

**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
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Introduction

Your Excellency the First Lady of Nigeria, honorable ministers and other Excellencies, members of the diplomatic corps, organizers of the meeting, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

Greetings from the World Bank's President Robert Zoellick and Vice President for Africa Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili, a Nigerian national.

First, let me thank the organizers of the meeting and all the international and national sponsors.

The World Bank has made the World's challenge – to reduce global poverty – its own challenge. The work of the Bank focuses on assisting countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, which call for the elimination of poverty and sustained development.

Our mission is to assist developing countries and their people reach the goals by working with governments, other development partners, civil society and youth around the world to eliminate poverty. To do that, we concentrate on building the climate for investment for sustainable growth, creating jobs, and on investing in human capital and empowering poor people to participate in development.¹

Distinguished participants, the current global youth bulge provides an unprecedented opportunity to take advantage of the largest pool of children and youth in recorded history. It also provides an opportunity to capture the demographic bonus or dividend.

Youth can be a positive force for change for the future and sustained economic growth if the right investments to build their human capital are made today; but unemployed and disenfranchised youth are susceptible to disruptive activities.

Why does the World Bank care about young people's health and development?

- Because the Bank's country clients, donors, and civil society is demanding action on behalf of youth.
- Because nearly half the people of the world today are under 25 years old. Half of the world's population is under 25; 1.5 billion are between 12 and 24. Africa alone is home to 200 million young people. The demographic phenomenon provides an unprecedented opportunity to take advantage of the largest pool of children and youth in recorded history.
- Because nine out of ten of these young people live in developing countries.
- Because the majority of the developing world's poor are children and youth.
- Because a billion of these young people will need jobs in the next decade.
- Because HIV/AIDS prevention and meeting the reproductive health of young people remain major challenges.

¹ Africa Action Plan

- Because they will need access to health care and to the knowledge and skills to navigate the sometimes risky passage from childhood to adulthood.
- Because countries must invest in the development of human capital to take advantage of opportunities and to be full partners in the fast-emerging world marketplace.

The subject matter of this important conference and the various themes are at the core of the World Bank's mission.

- Indeed, the Bank's 2007 *World Development Report* recognized the importance of young people – the *Next Generation* – to development.
- In the *Report*, the Bank clearly laid out the rationale for investing in young people as a way to reduce poverty and help countries achieve tangible gains in health, education, employment, and other areas.
- The *Report* says that countries that want to grow their economies and reduce poverty must invest in the human capital of young people during the five key life transitions: learning for work and live; going to work; growing up healthy; forming families; and exercising citizenship.
- The *World Development Report 07* presents a logical framework for youth investment across sectors, focusing on the *opportunities* facing youth as they grow, their capabilities to choose wisely, and the importance of *second chances* to recover from harm received or poor decisions made earlier in youth.
- I am proud to say that the Bank is the world's largest single financier for two sectors most directly related to youth outcomes; education and health.² Moreover, the Bank has contributed significantly to addressing the issues of poverty, private sector development, nutrition, social protection and social development, all sectors affecting the lives of young people.
- The Bank financed nearly \$1 billion for youth in FY2005.³ Between 1995 and 2005, the Bank financed \$9 billion in projects that directly benefit youth.⁴
- The Bank has also been a leader in tackling the problem in youth unemployment and is working with many governments on job creation programs.
- The Bank supports Poverty Reduction Strategies and is collaborating with UNFPA and other partners to strengthen youth participation and ensure that appropriate budget allocations are made in mid-term expenditure frameworks for investments in youth.
- Your Excellency, much more needs to be done to increase these investments and ensure they are working effectively.

The Challenges Ahead

- Although significant progress has been made in reducing income poverty worldwide, the fact remains that, according to the most recent MDG Global Monitoring Report, most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) outcomes directly targeting the young are not likely to be met unless greater attention is paid to this "next generation."
- We know that what has been done to date to improve the health of young people has not been sufficient and also know too many young people still lack access to education and health and information and services.
- We know too many young people are still getting infected with HIV, getting married and pregnant too early, dying from unsafe abortions, abusing tobacco and other drugs, suffering from mental illness, dying in road crashes, and acquiring poor nutritional and exercise habits.
- Gender inequalities persist. Girls count and boys matter.
- We know that the evidence base has been weak with limited impact evaluations and rigorous research.

² WB C&Y web site.

³ HDNCY Activities brief

⁴ *Youth in World Bank Operations: Regional Trends and Highlights*, March 2007.

- For many government's it is ensuring continuing investments to meet the growing demand in basic health, reproductive health services and skills of their labor force as well as preparing to address the needs of the youth bulge.

Conclusion

Governments look to the World Bank and other international organisations for financing and for policy advice on how best to invest their limited resources. To effectively play this role, we need to know more about what works and what is cost effective so it can be scaled up. But we also need to know about what does not work.

We still have much to learn about how to successfully and swiftly scale up these successful programs. That is why it is so important that you have gathered here for this important conference to review the evidence. We look forward to your help in providing us with the evidence to build on this experience, and to respond to the clear message of the MDG Global Monitoring Report that we need to quickly scale up actions on behalf of youth.

The World Bank applauds your efforts and recognizes your enormous dedication to expanding our knowledge. We stand ready to continue to finance programs that work to the benefit of young people, their families, communities, and nations. We wish you all fruitful deliberations.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, investing in young people's health and development and looking at the evidence to improve policies and programs is central to reducing global poverty, and promoting economic growth and sustainable development.