

Towards realizing the full potential of Adolescents and Youth



UNFPA Strategy on Adolescents and Youth

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Foreword

Executive Summary

Introduction

Today's adolescents and youth are 1.8 billion strong and one quarter of the world's population. They are shaping social and economic development, challenging social norms and values, and building the foundation of the world's future. Maturing earlier than previous generations, both physically and socially, adolescents and youth have high expectations for themselves and their societies, and are imagining how the world can be better. Connected to each other as never before through new media and because of globalization, they are driving social progress and directly influencing the sustainability and the resilience of their communities and of their nations.

While notable progress has been made, many adolescents— especially girls – are denied the investments and opportunities that they require to realize their full potential. For example, 26% of girls (39 million) and 17% of boys of secondary school age (11-15) were not enrolled in school in 2008.¹ About 215 million underage children work full or part-time,² while 75 million older youth (15-24) cannot find work.

For millions of young people around the world, puberty – the biological onset of adolescence – brings not only changes to their bodies but also new vulnerabilities to human rights abuses, particularly in the arenas of sexuality, marriage and child bearing. Millions of girls are coerced into unwanted sex or marriage to then also face high risks of unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, and from childbirth.

In low and middle income countries (excluding China), 12 percent of girls are married before they turn 15 while 34 percent are married or in union before they are 18. As a result, the leading causes of mortality and morbidity among girls and young women aged 15-24 years in these countries are complications of pregnancy, unsafe abortion and childbirth. In 2011, 41 percent of all new HIV infections were among adolescents and youth: being both biologically and socially more vulnerable, of those living with HIV and AIDS, girls and young women outnumber young men by almost two to one.

Governments and the international community have recognized these challenges and acknowledged the singular importance of providing the resources and opportunities required for all adolescents and youth to reach their full potential as skilled, creative and resilient people.

¹ UNESCO, UIS

² ILO, 2012

In partnership with young people, national and international organisations, UNFPA assists countries to identify and implement policies and programs to secure the health, development and human rights of adolescents and youth. This document presents UNFPA's new and expanded strategy for this work.

Sections 1 and 2, on the rationale for investment and the basis for action, are followed by a brief review in Section 3 of the comprehensive action agenda needed to realize adolescents' and youth's full potential. Section 4 presents the particular contributions that UNFPA is making to the comprehensive agenda, based on our mission and our special capacities. This is followed, in Section 5, by a brief indication of how we do this work, including through our partnerships globally, nationally and locally.

1. Why Invest Now?

A safe and successful passage from adolescence into adulthood is *the right of every child*. This right can only be fulfilled if families and societies make focused investments and provide opportunities to ensure that adolescents and youth progressively develop the knowledge, skills and resilience needed for a healthy, productive and fulfilling life. Further, national and global development, security and social justice can only be achieved if adolescents and youth are included as full and active participants. Investments in young people now are in *everyone's interest* and are everyone's responsibility: families, community leaders, nongovernmental organizations, governments, the private sector, the international community, and others alike.

i. Every Child's Birthright

Everyone is endowed from birth with human rights (See Box 1). For adolescents and youth, realization of these rights requires supportive and protective laws and policies; conditions to enable them to complete secondary school at a minimum; training, assets and other support to earn a livelihood and sustain a family when they form one; and timely access to education, information and health services, especially for their sexual and reproductive health.

Sexual and reproductive health and full enjoyment of the associated human rights are at the very heart of adolescents' transition into adulthood. They play vital parts throughout life in adolescents' identity, health, wellbeing and personal fulfillment. The choices and decisions that today's adolescents and youth make, or are forced to make by others, about their sexuality, intimate relationships, marriage and childbearing will critically influence whether or not they can take full advantage of opportunities for education, employment and political participation.

Box 1

The human rights of adolescents and youth include, among others:

- Life, liberty and security
- Health
- Education
- Information
- Expression
- Association
- Freedom from discrimination
- Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment including sexual violence
- Consent to marriage

*ii. In Everyone's Interest***Box 2****Investing in Adolescents' and Youth Now**• **Everyone's goal:**

Successful transition into productive and rewarding adulthood

• **Everyone's responsibility:**

Upholding the human rights of young people

• **Everyone's business:**

Investing in young people

Fully engaged, educated, healthy and productive adolescents and youth can help break multi-generational poverty; are resilient in the face of personal and societal threats, and, as skilled and informed citizens, can contribute effectively to the strengthening of their communities and nations.

Countries with a large proportion of people under the age of 24, thus, have an opportunity to reap a substantial “demographic bonus” for their nation’s economic development, resilience, sustainability, and productivity. It simply requires systematic

investment in young people. But such investments are also essential if we are to achieve the world’s aspirations, as expressed in the (current) Millennium Development Goals and post-2015 development frameworks, in international agreements on human rights, and in our common quest for peace and security.

2. Promises to Invest and Calls to Act³

The foundation for this concerted action by all, including by UNFPA, is intergovernmental agreements and national commitments and it is underpinned by demands from young people themselves.

i. Intergovernmental and National Commitments

Member states and the international community have made clear commitments to act in the interests of adolescents and youth, doing so most recently in Resolution of the 2012 United Nations Commission on Population and Development. This resolution builds on many other intergovernmental agreements and treaties and emphasizes the imperative to invest in adolescents and young people as “whole persons”. Every United Nations organization has a role to play. UNFPA, in particular, is mandated both to assist countries to meet these commitments, especially where these relate to sexual and reproductive health and to advocate for the political will, funding and human resources needed to achieve them.

ii. Young people's demands

Worldwide, young people are making their voices heard nationally and globally. They are calling on their governments to keep their commitments, particularly to respect and protect human rights. They are helping create the intergovernmental agreements that guide the work of UN organizations including UNFPA’s. They are demanding investment in, for example, their education, health, asset building and insisting on their active participation in decisions determining their own and their nations’ futures.

³ CPD Resolution on Young People and Adolescents, 2012

3. Empower Young People - The Multi-Sectoral Agenda

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are a corner stone of young people's transition to adulthood, influencing outcomes for both adolescents and youth across a range of fronts. Unless sexual and reproductive health and rights are supported

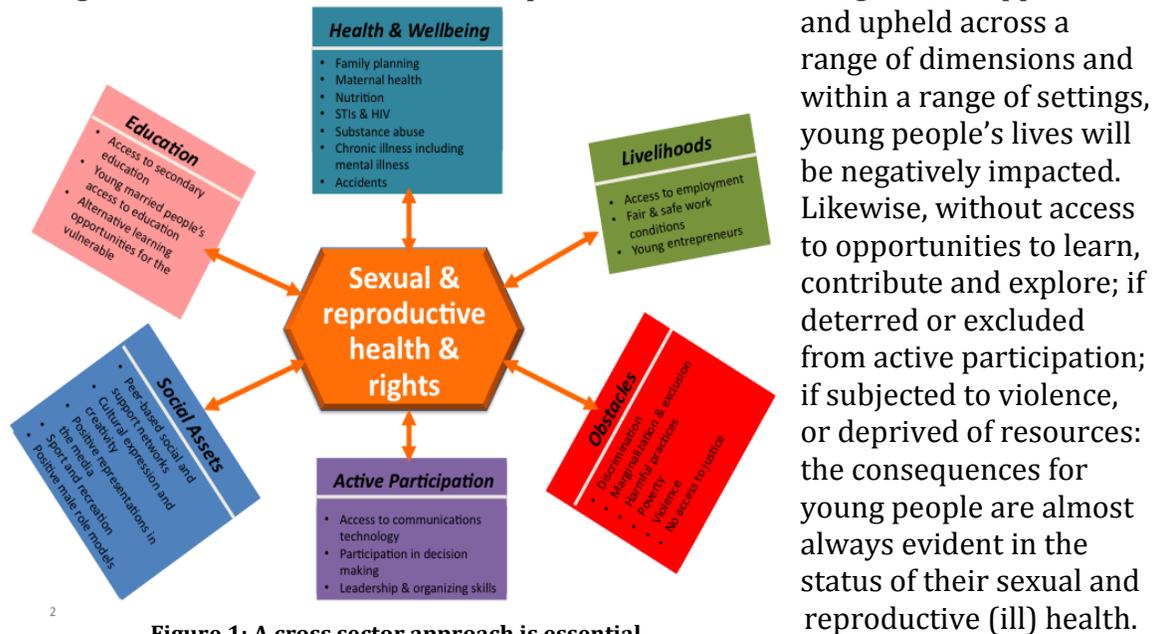


Figure 1: A cross sector approach is essential

adolescents and youth flourish on the road to adulthood, what is needed is an integrated set of policies and programs that addresses the “whole person” and pays close attention both to the context in which young people live and to the relevant international standards.

This means that no one sector or organization can do what is needed to support young people on their own. Only by working together across sectors and in collaboration with young leaders, can the constraints on young people's progress be removed, key obstacles tackled effectively and the pathway to adulthood be paved with opportunity and support:

i. Pave the way

While there has been considerable progress in access to primary education, and in some countries, to elements of, or even comprehensive, secondary education, across the globe, much remains to be done. Gender and other inequalities in access to education must be tackled. The quality of education must also be enhanced so that young people leave school prepared for work and full engagement as citizens.

With many economies unable to generate sufficient jobs, and poverty forcing adolescents to leave school prematurely, young people must have the option of access to vocational and jobs training, as well as to assets, such as credit, if they are

to generate livelihoods. Laws and standards also need to be implemented so that underage children are not trapped in the labor market and those who are of age to work are treated appropriately.

Simultaneously, adolescents and youth must be provided comprehensive sexuality education to develop the knowledge and skills they need to protect their health throughout their lives. Such education can be provided by schools or by non-school programs but ideally should be combined with skills training and opportunities for the physical activity that is vital to good health.

However, education and information are insufficient in themselves. Health services must also be readily available to help prevent and manage the major causes of death and ill health in adolescents and youth: unsafe sex and the related risks of

pregnancy, childbirth, and sexually transmitted infections including HIV; violence; traffic accidents; and mental ill health.

Equally, improved policies laws and programs are needed everywhere to prevent and mitigate violations of the human rights of adolescents and youth, and to encourage and foster their creativity.



Figure 2: An integrated action plan for young people

are simply not available because their country or community does not have them at their disposal, or lacks the political will to provide them. Evidence-based advocacy calling for prioritization of investments for these age groups, however, can generate the funding and technical inputs that are needed at national and community levels.

In addition, countries and the international community must work to remove the obstacles to young people's access to and utilization of available resources. The barriers should be targeted and dismantled including those of discrimination that exclude adolescents because of their age or gender, or that reflect patterns of inequity in the society (whether on the grounds of poverty or personal characteristics such as sex, ethnicity, health and pregnancy status, marital status, or sexual orientation; or residence including those forced from their homes, among others).

ii. Remove obstacles

In all societies, adolescents and youth encounter barriers that complicate their access to vital resources. In many instances, the human and financial resources they need

Among the most pervasive and detrimental obstacles are the extensive violations of the human rights of adolescent girls and young women, including harmful practices such as early and forced marriage, FGM and crimes in the name of family “honor”; commercial sexual exploitation; violence and sexual coercion in families, schools and youth programs, and in the workplace; trafficking; and bullying including through the Internet. Removing these obstacles requires actions across many sectors, and the sustained commitment of many actors, not only to punish offenders, but also to prevent violations in the first place. Prevention includes educating adolescents and youth about their human rights and building their skills for relationships based on gender equality. It also requires informing and training legislators, policy makers, justice officials, police, educators, among others.

iii. Enable youth leadership

Successful passage through adolescence into adulthood requires that young people have opportunities and the ability to express their views to decision-makers, and to practice their evolving skills and capacities, in their families and communities. Their contribution at national and global levels is also invaluable if the world is to hold true to their commitments to young people. This requires adolescents and youth to have adequate, accurate and timely information; skills for analyzing and using information, for effective interpersonal relationships and persuasive communication; and it means they must be provided access to key people and institutions including to their governments, and to modern communications technologies.

Supporting young leaders to network, to work with and to build organizations that include a wide range of adolescents and youth, especially girls and others who are disadvantaged or marginalized, will help ensure opportunities for all and a future that is more equitable and just.

4. UNFPA's Commitment and Contribution

Partnering with others in the UN system: ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UN Habitat, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, UN Women, UNHCR, WFP, UN Economic Commissions, the World Bank, as well as co-conveners with UNICEF in the area of HIV and young people in the context of UNAIDS co-sponsors, UNFPA contributes in specific ways to the empowerment of adolescent and youth.

i. The Principles Driving our Approach

So that UNFPA contributes to high quality outcomes for young people, responds to each country's specific situation, and fosters equity, gender equality and inclusion, UNFPA upholds the following principles:

- **Accountability to Key Stakeholders, especially Young People**

UNFPA emphasizes consultation and engagement with young people on the design, implementation and monitoring of its policies and programmes. To meet our and others' accountability to young people, we monitor and evaluate our own and others' policies, programs, communications and advocacy. We also convene key stakeholders including young people to assist in these processes and ensure our engagement is with diverse and gender-balanced representatives.

Box 3: UNFPA's Core Principles

- Accountability to key stakeholders, especially young people
- Delivery through partnerships
- Respecting diversity, focusing on the most disadvantaged
- Tailoring actions to national and local contexts

- **Delivery through Partnerships**

Investments across diverse sectors are required if adolescents and youth are to flourish. For this reason, UNFPA acts in partnership with young people and with actors from across a range of sectors, including the health, education and employment sectors, so that sexual and reproductive health and rights are well situated as levers of young people's successful transition to adulthood.

We analyze data, or help build local capacity to do so, to make available the evidence needed to advocate policy development, program commitments and funding at country, regional and global levels. We support young people and their organizations to develop the access, skills and leadership required for effective partnership with key stakeholders across the many sectors of concern to them. We convene diverse partners, inside and outside the United Nations system, to review progress, encourage up-scaling of successful programs and to develop new initiatives.

- **Respect for Diversity, Focusing on the Most Disadvantaged**

Upholding human rights, UNFPA, and its partners, ensure that policies, programmes and investments respond to and address the many differences among young people, at different ages and capabilities, within and across countries. Our first focus is on those who are most disadvantaged and marginalized, particularly girls and young women living in poverty.

- **Tailoring Actions to National and Local Contexts**

Grounded in situational analyses, and based on dialogue with adolescents, youth and other key stakeholders, UNFPA's and our partners' contributions respond to and reflect the specificities of local circumstances.

ii. Our Approach

Partnering with others in the UN system: ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UN Habitat, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, UN Women, UNHCR, WFP, UN Economic Commissions, the World

Bank, and co-conveners with UNICEF on HIV and young people in the context of the UNAIDS co-sponsorship, UNFPA contributes in special ways to adolescent and youth policies and programs.

With offices in 140 countries, specialized expertise in demography and in sexual and reproductive health and rights, and with strong capacity for policy advocacy and communications, UNFPA's contribution to the advancement of adolescents and youth has **five strategic prongs**:

- **Enable Evidence-Based Advocacy for Comprehensive Policy and Program Development, Investment and Implementation**

UNFPA compiles and analyzes (and assists countries to generate and analyze) population and development data. These data are then deployed by countries, UNFPA, and our partners, to support and advocate for effective policies, programs and investments across a range of sectors and at national, regional and global levels. The data and analyses enable partners and governments to also focus on the inter-relationships among various interventions for adolescents and youth and to encourage and support cross-sectorial collaboration to achieve common goals.

- **Promote Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

Adolescents and youth have a right to the education and skills building as they experience physical and emotional maturation; begin relationships; and face decisions about sexual activity, substance use, diet and exercise: decisions that will affect their life-long physical and mental health and well being.

While sexuality education exists in most countries, it tends to be limited and rarely meets the standard described in international agreements and the relevant UNESCO guidelines. Curricula urgently need to be initiated or modified to include all the necessary topics, and to support skills building for sustainable relationships, communities (and for societies). Sustainability in this context relies on gender equality, mutual consent, non-violence and respect for human rights. Training of teachers and other providers must be enhanced so that they are: comfortable with the topics involved; supportive, rather than judgmental, of young as well as older adolescents; able to provide accurate and full information, and equipped to refer young people to appropriate health services.

In collaboration with UNESCO, among other partners, UNFPA assists countries with: curriculum development for comprehensive sexuality education; provider training; monitoring and evaluation; and scaling-up of effective programs.

- **Build Capacity for Sexual and Reproductive Health Service Delivery (including HIV prevention, treatment and care)**

UNFPA assists policy makers, service administrators and providers to improve their outreach to young people, and to strengthen their services so that young people will be comfortable using them.

UNFPA provides tailored technical inputs, and supports relevant training of personnel, across all levels of the health system so that these systems better serve the young. With our partners, we work to leverage funds and priorities – at both national and global levels - for improvements in health systems, service delivery and expansion. These activities that UNFPA supports, vary within and across countries, but all share the goals of improved quality and integration in all sexual and reproductive health services including HIV prevention, treatment and care.

- **Take Bold Initiatives to Reach Marginalized and Disadvantaged Adolescents and Youth, especially Girls**

Millions of adolescent girls and young women live in deep poverty. With perhaps only one or no parent; married to a much older or abusive man; laboring in unsafe occupations such as domestic service or commercially sexually exploited (adolescent and youth under 18 years of age), engaged in sex work (those 18-24 years of age); as migrants or affected by conflict or disaster, young women and girls are commonly at the highest risk of poor sexual and reproductive health, violence and exploitation. For effective HIV prevention amongst young people, focus and priority should be placed on “young populations at higher risk of exposure”: defined as those already engaging in high risk behaviors (injecting drug users, young women and men involved in sex work and young men who have sex with men). Focusing on delivery to and support for these - the most marginalized, the poorest and the most vulnerable - is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do.

- **Promote Youth Leadership and Participation:**

A great deal is said in many quarters about the importance of youth participation and voice. In reality however, youth, especially girls and young women, rarely have opportunities to train and act as leaders or as advocates in places where the decisions that will affect their lives and their human rights are made.

UNFPA actively consults with and engages young people in its own work and we advocates for this in the work of others. Just as importantly, UNFPA also provides financial and technical support to adolescents and youth who are in the process of building networks and organizations, and are undertaking advocacy on behalf of adolescents and youth. UNFPA targets and prioritizes gender-equal inclusion of youth from diverse backgrounds, particularly the disadvantaged and marginalized.

Each of these five strategic prongs has implications for UNFPA's programmes and advocacy. Indication of what these implications are follows below:

5. Our Strategic Prongs in Detail

I. Evidence-Based Advocacy for Development, Investment and Implementation

Core Activities	Engaging ...	Prioritizing ...	Delivering ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for: national and global policies and programs, human rights protection, reform of laws prohibiting or criminalizing behaviors, and national and global accountability; based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National and global data gathering and policy analyses; ○ Building national capacity ○ Country-specific situation analyses; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse youth and at least equal numbers of female and male; • Governments; • UN agencies; • Community, national and Global leaders; • National and international NGOs; • Private sector actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disadvantaged by sex, age, circumstance (i.e. conflict, disaster), residence etc; • Health, especially SRH including HIV and NCD prevention • Actions by other sectors (education, livelihoods; human rights, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced country capacity to collect and analyze data on adolescents and youth; • Effective mechanisms for youth participation in planning and decision-making; • National and global advocacy platforms and action plans; • Policies, laws and regulations compliant with international standards.

II. Promote Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Core Activities	Engaging ...	Prioritizing ...	Delivering ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy with governments and UN agencies; • Capacity building for curriculum development and implementation; Provider training; • Monitoring and evaluation; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments (health, education, finance and planning); • UN agencies; • Diverse adolescents and youth • Professional associations; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full and accurate information (SRH, substance use, diet, exercise); • Skills-building for relationships (gender equality, human rights, conflict resolution); • Respectful and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive, good quality curricula and teacher training materials; • Strong advocacy NGOs; • Evidence and lessons learned; • Scaled up

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for and delivery of scale-up and assistance in fund raising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National and international NGOs • Governments 	knowledgeable, non-judgmental providers for work both in and outside schools.	programs in significant number of countries.
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III. Build Capacity for Sexual and Reproductive Health Service Delivery, including HIV prevention, treatment and care.

Core Activities	Engaging ...	Prioritizing ...	Delivering ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy to create global, national and community support for AY access; • Planning of improved services; • Production of improved provider training materials and processes; • Improved MIS to track youth utilization of services and quality; • Advocacy by youth, and outreach to youth; • Help raise funds and resources for service improvements and expansions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments (health, finance and planning; health services manager and providers); • UN agencies; • Diverse youth; • International and local NGOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services for the more disadvantaged, especially adolescent girls, young married women, and young mothers, most at risk adolescents and youth for HIV infection; • Integrated one-stop care (package of SRH services – including condoms to prevent STIs/HIV and as a contraceptive, contraceptive services, maternity care, safe abortion when it is not against the law, post abortion services); • Quality of services including the provider client relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulations and laws that allow adolescents to access services; • Improved services and outreach to youth in significant number of countries; • Data analysis(MIS, other) for services management, quality assurance, lessons learned

IV. Bold Initiatives to Reach the Most Vulnerable

Core Activities	Engaging ...	Prioritizing ...	Delivering ...
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical support to design and initiate programs; • Help raise funds in support of implementation; • Support monitoring and evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments (youth, health, women, education); • International and local NGOs; • Adolescent girls and their families; • UN agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disadvantaged girls (10-14, 15-19); • Multiple inputs (education or literacy; legal and financial literacy; health services or referral; sexuality education; training and resources for livelihoods); • Approaches that are scaleable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access for and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized young people • Examples of and methodologies for effective programs. • Lessons to guide future efforts • Best practices for promotion to others
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V. Youth Leadership and Participation

Core Activities	Engaging ...	Prioritizing ...	Delivering ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult youth; • Advocate for youth participation in forum that will affect their lives and opportunities, and help youth gain access; • Skills training and other support for youth advocates; • Technical and financial support for youth organizing and advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local, national, regional and global youth leaders especially for SRHR including HIV prevention, treatment and care; • NGOs; • Governments, the UN, and other stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills building; • Access and opportunities for youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-balanced and diverse groups of youth able to advocate effectively for their generation and the future, at community, national, regional and global levels.

Conclusion

The social, economic and environmental realities for young people today mean they are one of the largest groups of marginalized and excluded people that the world has ever seen.

More than a decade into the 21st Century, the world is at a crossroad with critical policy choices to be made, whose consequences will be felt for decades to come. If today we choose to invest in youth's and adolescents' education, livelihoods, sexual and reproductive health and civic participation, and underpin this with respect for and protection of their human rights, then tomorrow we will enjoy the fruits of young people's resilient, confident and talented contributions to the future we all want.

However, investments of this kind require collective commitment and need the momentum of a collective movement in which everybody has a role to play: governments, youth serving organizations, community based organizations, parliamentarians, the private sector, international organizations, development partners, and young people themselves.

UNFPA calls on all countries, communities, cities and villages to join with us and the UN family as we commit ourselves to work with young people support lead the way towards a future in which adolescent girls and boys can enter freely into a productive adulthood because they are educated, healthy, free from STIs and HIV, are not exposed to violence, unintended pregnancy or unsafe abortion; a world where girls are treated with dignity and respect in equal measure with boys and

where, regardless of their identity, young people's human rights are promoted and respected. That future is a resilient future, a sustainable future and that is the future we want.

Appendix 1: Committee on Population & Development 2012 Resolution on Adolescents and Youth

The CPD

- Calls on governments to take into account the implications of their population age structure in medium and long-term planning and make youth development a priority across all sectors;
- Urges governments to protect the human rights of adolescents and youth to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence, and regardless of age and marital status;
- Urges states to invest in multiple actions to improve opportunities for young people to gain access to productive employment and decent work, making links with education and training policies, among others, and taking into account gender equality and the empowerment of women;
- Urges all states, and calls upon governments, with the full involvement of young people, to meet the sexual and reproductive health service and information needs of adolescents and young people and, in so doing, to safeguard their rights to privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent;
- Calls upon governments to provide young people with evidence-based and comprehensive education on human sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, human rights, and gender equality;
- Calls on governments to pay particular attention to adolescents and youth, especially girls and young women, in scaling up HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, and provide comprehensive information, voluntary counseling and testing to adolescents and youth;
- Urges governments to eliminate harmful practices such as early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and other violations of girls' and women's human rights, and to enact and enforce laws and take other measures in this regard; and
- Calls upon and encourages governments to support and invest in effective youth participation including in decision-making.

Appendix 2: UN General Assembly 2011 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS (resolution A/65/L. 77)

Express grave concern that young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years account for more than one third of all new HIV infections, with some 3,000 young people becoming infected with HIV each day, and note that most young people still have limited access to good quality education, decent employment and recreational facilities, as well as limited access to sexual and reproductive health programmes that provide the information, skills, services and commodities they need to protect themselves, that only 34 per cent of young people possess accurate knowledge of HIV, and that laws and policies in some instances exclude young people from accessing sexual health-care and HIV-related services, such as voluntary and confidential HIV testing, counselling and age-appropriate sex and HIV-prevention education, while also recognizing the importance of reducing risk-taking behaviour and encouraging responsible sexual behaviour, including abstinence, fidelity and correct and consistent use of condoms; (Paragraph 25.)⁴

⁴ <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/65/L.77>