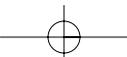


ADOLESCENTS: PROFILES IN EMPOWERMENT



“Young people are a source of creativity, energy and initiative, of dynamism and social renewal. They learn quickly and adapt readily. Given the chance to go to school and find work, they will contribute hugely to economic development and social progress. Were we to fail to give them these opportunities, at best we would be complicit in an unforgivable waste of human potential. At worst, we would be contributing to all the evils of youth without hope: loss of morale, and lives that are socially unproductive and potentially destructive – of the individuals themselves, their communities and even fragile democracies.”

‘We the Peoples’: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century, 2000

A PIONEERING INITIATIVE

'Meeting the Development and Participation Rights of Adolescent Girls' is a groundbreaking global pilot initiative funded by the United Nations Foundation (UNF). In accordance with the Secretary-General's reform effort, UNF supports the goals of the United Nations and contributes resources and support to a number of development efforts.

With this initiative, UNF has gathered together a range of partners to help realize the rights of adolescent girls and boys. Implementing partners are the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Population Council, the Commonwealth Youth Programme, the International Centre for Research on Women, and Family Care International are complementing the endeavour by sharing their expertise in reaching out to adolescents.

The project, now in its third year, is under way in 12 countries and territories: Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Jordan, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Russian Federation, Sao Tome and Principe and Senegal. The activities vary from country to country, depending on local needs. Many countries expanded the programme to include adolescent boys as well as girls.

This joint report reflects the activities of individual agencies around an issue of common concern. Each agency implements the interventions described in this document in accordance with the principles and policies of its mandate.

ADOLESCENTS: TODAY'S RESOURCES, TOMORROW'S ASSETS

More than 1 billion girls and boys around the world are in their second decade of life. About 85 per cent of these young people live in developing countries.¹ Young people face enormous challenges to learn, form relationships, shape their identities and acquire the social and practical skills they need to become active and productive adults. Adults, parents, decision makers and the world community at large have a moral and legal obligation to ensure the rights of adolescents and help them develop their strengths in a supportive and safe environment.

Adolescence can be perilous, particularly for young people struggling in poverty, especially for girls. Adolescence is often the time when “the world expands for boys and contracts for girls. Boys enjoy new privileges reserved for men; girls endure new restrictions reserved for women. Boys gain autonomy, mobility, opportunity and power; girls are systematically deprived of these assets.”²

Adolescent girls' enrolment in school often declines sharply due to the need for their help in the home and the costs of education. Parents often restrict their movements out of fears for their reputation and safety.

Girls' lack of power and status during adolescence is compounded by sexual issues. Many young women are unable to negotiate safe sex or assert their rights to reject unwanted sex.

Girls may have no control over whom or when they marry, or whether they want to marry at all. In some developing countries about 40 per cent of girls marry by the age of 18, often without their consent; often they marry much older men. Poor families may support the early marriage of their daughters because they regard them as an economic burden rather than a potential asset. For some parents, their daughter's marriage is seen as a way to prevent her from having premarital sex and ensure her safety and future security.

Adolescent girls are up to six times more likely to become infected with HIV than adolescent boys in some countries. Early and unwanted pregnancies are common. Approximately 70,000 adolescent girls die each year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Young women under the age of 18 face twice the risk of death during childbirth as women in their twenties. Many of them suffer long-term disabilities as a result of complications and/or poor health services during pregnancy and delivery.

Millions of adolescent girls, both married and unmarried, face domestic violence, rape, sexual and dowry-related abuse and exploitation, female genital mutilation/cutting and forced prostitution. It is estimated, for example, that 4 million women and girls worldwide are sold into marriage, slavery or prostitution. Half of all victims of sexual abuse are under the age of 15.

All young people have the right to:

- policies and programmes that promote their survival and personal development, including health care, education, life and livelihood skills and vocational training
- the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

¹ The World Health Organization defines adolescents as people between the ages of 10 to 19 years of age. Young people are commonly defined as those between the ages of 10 to 24. Youth are defined as those between 15 and 24 years of age, depending on the country context. To avoid repetition in this publication, the terms 'adolescents' and 'young people' are used interchangeably to refer to people aged between 10 and 19.

² B.S. Mensch, J. Bruce, and M.E. Greene, *The Uncharted Passage: Girls' Adolescence in the Developing World*, Population Council, New York, 1998.

- protection against violence, discrimination and exploitation
- participate in matters that affect their lives and freely express their viewpoints.

These rights have been set out in:

- the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989
- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979
- the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 and in the key outcome document issued at ICPD+5 in 1999
- the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, and the Political Declaration and outcome document from Beijing+5 in 2000.

Respecting these rights will enable all adolescents, boys as well as girls, to grow and develop to their full potential. The existing gender bias that skews societies and entrenches inequalities and poverty can be ended, giving girls the freedom to be active and equal partners in development.

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emanating from the Millennium Summit of the United Nations form a framework for the United Nations system to work together. A number of issues affecting adolescents are central to the MDGs: completion of primary schooling, elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, reducing the

maternal mortality ratio, and implementing strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

The initiative entitled 'Meeting the Development and Participation Rights of Adolescent Girls' puts 'adolescence' at the forefront of the development agenda of the three implementing UN organizations. Through this initiative adolescent participation is being institutionalized and adolescent issues and rights are being mainstreamed. Best practices and lessons learned are being incorporated into the policy framework. Indicators for measurement are being developed beyond health and education. The realities of girls' lives are being seen more clearly and strategies are more articulate at the country and regional levels. Protective environments for adolescents' health and development are being created and strengthened.

At the country level, the MDGs are supplemented by other developmental frameworks such as poverty reduction strategies, sector-wide approaches and health sector reforms. For the United Nations system, the Common Country Assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework are key instruments. The challenge is to ensure that the concerns of adolescents are mainstreamed within these frameworks so that the goals spelled out in the MDGs are fully achieved.

At the national level, this initiative has been instrumental in making the voices of adolescents heard. The long-term success of the project, however, will depend on how these voices continue to reverberate and influence larger developmental goals.

Following are some experiences that demonstrate the project's impact to date.

BANGLADESH

REACHING OUT TO RURAL ADOLESCENT GIRLS

In Bangladesh, nearly half of adolescent girls are married by the age of 15 and more than half of these become mothers by the time they are 19. Surveys show that early marriage, lack of knowledge about reproductive health and illiteracy are common among adolescents.

UNICEF and UNFPA, under the umbrella of 'Meeting the Development and Participation Rights of Adolescent Girls' joined together to address the problem.

An assessment study entitled 'Situation of Adolescent Girls in Bangladesh' provided essential information about the family, community and social and economic aspects of the girls' lives. And a similar study on adolescent boys has also been completed.

UNICEF works with unmarried adolescent girls to encourage them to delay early marriage and to empower the girls to participate in the social and economic decisions that affect them. UNFPA is working to inform married adolescents about their rights and to sensitize parents, community leaders and health care providers about the reproductive health needs of adolescents. Both agencies operate in the same geographical regions of rural Bangladesh and use complementary approaches.

UNICEF's pilot intervention Kishori Abhijan represents a pioneering effort to empower adolescents. The initiative encourages adolescent leadership and role models, and fosters gender equality and peer-to-peer education. Supported by UNICEF since 2001, it is being implemented in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh and non-governmental organization partners, including BRAC, the Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES) and the Population Council. UNICEF is assisting the government, families and communities in providing adolescents access to better education, information about their health and well-being, and opportunities to gain life and livelihood skills.

Under the scheme, girls are active partners and participate in non-traditional livelihood skills programmes like journalism and photography that enhance their confidence and visibility in the community.

Life skills-based education uses participatory approaches to teach critical thinking, negotiation and decision-making, in addition to health, social, business and other information. The training has opened up new roles for the girls in their communities. "My parents arranged for my brother to marry a 15-year-old girl but I convinced my parents that this was wrong and they called off the wedding," said one adolescent girl.

UNICEF and UNFPA are working with the Bangladesh Government and local partners to encourage adolescent leadership and foster gender equality.

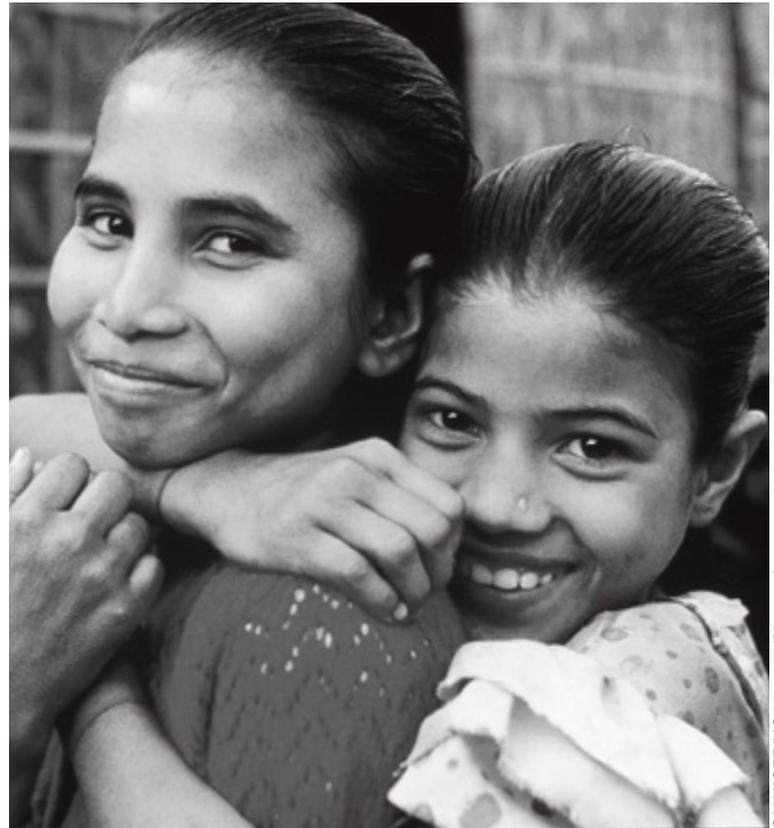
Another adolescent leader said, "My uncle blamed my aunt as she had given birth to a girl, and [so] he decided to take another wife. I explained to my aunt that the sex of children is determined by the father and not by the mother. When she, in turn, explained this to my uncle, he got very upset.... When he was shown my book, he accepted what was written and decided not to remarry."

Adolescent girls' mobility is usually very restricted, but four adolescent girls went to Rawalpindi, Pakistan, to participate in a South Asia Girl Child Symposium. After returning, Nasrin Akhter, a member of CMES Chapainawabganj said, "Five journalists came to my house to ask me what I did there and what I saw. More importantly, when I told my parents...what things I saw and how we were looked after, my mother said, 'Today there is no difference between my son and my daughter'."

"IF I HAD [HAD] THE INFORMATION BEFOREHAND MY MARRIAGE WOULD HAVE BEEN DELAYED FOR AT LEAST TWO YEARS AND I COULD HAVE CONTINUED MY SCHOOLING. NOW I AM SURE THE SAME WILL NOT HAPPEN TO MY SISTER."

Rashida, a married adolescent girl

A young female participant in a 15-day journalism training course said, "My father was nervous about me travelling far to attend this course. So we both spoke to the BRAC manager, who



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assured my father that I would be treated like his own daughter there. My father then agreed. I went to the training and had no problems. Since then, I have been allowed to go to more courses."

UNFPA, as a member of the Adolescent Reproductive Health Working Group, is working closely with the government and developmental agencies, policy makers and NGO representatives, to heighten adolescents' awareness about reproductive health rights through adolescent-friendly health services.

Baseline surveys facilitated by UNFPA have been used to design innovative approaches to the health needs of married adolescent girls. As part of the adolescent awareness campaign, reader-friendly booklets on marriage and family health, HIV/AIDS and relationships have been published and distributed to adolescents through youth club networks.

During pre-testing of the booklets, Rashida, a married adolescent girl, said "If I had [had] the information beforehand, my marriage would have been delayed for at least two years and I could have continued my schooling. Now I am sure the same will not happen to my sister."

Nearly 300 young people are learning multimedia skills—videography, TV production, radio broadcasting, photography, print journalism and website development—at the Multi-Media Centre in Cotonou.



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BENIN CREATING A CULTURE OF MUTUAL RESPECT

Adolescents in Benin account for 31 per cent of the population. They are faced with daunting challenges, as are their peers in most West African nations. Girls are the most vulnerable. They are impoverished and poorly educated, and only 34 per cent attend school between the ages of 6 and 11. Many girls marry and become mothers by the age of 19. Maternal mortality is very high: 498 for every 100,000 births. Between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of girls are forced to go through female genital mutilation/cutting.

UNICEF and UNFPA, the government and local NGOs have all worked together since 2001 on a project entitled Health and Social Services for Adolescent Girls in Benin – Empowering Adolescent Girls and Enhancing their Reproductive Rights.

The overall target is to reach 200,000 adolescent girls, both married and single, by the end of 2004 through Youth and Leisure Centers that provide quality health information and reproductive health services, non-formal education, including literacy programmes, and opportunities for cultural and artistic expression.

UNFPA initiated a national pilot programme to tackle youth health issues through the youth centres in partnership with the government; nurses are employed to provide girls and boys with reproductive and sexual health information, and peer educators have been trained for community based services.

UNICEF responded by building on experience gained since 1994 when it undertook a national and community project to improve children's rights, girls' education and women's quality of life through educational programmes and vocational skills training.

The present project focuses on urban and rural girls with activities that include:

- a socio-anthropological study on the situation of adolescents' reproductive health
- chat sessions every two months for 50 to 100 girls per region to speak about health, lifestyles, prevention of sexually transmitted infections and responsible behaviour
- exchange sessions involving three or four couples to discuss marriage, parental responsibility and civic values. The sessions are observed by 500 adolescents
- sports and recreational activities including basketball and theatre, to help young people develop a healthy, competitive spirit and a positive attitude
- training of over 500 girls and women as apprentices and in income-generating skills. Six non-profit ventures were started to provide jobs for young people
- a multimedia campaign on adolescent issues, including HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. The campaign reached young people, community leaders, teachers and parents
- setting up a multimedia centre including radio and educational TV, as well as a cyber café in Cotonou for adolescents and youth
- advocacy for the elaboration and adoption of a National Youth Policy.

THE OVERALL TARGET IS TO REACH 200,000 ADOLESCENT GIRLS, BOTH MARRIED AND SINGLE, BY THE END OF 2004.

The focus is on girls, but boys also benefit. Groups of boys and girls meet at youth centres, formerly a male preserve, to discuss their problems and come up with their own creative solutions, creating a healthy mutual respect for each other.

Parents are encouraged to take part as role models for youth. Political and community leaders also regularly participate in meetings on adolescents' reproductive health and girls' basic rights. Such meetings help dismantle social segregation and provide the girls with information they previously lacked. The government has shown their commitment to adolescents by contributing funds for the implementation of this project. The Ministry of Youth has incorporated some of the project's goals on reproductive and sexual health into its policy.



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JORDAN TRAINEES AND TRAINERS – A MULTIPLYING EFFECT

Young peer educators
and facilitators promote
healthy lifestyles
among adolescents in
Jordan.

In Jordan, unemployment among young people is high and society still largely restricts girls. Girls have much less freedom than boys and far less access to public places such as markets, youth facilities and Internet cafés. There has been a dearth of programmes to help adolescents develop their creativity, life skills and healthy lifestyles.

To more accurately gauge the situation of adolescents, UNICEF led a nationwide baseline survey that revealed differences between the way youths and their parents perceive their participation. The survey also confirmed the widespread existence of gender discrimination.

In addition to the survey, two institutional reviews were carried out on organizations working on youth issues, including the youth centers of the Higher Council for Youth. The results confirmed the need for a comprehensive approach to adolescent issues.

UNICEF's pilot project Promoting Life Opportunities for Adolescents in Jordan with a Focus on Girls, was launched in 2000 to create public interest and commitment to improving the situation of adolescents, to foster their participation and to promote opportunities for them in Jordanian society.

The project teaches adolescents life skills and helps build the capacity of those in the government and NGOs who work with young people. In the words of 17-year-old Arij Qadri, "When I got involved in the project, I started thinking of ways to improve myself, my peers and family.... I hope to gain a leadership position working with youth and children."

The Ministry of Education is actively promoting basic life skills in at least 100 schools, including some in refugee camps. The schools offer a 10-hour interactive session between parents and youths to facilitate better communication. The Higher Council for Youth works through 100 youth facilitators in 64 youth centres to support participatory and gender-sensitive approaches. The project was instrumental in creating Jordan's Children's Parliament that met in 2002, at which over 1,200 adolescents were introduced to democratic principles.

UNFPA's project entitled Promoting and Enhancing the Health and Well-Being of Jordanian Young People was launched in 2001. The project conducted a national knowledge, attitude and practice survey to identify risk behaviour and drug abuse patterns among young people and address their concerns. Activities focus on peer education and counselling on reproductive health. UNFPA is successfully implementing its programmes through advocacy seminars, forums and motivational and media campaigns, with the full support of decision

makers, community leaders, NGOs and media professionals. Its goal is to empower at least 35,000 adolescents by the end of the project.

The Princess Basma Youth Resource Center has pioneered participatory training for youth and peer education in Jordan. The centre works closely with UNICEF and UNFPA in designing and developing skills-based education.

The Center helped UNICEF develop training modules on leadership, communication, management of youth-to-youth projects, and dealing with daily pressures. Young people have been trained as peer educators and facilitators and they actively participate at every stage of the project, from initiation to implementation.

As a result:

- 129 female and 72 male adolescent facilitators are reaching 2,172 female and 1,590 male students in schools
- the Higher Council for Youth is training 3,087 adolescents and 475 service providers
- grass-roots NGO partners are reaching 900 adolescents and 325 service providers
- the Ministry of Education is reaching 5,202 adolescents and 3,054 service providers
- another 530 trainers reached 8,964 adolescents, 394 young facilitators and 6,156 service providers.

The Center is partnering with UNFPA in building modules on participatory and gender-sensitive approaches to reproductive health. They are both focusing on improving adolescent reproductive health, addressing discrimination against adolescent girls, and increasing communication between parents and their children about health issues.

"WHEN I GOT INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT, I STARTED THINKING OF WAYS TO IMPROVE MYSELF, MY PEERS AND FAMILY.... I HOPE TO GAIN A LEADERSHIP POSITION WORKING WITH YOUTH AND CHILDREN."

17-year-old Arij Qadri

MALAWI YOUTH CENTERS SERVE 200 A DAY

A situation analysis of adolescent girls in Malawi showed that most girls endure treatable health problems and lack vocational skills. The girls also have a high incidence of sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV/AIDS. Education is not considered a high priority for girls, marriage is perceived as their ultimate goal. Adolescent girls have no voice in these matters in Malawi.

As part of the 'Meeting the Development and Participation Rights of Adolescent Girls' project, a major initiative was launched by UNICEF, UNFPA and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in 2001 with the Department of Youth, national youth councils, ministries, and local and national youth associations.

The partners work with teachers, parents, community and youth leaders, peer educators and national leaders to reach married and unmarried, and in- and out-of-school girls between the ages of 11 and 20. At least 95 per cent of girls in Malawi will be reached by the end of 2004.

The project specifically aims to:

- improve the quality of education
- provide equal opportunities in vocational skills training
- lower the number of adolescent pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV/AIDS
- increase reproductive health services for girls
- give girls greater economic independence through the provision of livelihood skills
- ensure greater participation by girls.

More than 200 adolescent girls have been trained in vocational skills such as the use of computer software, journalism, music, tailoring, knitting and theatre. This represents a dramatic shift away from the traditional home-based skills for girls such as embroidery and cookery.

Theatre and music groups have proven particularly effective in communicating information on HIV/AIDS, children's rights, girls education and participation. In periodic sessions, nearly 300 adolescents discuss sexuality, reproductive health and participation rights. The journalism group produces a quarterly magazine that features stories from the community, focusing on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

Ten girls-only clubs, each with 30 to 100 youth members, have been launched. Local youth NGOs help train the girls in combating HIV/AIDS and in financial management and leadership skills. Activities include peer education, theatre, sports and anti-AIDS festivals. The clubs also work with schools, community and other youth groups. Chisomo Mbango, an adolescent from Youth on the Move Girls Only Club in Lilongwe says, "I have become more assertive since I joined the club. With the skills that we learn, we are now able to discuss issues like HIV/AIDS freely with our friends, community leaders and even our parents."



UNICEF, UNFPA and UNAIDS are working with the Malawi Department of Youth and local partners to improve education and adolescent health, provide vocational training and ensure greater participation by girls.

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Over 700 girls took part in training on adolescent growth and development, values, self-esteem, good parenting, leadership and sexual and reproductive health, and dealing with the pressures of everyday life. A workshop was also conducted for 50 boys and 25 girls on gender sensitivity, equal rights and leadership.

Some 1,300 out-of-school adolescent girls were trained in reading and writing. The number of fluent readers has grown and many are now able to write simple letters and solve basic mathematical problems. In her letter to UNICEF, Agnes Paulo said "the Adolescent Literacy Project has helped us read and write and the project should continue in order to benefit more girls." Forty such letters from girls were received.

"I HAVE BECOME MORE ASSERTIVE SINCE I JOINED THE CLUB. WITH THE SKILLS THAT WE LEARN, WE ARE NOW ABLE TO DISCUSS ISSUES LIKE HIV/AIDS FREELY WITH OUR FRIENDS, COMMUNITY LEADERS AND EVEN OUR PARENTS."

Chisomo Mbangе, an adolescent from Lilongwe

Youth centres have been established to provide young people with 'safe spaces' to meet, learn skills, share information and play football, volleyball, badminton and traditional games. Jointly managed by young people, one centre serves as many as 200 adolescents on a busy day. Over 10,000 children from surrounding schools also use the libraries at the different centres. "My reading skills have improved because of the books at the centre. My parents even encourage me to come to the centre when I'm free" said Gloria Lemba, a 13-year-old girl from Chinsamba Primary School.



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MALI LITERACY IS THE ENTRY POINT

At a school near Kayes, Mali, a young girl participates in class.

The early pregnancy rate for adolescent girls is high in Mali due to unprotected sex. Among girls with no schooling the pregnancy rate is 46 per cent. And the rate of HIV infection is rising among girls and women between the ages of 15 and 30. Nearly all girls (ages 15 to 24) have been subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting.

In 2001, UNICEF, UNFPA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) joined forces to create a multisectoral response to these problems. The project, entitled 'Meeting the Development and Participation Rights of Adolescent Girls', was launched in collaboration with the Ministère de la Femme, de l'Enfant et de la Famille and local and national NGOs.

Its aims were to:

- increase access to education through literacy drives
- heighten public awareness of the harmful effects of early marriage and pregnancy

- provide better sexual and reproductive health services
- offer legal and social protection to girls and promote their rights
- support girls' participation in all levels of public life.

The project is addressed to young people both in and out of school, with a focus on migrant girls, domestic workers, victims of violence and abuse and those living on the margins of society. The project is reaching adolescents through 96 literacy centers. UNFPA is supporting youth reproductive health activities by providing information on family planning and HIV prevention. UNICEF is assisting in educational, livelihood and recreational programmes, including both formal and non-formal education and rights promotion. UNDP trains adolescent girls in leadership and citizenship.

UNDP, along with other partners, is also taking a lead in creating a database on adolescents and developing a framework for integrated vision to promote the development and participation rights of adolescent girls in Mali. Both UNDP and UNICEF are exploring the establishment of a micro-financing system for adolescent girls.

One major innovation has been the use of literacy as a lead-in to other activities including micro-finance and reproductive health. Literate adolescent girls are animators at the centres. In the words of Hawa Sidibe, a 16-year-old from Wasolo Sekou village, Ségou region, "We have been taught to read and write this year. We were happy with the literacy courses. Now we are able to read, to write to our parents in our

ONE MAJOR INNOVATION HAS BEEN THE USE OF LITERACY AS A LEAD-IN TO OTHER ACTIVITIES INCLUDING MICRO-FINANCE AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH.

villages, and to do math. Everything went so well this year and we really hope that it can continue in the same way next year. I request the project administrators to continue literacy training for our sisters so they can see things more clearly. We also hope to have a certificate that shows we successfully completed the course. The certificate will permit us to open a literacy center in our own villages for those who didn't have an opportunity like us."

Other approaches focus on the training and deployment of peer educators, the creation of youth centres and social communication to reach adolescents.

Peer education, however, has had only limited success in Mali. Often participants drop out in the middle of the programme. For a more successful programme, teachers, religious and community leaders and adolescents themselves need to be included in the planning stages.

The sensitive issue of female genital mutilation/cutting is being addressed, with the goal of eliminating it altogether. The project has the full support of the Ministry of Health, which declared that the practice of excision would not be tolerated in any health institution. When Mali finally bans the practice, as have six other African countries, it will contribute greatly to the health and well-being of adolescent girls.

MAURITANIA

INITIATIVE REACHES FOUR OF THE POOREST REGIONS

Mauritania is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 51 per cent of its people living below the poverty line. Other factors such as drought, urban migration, high unemployment and a heavy debt load hamper its socio-economic development.

There is a lack of quality education for girls and boys under 18, who comprise half of the country's population. Education has only recently been made compulsory and, for financial and social reasons, around 15 per cent of primary-school-age children do not attend school. Only 14 per cent of girls attend secondary school. Compounding this problem is the fact that three out of four girls marry before they turn 18.

Mauritania made significant progress in the last decade in providing access to primary education for young people. Improving access to, and the quality of, secondary schools remains a critical challenge.

UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP and WHO, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Education in Mauritania, rose to meet the challenge by launching the Educating Adolescent Girls in Support of Community project in 2001. The initiative was directed at four of the poorest regions in Mauritania – Assaba, Brakna, Gorgol and Guidimakha – where enrolment of girls was low in both primary and secondary schools.

The project focuses specifically on:

- improving the basic infrastructure and environment in 28 secondary schools
- facilitating access to education for girls who are most in need
- enrolling at least 1,500 more girls in secondary schools
- reducing by 50 per cent the dropout rates, currently estimated at nearly 43 per cent
- increasing pass rates by at least 20 per cent
- equipping at least 5,000 girls with life skills, including home economics, reproductive health, computer and information technology and environmental preservation skills
- developing a model of girls' education based on best practices from the project to be replicated throughout Mauritania.

The UNICEF project entitled Social Mobilization for Girls' Enrolment provides an enabling environment for girls, building on annual communication campaigns to mobilize public support for girls' right to education. Parents, community leaders, associations and women's groups are rallied to help bolster girls' enrolment and retention in schools.

In UNDP's Financial Support to Needy Families for Girls' Enrolment programme, families receive assistance in the form of school supplies, books and clothes. The programme also provides workshops and recreational and income-generating activities.

THE PROJECT AIMS TO EQUIP AT LEAST 5,000 GIRLS WITH LIFE SKILLS, INCLUDING HOME ECONOMICS, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, COMPUTER AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION SKILLS.



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Educating girls is a priority in Mauritania. Here, two adolescent girls take a break from class in the town of Kaédi.

To provide a positive learning environment, WHO is collaborating with the village education committees in rehabilitating worn-out school buildings, streamlining water supply, reducing disparities and creating safe spaces and playgrounds, following the experience of UNICEF with its Clean, Healthy and Green Schools primary school programme.

Another innovative concept is the community host families or 'boarding houses' approach developed by UNICEF. Here, families and villages are mobilized to set up community houses for girls near their schools, which become like second homes to them. 'Women mentors' supervise the girls, and because they come from the same villages as the girls, their parents feel secure.

UNESCO, UNFPA, WHO and UNAIDS have jointly helped create school clubs for girls offering educational and recreational activities such as arts and crafts, theatre, sports and media. Some girls have been trained as peer educators to communicate on issues such as leadership, sexual well-being, reproductive health and counselling.

UNFPA and UNESCO have also assisted in streamlining the schools' curricula and reading materials to address youth issues and needs such as gender equity, family life, violence against girls and women, and responsible sexual behaviour and reproductive health.



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MONGOLIA FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS

Adolescents in Mongolia reading *Love*, the country's most popular teen magazine.

Mongolia is a nation of young people. Nearly 35 per cent of the population is under the age of 18 and a quarter of the population is between 10 and 19 years old.

The country occupies a unique place among developing nations because of its many strengths. It has a small population of less than two and a half million in a country that is the size of France. Literacy rates are high. It is one of the few nations where there is gender equality among adolescents. It stands out as an example to the rest of the developing world on how to provide a safe and supportive environment for adolescents – boys and girls alike. However, other issues, such as poor physical school conditions, poor access to health care and inadequate recreational activities for youth outside schools, remain to be addressed.

To better understand the situation of youth, UN agencies, the Mongolian Youth Development Centre and governmental and non-governmental organizations jointly conducted the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey during 1999-2000.

The survey found that nearly 78 per cent of adolescents felt that their active participation in society is not accepted, and that they lacked open communication with their parents. In addition, many young people do not have access to health information and health care services. A third of them felt intimidated by classmates and said that their teachers were authoritarian. The survey also indicated the need for out-of-school and after-school activities with other young people.

“UNTIL THE PROJECT BEGAN, WE DIDN’T REALIZE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES. ADOLESCENTS LIKE THE FEELING OF RESPONSIBILITY – WE ARE ALL TRYING TO LEARN...TO BECOME GOOD MEMBERS OF SOCIETY AND TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MONGOLIA.”

15-year-old Zolkhoo Erdenbulgan

An integrated, sustainable, multisectoral initiative was designed to respond to the needs identified in health, education, participation and communication based on the survey findings. Entitled Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls and Boys, the project was launched by UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO and WHO, in collaboration with the Government of Mongolia, the Scouts Association of Mongolia and – most importantly – adolescent girls and boys themselves.

UNICEF supports the participation of adolescents and parents in schools through student councils, adolescent-friendly centres, and guidelines for youth NGOs and associations.

A major initiative of UNICEF is the ‘My Passport’ campaign, launched to increase civic participation among young people, enhance their role in society and reduce school absenteeism. With enthusiastic support from the government, it involved 12,000 adolescents in a wide array of school and community activities such as tutoring their peers, building leadership skills, and reaching out to peers with disabilities, those out of school and those living on the street. The Prime Minister, enthusiastic about the campaign, declared that it should be conducted in every school in Mongolia from 2002 to 2003.

UNFPA has undertaken a study, the first of its kind, on the lives of young people. UNFPA and UNESCO implemented a distance education programme entitled Parent and Child Communication on Sexuality. A book called *Are You Listening?* focuses on helping parents understand and become more sensitive to the sexual needs and reproductive health of adolescents and explains how adolescents can communicate with their peers. The quality of health services for adolescents have also been improved based on input from young people.

UNFPA is developing handbooks, pamphlets and posters on healthy relationships and has provided education materials on sexuality to be included in secondary school curricula. The needs assessment showed a lack of communication between parents and adolescents in Mongolia about reproductive health and other issues. To address this, UNESCO produced a series of distance learning interventions, including manuals, workshops, textbooks and radio and television programmes.

Due to the joint UNESCO-UNFPA programme on parent-child communication, parents and teachers are now more comfortable discussing sexuality and reproductive health with adolescents. Gendersuren, a father of four children, was initially uncomfortable with the course but then came to value it. “I was intrigued that other parents were attending and I talked with them and they helped me understand that it was necessary.... When I tried to talk to my 10-year-old daughter, she also reacted the same way I did, embarrassed and angry. But then she became more open and began to ask me questions.”

UNESCO is also producing six *Kid to Kid* television programmes on adolescent issues.

WHO is working to improve the quality of health services for adolescents by strengthening the existing health system. Focusing on areas such as reproductive health, mental health, substance abuse and oral hygiene, its initiatives include adolescent-friendly health services, training for health care workers and health education materials.

Zolkhoo Erdenbulgan, a 15-year-old who participated in UNICEF’s ‘My Passport’ campaign, summed it up for Mongolian adolescents when he said, “We learned about health and I lost many of my bad habits. I learned to eat the right foods and protect myself against disease.... Until the project began, we didn’t realize our responsibilities. Adolescents like the feeling of responsibility – we are all trying to learn. And we all have one aim: to become good members of society and to contribute to the development of Mongolia.”

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

BUILDING ON STRENGTHS

Recent research shows that both adults and youths in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are experiencing psychological and social stress. However, among all groups, adolescents are the most optimistic about their future. UNICEF and UNFPA saw this as an opportunity to jointly launch a project entitled Improving Adolescent Lives in Palestinian Society.

A first of its kind in the region were the 2001 summer camps for nearly 1,500 adolescents, of which 50 per cent were girls. Developed with UNICEF assistance, the summer camps embraced the principles of equality, non-violence and freedom of expression.

Based on lessons learned from the project, UNICEF, along with two NGOs, developed a peer-to-peer counselling programme in which over 110 youths, aged between 18 and 23, were trained as service providers. They learned new skills in

active listening, psychosocial support, mentoring and recreational activities for children and adolescents, enriching their lives as well as those of their peers. Nearly 60 schools participated, most in areas hard hit by violence.

Alaa, a trainee from Occupied Palestinian Territory involved in the counselling project, said, "I felt for the first time someone trusted me enough to give me a responsibility. I felt I was doing something good, something useful for my people." The youth mentors and school counsellors also work in the school system, in groups or one-on-one with students. UNICEF commended this as the best example of 'more practice, less theory'.

UNICEF also pioneered six innovative adolescent-led small-scale projects, chosen out of 50 proposals submitted through a contest called 'Adolescents...For a Change!!!' According to Islam Abu Khati, a 14-year-old girl from Khan Younis in Gaza, "This project has helped in the development of my personality and character. I have never felt before that I am important. It has also increased the respect that my friends, family and relatives have for me."

In addition, life skills education was introduced into the Palestinian school curricula. In conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education, UNICEF trained 675 of the school staff in life skills, and produced materials for parents, educators and adolescents. In 2002, life skills education was piloted in 33 schools, benefiting approximately 11,000 adolescents. The Skills for Life project will be integrated into Palestinian school curricula, starting with grades 4 to 10, by the end of 2003.

UNICEF also developed media programmes for and with adolescents. Sixty young journalists were trained to edit *The Youth Times*, which reports on youth concerns in English and Arabic. Issues of the newspaper reach more than 30,000 adolescents.

Children's municipal councils have been established in three child-friendly cities, enabling children to have a direct influence on planning and decision-making. Through an open democratic process, over 12,000 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 went to the polls. One hundred and



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Girls on their way to school in Occupied Palestinian Territory.

“I FELT FOR THE FIRST TIME SOMEONE TRUSTED ME ENOUGH TO GIVE ME A RESPONSIBILITY. I FELT I WAS DOING SOMETHING GOOD, SOMETHING USEFUL FOR MY PEOPLE.”

Alaa, a trainee from Occupied Palestinian Territory

fifty members, more than half of them girls, have been trained to plan community-based projects, and are contributing to make their cities child-friendly.

UNFPA’s activities include integrating sexual and reproductive health issues into the schools’ curricula, starting counselling programmes and improving media coverage of all issues. UNFPA is doing this by:

- offering increased access to information on reproductive health to adolescents aged 12 to 18
- training teachers on methods of teaching sexual and reproductive health and developing a manual on adolescent health for school counsellors
- sensitizing caretakers on adolescent reproductive health needs
- mobilizing support among decision makers.

The success of UNFPA interventions can be attributed to its close collaboration with ministries, governmental and non-governmental organizations, leading UNFPA to:

- partner with a women’s resource centre to provide psychosocial counselling and media opportunities for adolescents
- work with the Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association to draw attention to adolescent reproductive health needs
- help Palestinian ministries incorporate sexual and reproductive health information into the schools’ curricular and extra-curricular activities
- cooperate with the Ministry of Health on advocacy and policy-making aspects of adolescent health needs
- highlight its initiatives in a series of articles on World AIDS Day in local newspapers, and publish a thematic brochure on adolescent health issues.



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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

MORE THAN 60 ORGANIZATIONS
WORKING TOGETHER IN 14 REGIONS

Children and adolescents
enjoy creative play at a centre
for dysfunctional families in
Sholkov, near Moscow.

The transition from a state-controlled to a market economy in the Russian Federation has been fraught with problems and challenges. Many parents hold more than one job to keep their families afloat, often leaving children unsupervised. And, due to family break-ups, violence and poverty, large numbers of children have been placed in orphanages and state institutions.

A situation analysis of the post-Soviet era showed adolescents to be the most vulnerable and neglected social group. Many girls and boys face problems such as drug and sexual abuse, high-risk behaviours, sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV/AIDS, and early and out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

To address these issues, UNICEF and UNFPA joined forces with ministries, local and national NGOs, and health, education and social protection administrations in several territories of the Federation, to launch the Adolescents' Health and Development project. It provides young people with information and skills for healthy lives, offers access to youth-friendly services and safe spaces, and mobilizes support for youth issues and needs through the media.

The strategies are directed at adolescent boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 18 both in and out of school, especially those most at risk. Special attention is being given to girls' reproductive health.

THE ADOLESCENTS' HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT PROVIDES YOUNG PEOPLE WITH INFORMATION AND SKILLS FOR HEALTHY LIVES, OFFERS ACCESS TO YOUTH-FRIENDLY SERVICES AND SAFE SPACES AND MOBILIZES SUPPORT.

To accomplish the goals, eight youth information centres were established in 2001. They function as:

- resource centres for information on youth issues for the government, media, youth organizations, NGOs, parents and adolescents
- safe places for young people to engage in educational, sports and recreational activities
- centres for counselling, mentoring and peer-to-peer training, and for acquiring healthy lifestyles and technical skills.

The centres were pooled into a network of resources, skills and technical expertise. Activities include the dissemination of information, youth participation at all levels, peer-to-peer initiatives, media advocacy, exchanges between the government and NGOs working with adolescents, computer training and free access to the Internet for young people.

Three centres developed a module on the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and drug abuse among teenagers. The module was presented at an All-Russian Peer to Peer Education meeting attended by delegates from 20 organizations. Fifteen thousand young people have been reached through the centres.

A number of youth-friendly services are now helping young people lead better and healthier lives. The *Good Practice* information bulletin on youth-friendly health services was issued by the government in September 2001 and a guideline on adolescents' reproductive health was issued by the Deputy Minister of Health in 2002. These examples reflect the policy changes that the programme is helping to bring about.

At least 60 organizations are collaborating in 14 regions to reach adolescents, especially those who are at risk and poor. To intensify advocacy efforts, an NGO coalition of youth-friendly clinics is also being set up. In addition, a 'Youth-Friendly Clinic' manual has been developed, based on lessons learned in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. And counselling and referral centres have been developed as models in several districts of St. Petersburg, aimed at reaching adolescents with a broad range of services.

In Moscow, SANAM, a local NGO, provides anonymous free testing and counselling on HIV/AIDS for children living on the streets. In May 2002, this project was presented to the UN Secretary-General during his visit to the Russian Federation as an example of a practical UN response to the challenge of HIV/AIDS among youth.

In Barnaul, Tomsk and Tver, mass media campaigns and round-table discussions were held with business leaders, radio and television programmes produced, and articles in local and national newspapers on adolescent health rights were published.

The words of Tatiana Timoshenko, a youth health clinic volunteer, reflect the urgency. She said, "We organize and conduct training sessions on HIV/AIDS and prevention of drug abuse. But the government and NGOs should organize more youth events, more prevention booklets, posters and video materials on healthy lifestyles."

To combat violence against women, a 'Say No to Violence' campaign was initiated. Several training sessions were conducted for adolescent girls on domestic and sexual abuse, rape prevention, self-protection, mutual support and legal aid. Psychologists, social workers, media professionals and lawyers have worked closely with over 500 girls in this ongoing campaign. Many victims of domestic abuse have greatly benefited.

SENEGAL BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

In Senegal, nearly 60 per cent of the population is younger than 20 years old. Adolescents, chiefly girls, are threatened by social and economic problems such as sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, drug and tobacco abuse, poverty, violence, unemployment and illiteracy.

Surveys show that about one fifth of girls have had premarital sex, often unprotected, before they turn 15. About the same proportion marry before the age of 15. A quarter of young women have children between the ages of 15 and 20.

In 2001, UNICEF and UNFPA launched a project entitled An Initiative to Promote the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls in Senegal, in partnership with governmental and non-governmental agencies, including the Ministry of Youth, local and international NGOs, and youth and village associations.

The project aims to offer to adolescent girls life skills training and expanded life choices in sexual and reproductive health, education and employment. In the first two years of implementation the goal was to reach 10,000 poor adolescent girls, between the ages of 11 and 20. The project seeks to break the cycle of poverty by addressing the most pressing problems of those most in need: girls who are poor – both married and single – often from broken homes, and often mothers.

Four hundred adolescent girls will receive training in life skills to become peer counsellors. Each is expected to work with groups of 20 to 25 girls as trainers, leaders, confidantes and role models, focusing on youth, gender, sexual and reproductive health and human rights issues. These peer counselors will be supervised by qualified adult educators.

This method of using both adult educators and peer counselors has proven effective. Studies have shown that while adolescents consider their peers to be the primary source of information, they would also like adults and authority figures to provide them with certain types of information, tools and skills. The method has been especially successful in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

THE CONCERNS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH ARE A TOP PRIORITY FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF SENEGAL.



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Adolescent girls in Senegal are being trained in a variety of income-generating skills. This group is studying photography.

Along with UNICEF and UNFPA, other agencies expected to partner in the project are:

- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNDP to lend their expertise in the areas of employment, including self-employment and financial assistance
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), to support women's centres and shelters that provide information, counselling and health services and legal aid
- FAO, to work with women on micro-gardens
- UNESCO, to work on girls' education
- WHO, to work on sexual and reproductive health issues
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDCP), to work on substance-abuse issues.

In addition, UNFPA and UNICEF carefully evaluated seven NGO programmes. Over 1,100 adolescent girls and 600 domestic workers have enrolled in literacy and sewing programmes; over 2,200 adolescents received financial assistance enabling

them to continue their education in elementary school. Another 260 adolescents are benefiting from up-to-date remedial teaching with the introduction of new information and communication technologies. Three health centres are providing information and services to 800 adolescent girls. A mobile clinic is rendering similar assistance to 500 more adolescents. Over 200 adolescents are learning about catering or operating fruit and vegetable businesses, and another 100 adolescent girls have been trained in the use of computers, photography and the management of cyber centres. In 2003, some of these adolescents will have access to financial assistance through micro-credit to help them start their own businesses.

The Government of Senegal is fully supportive of the initiative and has declared that the concerns and development of youth are its top priority. Thanks to the project, the Ministry of Youth is broadening the scope of the national policy to raise awareness of youth issues and promote youth programmes.

GOING FORWARD

In February 2002, about 130 delegates from 11 countries gathered in Dhaka to review the status of the 'Meeting the Development and Participation Rights of Adolescent Girls' project. Noting that strides have been made in various countries, the delegates also identified the need for additional resources and tools; for strategies on how to team up with the media to mobilize public opinion; for the creation of new areas of programming; for better measurement and evaluation techniques; and for the documentation and sharing of project lessons and experiences.

Building capacity in new programme areas

With support from implementing and collaborating agencies such as the Population Council, the Commonwealth Youth Programme, Family Care International and the International Center for Research on Women, the project is implementing innovative approaches. Some key examples are life skills-based education, including training in leadership and decision-making; livelihoods programming, the creation of safe places – especially for girls; peer-to-peer education, intergenerational dialogue and programmes to ensure girls' physical and mental health. A supportive environment is being created so that adolescents can gain access to information, skills and services. The key to the success of the programme has been the active participation of adolescents. In the coming months, some new and promising approaches are being planned to further enhance the lives of young people.

Measuring progress

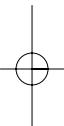
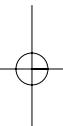
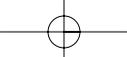
WHO is lending its expertise to help identify target audiences, define goals, focus on activities and monitor and evaluate progress. Some common indicators are being tested and developed, concentrating on adolescent participation and how being 'connected' to parents and adults is crucial for young people's protection and development.

Documenting and sharing good practices

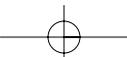
Several regional and national networks are being established to communicate and share the accomplishments and lessons learned. The experiences gleaned from the initiative on the developmental and rights-based approach to programming, addressing gender inequality, fostering inter-agency collaboration and influencing the national and global agenda, are worth documenting and sharing to prove the value of strengthening integrated programming for adolescents.

Increasing the investment

'Meeting the Development and Participation Rights of Adolescent Girls' has scored successes in bringing about changes in the lifestyles and attitudes of adolescents and adults in the 12 programmes that took part. However, much more work needs to be done. Commitment on the part of all partners – individuals, families, communities, NGOs, governments and national and international donors – is vital to ensure fiscal resources and support to programmes. Only then will young people achieve their full potential and will societies reap the enormous economic, social and health benefits.



The implementing partners acknowledge and sincerely appreciate the generous contributions and support of the United Nations Foundation and the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships in promoting the development and participation rights of adolescent girls across the globe.



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Cover photo: A young girl from Mauritania, where the government and UN agencies joined together on a project to educate adolescent girls.
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July 2003