

Module 1: Introduction to adolescence and to adolescent health - Adolescent health and development with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health - Assignment

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World Bank. World Development Report 2007. Development and the next generation. Washington: World Bank; 2007.

The current world population disaggregated by age shows that the number of people aged 12-24 years has exceeded the threshold of 1.3 billion; situation that is unprecedented. It is a boon offering a real window of opportunity to investing in human capital of youth — a sure way to reducing poverty in the years to come. The hope is to reap this demographic dividend by bringing the youth to become productive workers, responsible family heads, conscientious citizens and community leaders of great integrity. Achieving this option means offering them opportunities that allow developing their own human capital. But challenges to address arise in terms of health and education. Today most young people have the chance to survive childhood diseases, but just as they reach adolescence, other health problems arise from behaviours that could have serious adverse effects on the well-being in the future: sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancies-related complications, drug abuse, obesity, violence, and so on. By the same token, many are young people who are completing their primary school but they are faced with the demand of advanced skills beyond literacy on the labour market. Moreover, the problem often arises also in term of irrelevance of training. Poor quality of basic education severely limits opportunities for young people and has a long-term impact likely to loom throughout the transitions that they undergo in learning, developing a healthful lifestyle, starting working, beginning a family and exercising citizenship.

Addressing these issues, countries need policies and institutions that:

- Broaden for them opportunities, a system which dispenses information and incentives to help the young to make good decisions. The majority of issues affecting them because of misbehaviours or inexperienced decisions making reflect a lack of information and resources. Both can be addressed by right policies that improve the climate for young people, with the support of their families, to invest in themselves, to develop their human capital and use it productively in work.
- Make them able to make informed choices, achievable and responsible. Men and women prepared to cope with the practicalities of daily life.
- Offer second chances: the opportunity given to youth to make up from failures of life occurred either because they have had their opportunities restricted or they have chosen the wrong path. The girl who served as sex slave, the child soldier who was forced to unspeakable atrocities, the orphan abandoned by the community and takes refuge in the streets, the albino child accused of witchcraft; all of them need an overhead hand that put them back on the path to build their human capital for the future.

The application of these concepts has already provided strong evidence, having been called East Asian miracle. It's time for other governments to seize the opportunity. The window will not indefinitely remain open. Charles Beys said once "to lose a crop it only takes a night".

[UNFPA. UNFPA framework for action on adolescents and youth. Opening doors with 4 keys. New York: UNFPA; 2007.](#)

The global population distribution shows that people aged 10-25 years account for 1.5 billion. Yet nearly half of them live below the poverty, much of them are not educated. We are also witnessing increasing number of teenage mothers each year, galloping rate of mortality from preventable deaths related to risk behaviours which characterize the second decade of life. This situation broadens the gap to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and requires immediate action which calls for investing in young people. The Framework for Action on Adolescents and Youth, elaborated by UNFPA, aims at addressing these issues. Its main objectives are to permit to gain MDG starting from the principle that young and adolescent health is fundamental to improve the socio-economic situation of people. The UNFPA plays a central role thanks to her experience based on the respecting of adolescent and youth rights. The framework is based on three main principles:

1. Adolescent and youth problems need a comprehensive approach
2. Adolescent and youth have a central role for poverty reduction strategy
3. It is necessary to create a common language of discussion between the different actors

The UNFPA strategies aim to work at policy level in order to create alliances between different actors, governmental and NGOs, at program level encouraging the creation of social services and livelihood based on a multisectorial plan. In order to achieve it a global approach must be used, working in four main areas:

1. Supportive policy making that applies the lens of population structure and poverty dynamics analyses: policy maker should concentrate their action to young and adolescent category in order to reduce poverty and gain MDG
2. Gender- Sensitive, Life Skills Based Sexual and reproductive education: girls and boys have to become aware of the importance of their choices in SRH
3. Sexual & Reproductive Health Services: health and SRH services must be based on boys and girls exigencies
4. Young People's Leadership and Participation: this must constitute the base of this approach, so the participation of young people should be encouraged

The key to make possible the 4 key approaches is to create spaces for youth participation, comparison between young and adult.

[WHO. Strengthening the health sector response to adolescent health & development. Geneva: WHO; 2009.](#)

The adolescence is not only the stage of life characterized by major physical and psychological changes, it is also a of risk-taking period during which health problems can arise from misbehaviours that have serious adverse effects on the well-being. An estimated 1.4 million of adolescents die from preventable deaths worldwide. Investing in their health should be a priority for health policies, Health Ministries being the hub coordinating the actions of all health

stakeholders and providing pulse and right strategies. The WHO has elaborated the 4s Framework in the sector of HIV, hoping that this method will be useful also in other health sectors such as nutrition, mental health, substance use and intentional or unintentional violence:

1. Gathering and using strategic information: it's necessary to gather and aggregate (by age and sex) data in order to make it available for policies and development programs. Ministries of health are responsible to facilitate the collection, dissemination and use of these data.
2. Developing supportive evidence-informed policies: the government strategies should include policy statements that, starting from evidence, explain how to apply the chosen strategy to adolescents.
3. Scaling up the provision of health services and commodities: health system is not structure in order to satisfy adolescent necessity, most of time there are specific actions implemented by NGOs, but they are not satisfactory. Ministries of health should stimulate and support the creation of health services for adolescents.
4. Strengthening other sectors: health sector should collaborate and coordinate the activities implemented by other sectors or civil societies, for example health information and education, in order to addressing SRH and HIV in adolescents and implement the use of evidence-based approach.

This implementation of this framework will help to improve health and development of adolescents which will result in terms of improvement of health of adults of the next generation, their socioeconomic status and consequently the economic situation of the countries. Acting in this way helps to ensure their health rights, as affirmed by the UN Convention on the rights of the child.