

**YOUTH DELIVER THE FUTURE
INVESTING IN YOUTH PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT:
RESEARCH THAT IMPROVES POLICIES AND PROGRAMS**

**Abuja, Nigeria
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Opening Plenary Remarks

By

**Alh Abdullahi Maiwada, Mon
Program Manager, Reproductive Health, USAID**

Her Excellency, the First lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Hajiya Turai Umar Yar'Adua,; the Honorable Ministers of: Health, Women's Affairs & Social Development, Education, and Youth & Development; the country representatives of the WHO, UNFPA, World Bank, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Youth Coalition; The Chair of International Steering Committee, Professor Amy Tsui, the Chair National Steering Committee; members of the National Assembly; permanent secretaries and directors of federal ministries; representatives of the media; members of the International and National Steering Committees; and distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased to be a part of the opening plenary of this International Conference on Youth Health and Development: Investing in Young People's Health and Development, with the theme of research that improves policies and programs being hosted here in Nigeria. I congratulate the National and International Steering Committees of this conference and in particular the Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and its Nigerian affiliates. This event is particularly significant because USAID regards it as an expression of the international academic, research, and development communities as well as Nigeria's government commitment to addressing the health and development needs of the adolescents and young people around the world, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, of which Nigeria is inclusive. The United States Agency for International Development, in collaboration with the Nigerian government, is committed to investing in the lives of the Nigerian people and world-wide through our other youth programs and interventions.

Adolescents and young people form a critical population that must be targeted as key beneficiaries in this endeavour. Available statistics show that the health, particularly the reproductive health status of the adolescents and young persons in Nigeria, requires a great deal of attention. They are the most affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The seroprevalance of HIV/AIDS among this age group of 15-24 years of age is 4.7%, which is higher than the national average of 4.4%. This age group also suffers disproportionately from other sexually transmitted infections and other reproductive health outcomes. The choice of this conference theme is well suited to today's youth development agenda, research that improves policies and programs. Nigeria has a high rate of teenage pregnancy. According to the 2003 National Demographic and Health Survey NDHS, young people of 15-24 years old contributed to 40% of deliveries in Nigeria. About two fifths of teenage pregnancies in the country are believed to end up in induced abortion, with consequent complications and even death. As a result of increasing poverty and other adverse social conditions, adolescents and young people are exposed to and become victims of anti-social practices, including drugs and violent crimes. There is therefore an urgent need for government at all levels, civil society, and development partners to invest even more time and resources on the health and development of this critical population group, as a national priority.

USAID Nigeria recently supported, through ENHANSE, the revision, launch, and dissemination of the policy for the health and development of the adolescents and other young persons in Nigeria, which is one step in the right direction. We want to work closely through and with all development partners to ensure that the minimum essential package is available to this group at the basic level of care. USAID is also supporting other youth health and development programs through our variety of programs and interventions world-wide and promote global technical leadership on youth reproductive health and HIV by sharing what we know works best through our centrally funded Interagency Youth Working Group

(IYWG). Currently in Nigeria, we are supporting youth health-friendly interventions through our implementing partners such as IRHIN/SFH, COMPASS, and GHAIN RH, to mention a few.