



Abuja Call to Action

Increase Investments for Young People's Health and Development

Honorable Saudatu Sani read the Call to Action at the closing on Tuesday, April 29, 2008

From 27-29 April 2008, in Abuja, Nigeria, 550 participants from 37 countries, representing all regions of the world, discussed new research and program findings at a notable International Conference, "Investing in Young People's Health and Development: Research that Improves Policies and Programs."* The Conference participants – drawn from academia, government, and civil society – called for increased investments for young people's health and development as an essential step to supporting young people today and ensuring the promise they hold for tomorrow.

We:

Recall the emphasis on youth at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the importance of a focus on young people if the Millennium Development Goals are to be met;

Recognize that young people, aged 10 to 24, make up about one of every three people in many countries and represent society's hope – both present and future;

Celebrate and *cultivate* the potential and resourcefulness present in all young people as they transit to adulthood;

Acknowledge the rapid social, economic and political transitions, and challenges surrounding young people that hold positive and negative implications for them, including urbanization, migration, technology, and globalization;

Note that while many young people can safely move into adulthood, the transition involves many challenges, including insufficient access to education, lack of economic opportunities, inability to fully exercise their citizenship and rights, health challenges, harmful gender norms, and harmful psycho-social conditions;

Recognize that these challenges have immediate consequences, such as failure to progress to secondary schooling, lack of economic resiliency, road traffic accidents, tobacco and substance use, and poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes such as unintended pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, and STIs;

Emphasize that adolescent girls are among the most vulnerable for HIV infection in generalized epidemics due to socio-economic and cultural reasons, sexual coercion, and exploitation;

Underscore the risks of very early pregnancy to both married and unmarried girls;

Recognize a lack of attention and resources on vulnerable and marginalized groups, including young adolescents (ages 10-14), married adolescents, street children, young sex workers, displaced youth, adolescent orphans, young injecting drug users, young people who are trafficked, and domestic servants;

Recognize the importance of meaningful youth participation in program design, implementation, and evaluation.

Young people represent an important resource and potential force for change in their countries and communities, and greater efforts need to be made to demonstrate that young people's involvement with programs is value-added in terms of process and outcomes. There is wide recognition of the importance of protective and risk factors for young people's health and development, although more research is needed on how to reinforce the protective factors, such as parents, peers, education, social values and norms, and mitigate the risk factors such as discrimination, inequitable gender norms, sexual coercion, and violence. Therefore, we encourage and support:

A number of evidence-based interventions that can be widely implemented **now**:

- curriculum-based interventions that provide age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health information and develop life skills and self-efficacy;
- gender-sensitive youth-friendly services with community outreach;
- comprehensive information campaigns specifically designed for young people that involve more than one type of media;
- policies that increase knowledge of and access to services and commodities, such as contraception, including emergency contraception;
- expanded opportunities for girls' education, especially secondary education.

We also recognize other promising actions:

- curriculum-based peer education;
- working with communities to reduce sexual coercion and gender-based violence;
- working with parents so that they can contribute more effectively to young people's health and development;
- strengthening social support systems for young married women.

Finally, we recommend new and existing funds for the following evidence-informed projects and programs:

- Scaling-up of effective youth projects and interventions through sustainable institutions;
- Operations research to identify key elements necessary to sustainably scale-up effective interventions;
- Evaluation research of promising interventions for recommendation for wide-scale implementation;
- Involvement of multiple ministries with youth programs to formally collaborate with clear responsibilities, funding, and participation of young people;
- Closer linkages between researchers, policy makers, programmers, and young people, to ensure research reflects key policy and programme issues, and that policies and programs are evidence-informed;
- Direct increased resources and actions to those young people who are particularly vulnerable and most at-risk of the priority problems that undermine young people's health and development;
- Improved laws and policies, and the implementation of these policies, which address gender norms and other societal factors that negatively affect young people's health and development;
- Country-level monitoring of the progress of programs for young people, including financial investments, coverage and quality of services, other interventions for young people, and indicators of the health and social status of young people.

In conclusion, the Conference participants and sponsors believe a greater investment in young people will allow them to realize their potential and help to ensure that they become healthy and productive adults.

** The Gates Institute of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health sponsored the meeting with multiple partners, including the University of Ibadan's Center for Population and Reproductive Health and the Obafemi Awolowo University's Department of Community Health. "Young people" refers to ages 10 to 24.*

