

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

**Abuja, Nigeria
April 27-29, 2008**

Opening Plenary Speech

By

**Her Excellency, Hajia Turai Umar Yar 'Adua
First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria**

Delivered by

**Dr. Hassan Muhammad Lawal
Honourable Minister of Health/Labour**

I feel highly honoured to be invited to the opening ceremony of this important international conference focusing on young people's health and development. Without any doubt, young people are the future of our world and hold the key to the world of the future. The slogan of this conference, "Youth Deliver the Future," is therefore an apt one. Without the proper development of young people there will be no future development anywhere.

The youth that will effectively deliver the future, however, is one that has been adequately prepared for the future; one in whom the society has sufficiently invested in to ensure maximal development and provide relevant opportunities to optimize his or her potentials. It is in this respect that I wish to congratulate the organizers for the choice of the conference theme "Investing in Young People's Health and Development: Research that Improves Policies and Programmes." Not only does it bring focus to the need to optimize investments in youth development, but also the fact that we need to optimize youth development investments through evidence-based policies and programmes. Indeed, with well over one and a half billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 years- the largest in history- living today, the need to confront the challenges facing young people in various areas of development, including health, education, and employment, has never been greater

To reduce the risks young people are exposed to and promote their positive development, nations and societies need to massively and strategically invest in young people's development more than ever before. Here lies the path to a glorious future for our world and the achievement of our collective development vision as represented in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Such investments have potentials for generous yields. Actually, the substantial increase in the number of young people globally presents us with more opportunities than challenges. Equipping this uniquely energetic and technologically-minded population group with the best of the resources we have offers the best opportunity to move our world forward like never before. This is an opportunity we dare not miss; for the consequences of failure is too costly to contemplate.

Young people all over the world, irrespective of diversity of their backgrounds, nurture the hope for a better future. It is not only our duty, but also in our best interest to nurture and work with them to achieve the better future that our world so desperately needs. This conference is a clarion call for us all- irrespective of whether we are policy makers, academicians, programme operatives, or young people, to commit ourselves anew to the development of our future generation.

I am particularly glad that you have chosen Nigeria, the heart of Africa and home to more than a fifth of the African youths to meet at this time on this important developmental agenda. I heartily welcome you and enjoin you to enjoy the rich hospitality of our government and people. The government of Nigeria with its renewed commitment to the health and development of young people as epitomized by, among others, the recent launch of a new "National Policy on the Health and Development of Adolescents and other Young People in Nigeria" and increasing investment in related programmes, looks forward to the outcome of the conference.