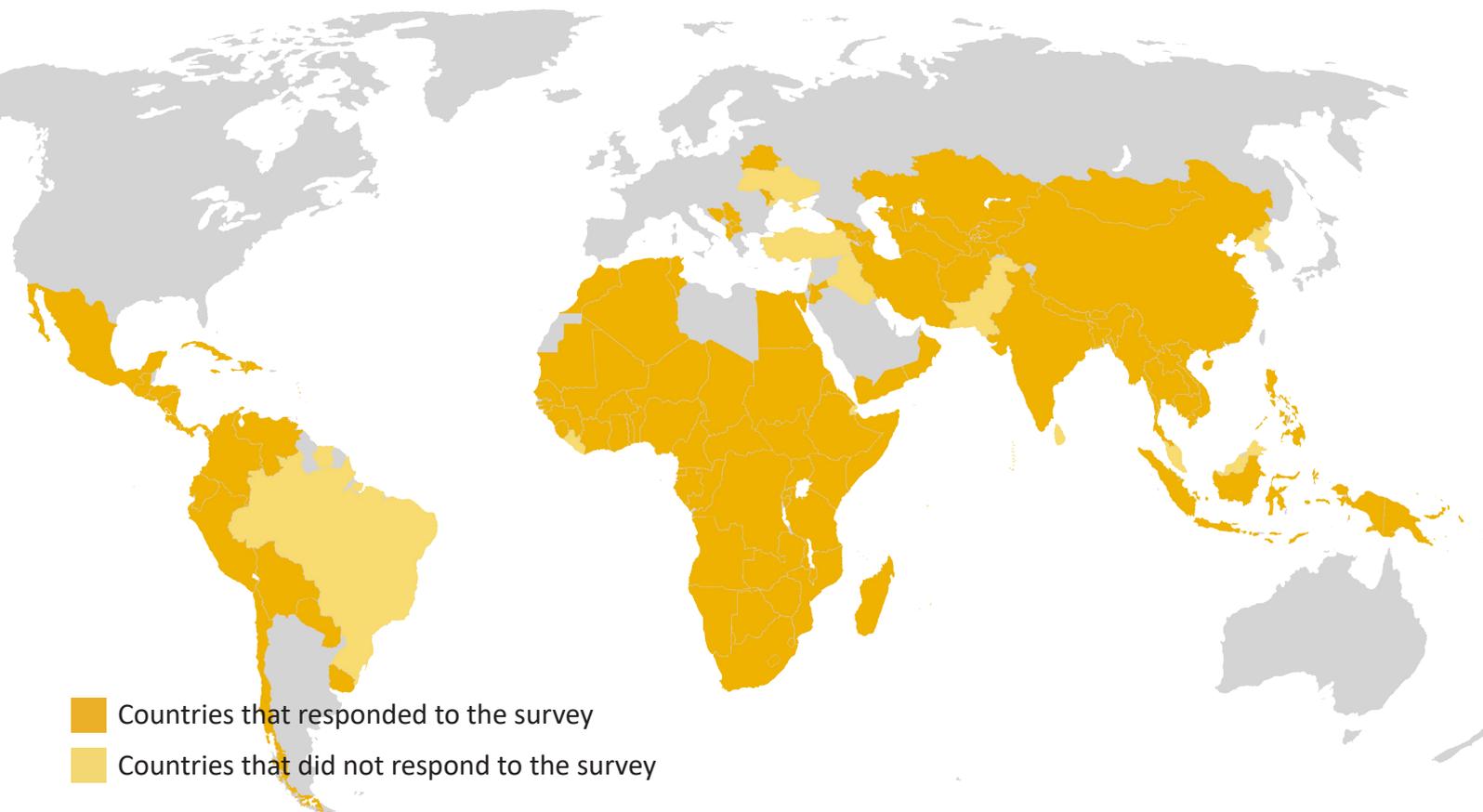
- 1** To assess the performance of UNFPA in its support to adolescents and youth during the period 2008 to 2015
- 2** To facilitate learning, capture good practices and generate knowledge from UNFPA experience implementing a range of interventions in the area of adolescents and youth across diverse contexts
- 3** To inform the development of the forthcoming Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and implementation of adolescents and youth interventions within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



Núcleo de Mavalane, a youth association against drugs and HIV, Mozambique ©Sipa Press/Benedicte Desrus



Geographic coverage of the 9 country case studies and the 3 regional reviews



Geographic coverage of the surveyed countries

2. The context

Why are adolescents and youth important?

The world has more young people than ever before. There are about 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24 and this number is expected to increase. The main health issues faced by adolescents and youth include early pregnancy and childbirth, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and other infectious diseases, and violence. Despite achievements in the sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of young people and the human rights of adolescent girls and young women, challenges remain. Underlying social, economic and legal barriers affect young people's sexual and reproductive health. Gender norms and inequalities often put girls and young women and their sexual and reproductive health at a significant disadvantage.

Today, about 60 per cent of the population in the least developed countries is under age 24 and is rapidly increasing. This rising number of young people, when accompanied by falling fertility rates, offers a critical window of opportunity for developing countries to realise a demographic dividend of economic growth. This occurs when a country's working-age population is larger than the non-working and offers an opportunity for rapid economic growth with great potential gains, particularly among young people. To make the most of a demographic dividend, countries with falling fertility rates must undertake specific actions to empower young people to fulfil their potential. This includes encouraging gainful employment, investing in education, and ensuring access to adequate nutrition and health, including unrestricted and universal access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services.

Definition of adolescents and youth

The United Nations has defined youth since 1981 within a general age range of 15 to 24 years. While there are no universally accepted definitions, UNFPA, WHO, and UNICEF share a common, expanded definition which includes:

- ▶ Adolescents: 10 to 19 years
- ▶ Young people: 10 to 24 years
- ▶ Youth: 15 to 24 years

To date, the terms “adolescents” and “youth” are used interchangeably in programmes and policies. Research is equally negligent in making clear distinctions between the age groups of very young adolescents (10 to 14) and those slightly older (15 to 19), despite significant social, psychological, physiological, and developmental differences.

What is the role of UNFPA?

UNFPA is mandated to advance the sexual and reproductive health, the participation and leadership and the wellbeing of adolescents and youth at global, regional and country levels. This mandate is anchored in UNFPA strategic plans and adolescents and youth frameworks.

At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, commitments to advancing the sexual health and reproductive rights of young people were made. UNFPA aligns its support with other stakeholders committed to adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health, including other United Nations organisations. Support is also aligned with internationally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Millennium Development Goals, and those articulated within the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, for which UNFPA has the unique mandate of monitoring progress on implementation.



At the 2012 Commission on Population and Development, governments agreed...

“...with the full involvement of young people and with the support of the international community, to give full attention to meeting the reproductive health service, information and education needs of young people, with full respect for their privacy and confidentiality, free of discrimination, and to

provide them with evidence-based comprehensive education on human sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, human rights and gender equality to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality.”

What commitments has UNFPA made?

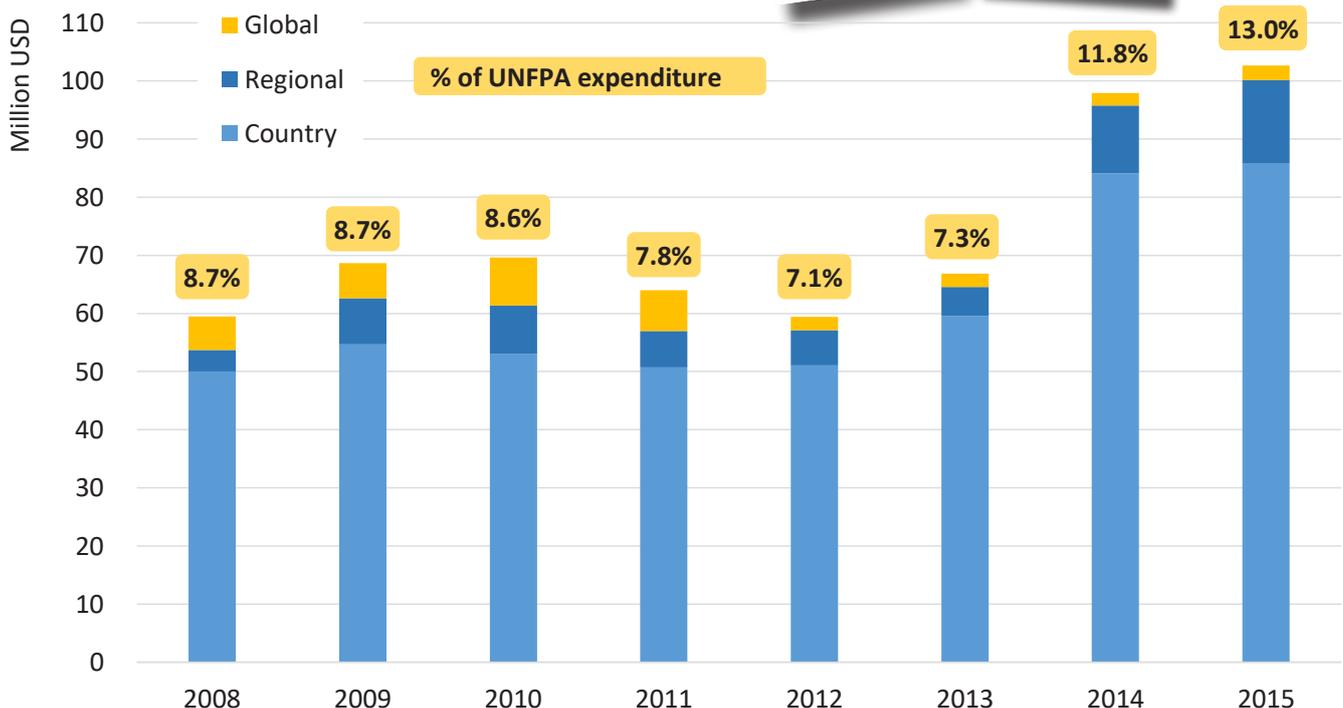
To advance UNFPA support of adolescents and youth, significant financial and human resources have been invested since 2008.

Expenditure in support of adolescents and youth over the period 2008 to 2015 was USD 589 million, which represented 10 per cent of total UNFPA expenditure over the same period.

In 2015, financial support for adolescents and youth accounted for 13 per cent of UNFPA expenditure, which was an increase from 8.7 per cent in 2008. Human resources were available in 90 per cent of country offices and in all six regional offices.

Which frameworks guided UNFPA?

- ▶ UNFPA Framework for Action on Adolescents and Youth (2006)
- ▶ UNFPA Strategic Plan 2008-2011
- ▶ Midterm Review of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2008-2013
- ▶ UNFPA Strategy on Adolescents and Youth 2012-2020
- ▶ UNFPA Strategic Plan 2014-2017



Expenditure in support of adolescents and youth

3. Evaluation approach

The evaluation was framed by seven evaluation criteria and seven evaluation questions. The criteria included: relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, efficiency, partnership, coordination and added value. The questions were grounded in a reconstructed theory of change emanating from UNFPA strategic plans and strategy documents related to support to adolescents and youth for the period under evaluation. Each evaluation question contained several assumptions and specific indicators to frame the data collection and analysis.

The evaluation utilised a theory-based approach and combined qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. Contribution analysis was used to assess causal links and triangulation was applied to guarantee the reliability and robustness of findings.

The evaluation followed a transparent, participatory approach, involving diverse stakeholders and integrated both gender and human rights principles as well as other key principles including participation, social transformation, inclusiveness, and empowerment.

Importantly, the evaluation captured the perspectives, views and voices of programme beneficiaries, that is, adolescents and youth themselves. In total, 325 young people were engaged during the evaluation process.

The evaluation's scope includes all support provided by UNFPA to adolescents and youth at country, regional and global levels, with a particular focus on the countries and regions captured in the five field case studies (**Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan and Nicaragua**), the four extended desk studies (**Lao PDR, Mozambique, Nepal and Niger**) and the three regional reviews (**Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific and East and Southern Africa**).

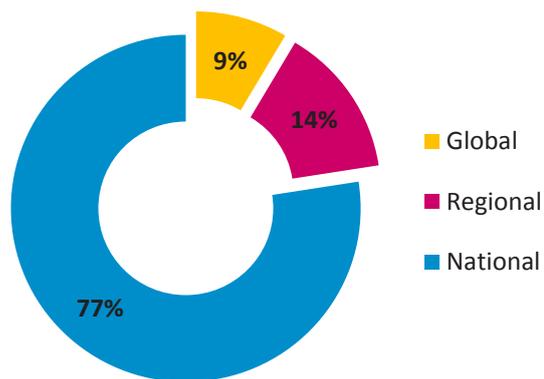
The evaluation had five components and each provided a line of evidence that was used to inform the three levels of analysis (country, regional and global).

The evaluation questions covered the following topics:

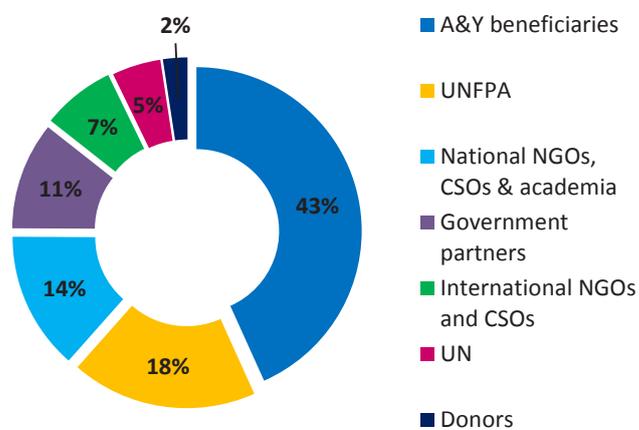
- 1** Alignment of support to adolescents and youth, particularly the most marginalised and vulnerable, with UNFPA policies and strategies, partner government priorities, plans and the needs of adolescents and youth and responsiveness to change in context
- 2** Incorporation of human rights, gender responsive and culturally sensitive approaches in programming and prioritisation of the most marginalised and vulnerable adolescents and youth, particularly young adolescent girls in interventions
- 3** Sustainability of the availability of sexual and reproductive health education and information and integrated services for adolescents and youth
- 4** Evidence-based policies and programmes that incorporate the needs and rights of adolescents and youth and priority for adolescent girls in national development policies and programmes
- 5** Adolescents and youth leadership, participation and empowerment, especially by marginalised and vulnerable adolescents and youth, particularly adolescent girls
- 6** Availability, optimisation and utilisation of resources to achieve results in support to adolescents and youth
- 7** UNFPA leadership, coordination and partnerships to advance adolescents and youth issues and promote South-South cooperation

Methods for data collection

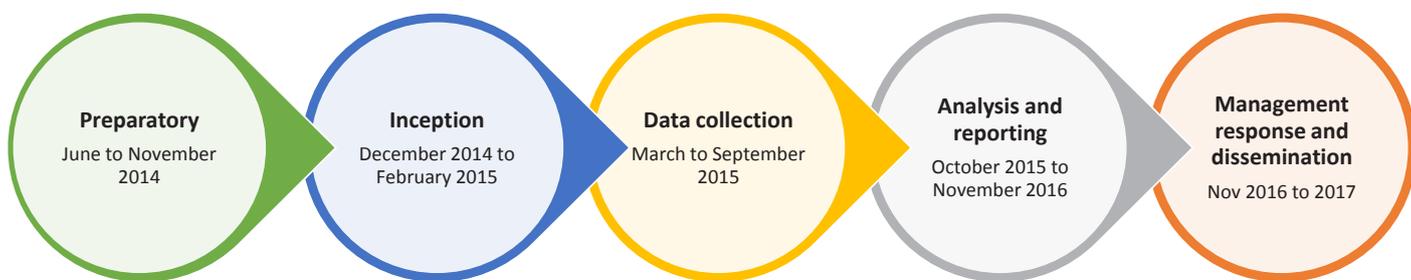
Data collection methods included: document and literature reviews, a detailed financial analysis, interviews with key informants, group interviews, focus group discussions, survey of UNFPA country offices, direct observation in countries visited, and an e-Roundtable. Based on stakeholder mapping at all levels, 670 stakeholders were consulted of which 325 were adolescents and youth.



Evaluation components



Distribution of key informants by level and type of stakeholder



Evaluation phases

4. Overall assessment

The evaluation concludes that UNFPA has significantly increased its priority, policy and programmatic focus in terms of support to adolescents and youth during the evaluation period of 2008 to 2015.

During this period, UNFPA leadership helped implement the International Conference on Population and Development Programme for Action for adolescents and youth and other internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

There has been a steady evolution in focus on adolescents and youth over the three strategic planning periods covered by the evaluation. From 2014, with the adoption of the current strategic plan, UNFPA has further deepened its focus on, and support to, adolescents and youth.

This increasing strategic focus was accompanied by increased investment in financial and human resources for both mainstreamed and targeted programming.



UNFPA is a highly recognised and respected leader

UNFPA was found to be a highly recognised and respected leader in adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health and exceptionally well-placed to expand this leadership to a broader adolescents and youth agenda.

The evaluation notes that UNFPA leadership in the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and youth is highly valued and that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a timely opportunity to build on this base, further leveraging the demographic dividend.

UNFPA is at the forefront of support for adolescents and youth

UNFPA has consistently been at the forefront of support for the availability and use of sexual and reproductive health services, education and information for adolescents and youth.

The contribution of UNFPA has proven essential to advancing the respect, protection and fulfilment of the human rights of adolescents and youth, particularly those of girls.

Strong and effective support was found in UNFPA work on adolescent girls, an area in which UNFPA has been a leading advocate.

UNFPA champions the leadership and participation of young people

By supporting the capacity building of youth leaders and youth-led organisations, UNFPA has been widely acknowledged for championing the leadership and participation of young people within global and regional development processes. UNFPA commitment to the engagement, leadership and participation of adolescents and youth has advanced a human rights-based approach to development.

UNFPA-supported, youth-led conferences generated often groundbreaking political commitments from governments and opened critical windows of opportunity for stakeholders to deliver on sexual and reproductive health services and education for adolescents and youth.

5. Key results

Alignment of support and responsiveness to changing contexts

UNFPA support was well-aligned with government plans and policies on adolescents and youth. It also supported governments to develop national plans and strategies reflecting the needs of adolescents and youth.

UNFPA responded appropriately to changing contexts while maintaining the coherence of their programmes.

UNFPA has advocated for investment in adolescents and youth in order to take full advantage of a potential demographic dividend.

Sexual and reproductive health education and integrated services

UNFPA contributed to an increase in the availability and use of sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents and youth by building national capacities to deliver youth-friendly health services in line with international standards, assuring the integration of HIV services and the availability of contraceptives. Integration of gender based violence services was not regularly part of youth-friendly health service packages.

UNFPA helped reduce legal and policy barriers to sexual and reproductive health services, which increased use of services by young people. Multisectoral and mainstreamed service programmes that engaged communities were more successful in making services comprehensive and accessible to young people.

UNFPA contributed to an increase in the availability of sexual and reproductive health education and information programmes for adolescents and youth through advocacy, building national capacities, and providing policy advice. UNFPA also created knowledge and tools to support their implementation.

Incorporation of human rights, gender responsive and culturally sensitive approaches

UNFPA has consistently incorporated human rights, gender responsive, and culturally sensitive approaches into programming for adolescents and youth at all levels, with approaches varying by context and capacity of the country office. UNFPA efforts to incorporate the most marginalised and vulnerable adolescents and youth, particularly adolescent girls, have increased since 2008.



Poster promoting a responsible sexuality in Nicaragua
©UNFPA Evaluation Office

Good practice example: UNFPA supports leadership and participation of marginalised and vulnerable adolescents and youth



Srijana works in the association of women who use drugs in Nepal



Context: Youth LEAD is a youth-led organisation focusing on young populations at risk of, or affected by, HIV in the Asia Pacific region. Founded in 2010 with support from UNFPA, it is currently represented in 19 countries.

UNFPA Strategy: Youth LEAD designs and implements programmes designed by young people for young people. It focuses on education, advocacy and networking at local, national and regional levels, contributes to publications, and partners with United Nations agencies, civil society, and donors.

Results: Youth LEAD has developed the NewGen short course, which focuses on capacity building to raise the voices and profile of young people.

Follow Up: Youth LEAD represents Asia Pacific in the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board. It also serves as the children, youth and adolescent constituency focal point of the Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Organisation Engagement Mechanism and is an active member of the Asia Pacific Inter-Agency Task Team on young populations and the PACT (a global consortium of youth-led organisations working on HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights).

Prioritising adolescent girls and adolescents and youth data for programming and policymaking

UNFPA significantly contributed to increasing the priority given to adolescent girls in national development policies and programmes. Many stakeholders recognised UNFPA as a leader in adolescent girl issues at all levels, especially on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. Operationalisation of the strategic priority on adolescent girls is, as yet, inconsistent at country level reflecting a lack of clarity around the concepts of marginalisation and vulnerability. Adolescents and youth programming has not, as yet, focused sufficiently on young adolescent girls aged 10 to 14 years.

UNFPA support to the collection of data on adolescents and youth was strong, with more work needed in the use of data for policy-making at country and regional levels. The collection of age-disaggregated data and the consistent use of needs-assessments were limited. Joint programming, especially for adolescent girls, however, was more successful in the use of data and needs-assessments.



HIV/Aids awareness in Nepal ©UNFPA/Anna Adhikari

Adolescent and youth leadership, participation and empowerment

UNFPA actively built the leadership capacity of young people by strengthening adolescents and youth networks and organisations as well as individuals at all levels, through skills-training and encouraging leadership and participation in conferences, meetings and workshops.

UNFPA supported representatives of youth organisations to engage with implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies and programmes from local to global levels and helped establish youth-led advisory and advocacy mechanisms at country and regional levels. This support resulted in direct youth input to global, regional and national sexual and reproductive health agendas, including in the 20 year review process of the International Conference on Population and Development.

Leadership, coordination and partnership

UNFPA has provided effective technical and political leadership on adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health through its convening power and strategic advocacy, with greatest achievements at global and regional levels.

UNFPA provided leadership and coordinated effectively on numerous adolescents and youth issues resulting in increased political commitment to adolescents and youth, as evidenced in the Montevideo Consensus in Latin America and “Young People Today” in East and Southern Africa.

South-South cooperation was well-supported by headquarters and some regional offices. This facilitated the exchange of knowledge and lessons learned and developed capacities in UNFPA programme countries. The use of South-South cooperation at country level could be further explored.

Availability and use of resources

UNFPA has put in place adequate human resources at country and regional level for adolescent and youth programming. However, staff retention at country level posed challenges to sustainability and institutional memory. Staffing at headquarters is characterised by insufficient coordination and multiple lines of accountability across different branches implementing adolescents and youth interventions.

Financial resources for adolescents and youth increased over the evaluation period, specifically at country and regional level. Administrative and organisational structures, including for monitoring and evaluation, have improved significantly, although further effort is required to consolidate progress.



Good practice example: Andean plan on adolescent pregnancy prevention

Plan eə

PLAN ANDINO
PARA LA PREVENCIÓN
DEL EMBARAZO
EN ADOLESCENTES



Carmen, a 16-year-old Colombian, expects her second child

©Joey O'Loughlin

Context: High adolescent pregnancy rates in the region.

UNFPA Strategy: The Latin America and the Caribbean regional office partnered to support the creation of an Andean plan for pregnancy prevention together with **Colombia, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru** and **Venezuela**.

UNFPA partnered with governments, intergovernmental actors and donors such as the Economic Commission of Latin America, the Iberoamerican Organisation for Youth and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation to create a multisectoral committee for adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health education and services in the region.

Results: The Andean plan fostered national commitment, with clear policies and implementation guidelines. Current evidence, lessons learned and best practices were shared in the region, which helped to implement quality sexual and reproductive health services and education for adolescents and youth. Programmes were encouraged to scale up with the multisectoral support of institutional leaders and champions, as well as youth leaders and organisations.

Follow up: This commitment has since been used by adolescents and youth advocates in countries, with support from UNFPA, to advance key issues such as sexual and reproductive health education and information and access to health services.



6. Summary of conclusions

Strategic positioning of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth

- ▶ UNFPA is a recognised leader in adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health and is well-positioned to lead on a broader adolescents and youth development agenda in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- ▶ There is a need to consolidate and strengthen strategic clarity and coordination for UNFPA support to adolescents and youth.
- ▶ UNFPA has allocated adequate human and financial resources for adolescents and youth programming.

Programme areas for UNFPA support to increase quality, effectiveness and sustainability

- ▶ UNFPA is a champion for adolescent girls and has sharpened its focus and attention on their diverse needs.
- ▶ UNFPA has been at the vanguard of calling for the respect, protection and fulfilment of the human rights of adolescents and youth, especially adolescent girls, through a human rights-based approach to programming that is both culturally and gender sensitive. UNFPA contributed to changing laws, policies and social norms that discriminate against young people.
- ▶ UNFPA has a long-standing commitment to meeting the needs of marginalised and vulnerable adolescents. There has been a particular focus on adolescent girls and young populations at risk of HIV, with demonstrated strong results.
- ▶ UNFPA has been at the forefront of sexual and reproductive health service provision, education and information for adolescents and youth. Through long-term investments, UNFPA has made important contributions to increasing the use of youth-friendly health services and sexual and reproductive health education and information, including life-skills programmes, for in- and out-of-school youth.
- ▶ UNFPA is widely recognised for its support for youth leadership and participation at all levels, through capacity building of individual youth leaders, youth-led organisations and the development of networks of youth organisations.



Use of data for evidence-based programming and learning

► UNFPA is a respected partner in the production and availability of adolescents and youth-related data and has a clear comparative advantage in this area. Overall, UNFPA has strengthened the capacity of national statistics offices to produce and disseminate disaggregated data on adolescents and youth, although data collection and analysis on younger adolescents (10 to 14 year olds) remains inadequate.

► UNFPA has made recent efforts to become a learning organisation. However, further effort is required to ensure that results-based management systems fully and accurately capture the breadth of adolescents and youth programming, and that country offices prioritise reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and lesson-learning initiatives for adolescents and youth.

7. Key recommendations



I. Strategic positioning of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth



- ▶ Through a unified framework for adolescents and youth, supported by an overarching theory of change, UNFPA should further consolidate and build on strong progress in adolescents and youth programming.
- ▶ UNFPA should continue to provide strong leadership on adolescents and youth issues within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- ▶ UNFPA should review resource-allocation for adolescents and youth, maximise efficiency and ensure that staff implementing adolescents and youth interventions have the necessary skill set to do so.

II. UNFPA programming to enhance relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability

▶ UNFPA should improve efforts to target the most vulnerable and marginalised among adolescents and youth by strengthening analysis and use of data.

▶ UNFPA should consistently use a human rights-based approach in adolescents and youth programming.

▶ UNFPA should improve the quality and sustainability of sexual and reproductive health services, education and information for adolescents and youth by ensuring systematic linkages across UNFPA-supported interventions in these areas.

▶ UNFPA should strengthen meaningful engagement of adolescents and youth at all levels of programming (national, regional and global).



III. Reporting, monitoring, evaluation and lesson learning

► UNFPA should strengthen research, monitoring, reporting and evaluation to generate evidence for organisational learning and programming, and accountability for adolescents and youth support.



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