

THE POWER OF 1.8 BILLION

ADOLESCENTS, YOUTH
AND THE TRANSFORMATION
OF THE FUTURE



state of world population 2014

The State of World Population 2014

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Foreword

Our world is home to 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24, and the youth population is growing fastest in the poorest nations. Within this generation are 600 million adolescent girls with specific needs, challenges and aspirations for the future.

Never before have there been so many young people. Never again is there likely to be such potential for economic and social progress. How we meet the needs and aspirations of young people will define our common future.

Education is critical. The skills and knowledge young people acquire must be relevant to the current economy and enable them to become innovators, thinkers and problem-solvers.

Investments in health, including sexual and reproductive health, are also central. When young people can make a healthy transition from adolescence into adulthood, options expand for the future. Yet today, more than 2 million 10 to 19-year-olds are living with HIV: about one in seven of all new HIV infections occur during adolescence.

Strategic investments can allow young people to claim their rights—to education, health, development, and to live free from violence and discrimination. Yet today one in three girls in developing countries is married before the age of 18, threatening her health, education and future prospects. Up to half of sexual assaults are committed against girls below the age of 16. Rule

of law and security institutions must be strengthened to protect the rights of all, including young people. Realizing these changes will require that young people are counted and have a voice—meaningful participation—in governance and policymaking.

With the right policies and investments, countries can realize a “demographic dividend,” made possible by falling mortality and fertility rates. With a larger working population and fewer dependents, a country has a one-time opportunity for rapid economic growth and stability.

To realize this dividend, investments are needed to build institutional capacity, strengthen human capital, pursue economic models that improve employment prospects, and promote inclusive governance and the enjoyment of human rights. International support can unlock the potential of the next generation of innovators, entrepreneurs, change agents and leaders.

Twenty years ago, 179 governments at the International Conference on Population and Development endorsed a groundbreaking

“When young people can make a healthy transition from adolescence into adulthood, options expand for the future.”

Programme of Action, which recognized the important role of young people in development. Today, we have an opportunity to define a post-2015 sustainable development framework, built on lessons learned, that empowers youth and includes specific indicators and targets on education, skills development and employment, health, especially sexual and reproductive health, youth participation and leadership.

Young people must be at the centre of the post-2015 vision for sustainable development to drive the future we want.

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin
Executive Director



A message from İrem Tümer, contributing editor

Calls for investments in young people have increased dramatically in recent years. Meanwhile, more and more countries agree that policies that help young people fulfil their potential can also help drive economic development. This year's *The State of World Population* is significant because it frames investments in youth not solely as responding to the needs of young people, but also as an imperative for sustainable development. The perspective and data that are being presented in this report can be a very valuable asset for the advocacy and programming of youth-led organizations and youth activists.

In many countries today, there is a discrepancy between rhetoric about the need to invest in youth and young people's participation in policymaking, planning and implementation. With the momentum that is created by the ongoing discussions on young people, there also emerges a great opportunity for their further integration in development processes. This requires dedication, will and commitment on both sides.

Terms like “investment in youth” may imply that young people are or can only be passive recipients of investment. But this view is misguided because young people can and must be indispensable partners in development. In my involvement in youth organizations, I have seen firsthand that with the right support, young people can be the problem-solvers and innovators who can break the mould and find new ways of doing things or ways to do them better. Young people are in the best position to understand what they and their peers need and are able to ensure implementation

in broader networks that are often inaccessible to policymakers.

While it is vital for policymakers and other stakeholders to reach out to young people, the responsibility also lies with youth-led organizations and youth activists to bring their involvement to the next level by establishing themselves as sustainable and reliable partners. Being accountable and professional are first steps in establishing their credibility. Youth organizations must also adapt to our rapidly changing world and embrace new technologies that can revolutionize commerce, industry and policymaking.

Even though it has become well-established that investing in youth makes good economic sense and is a human rights imperative, the latter is sometimes forgotten, especially when young people are called on to “change the world.” But the world will not change, no matter how hard we try, if young people are not able to exercise their human rights. It is true that young people will be the major drivers of



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change in the coming decades, but it should still be remembered that most of the investments that this report is advocating should be made to ensure that the fundamental rights of young people are protected. A world in which a quarter of humanity is without full enjoyment of rights is a world without the basic building blocks for change and progress.

The My World 2015 survey revealed that globally, young people see “a good education,” “better health-care” and “an honest and responsive government” as actions that would make the greatest difference to their lives. Better job opportunities and protection against crime and violence are similarly important. These responses show a lingering global need to provide the essential conditions for the full empowerment of young people.

Young people are about to inherit an enormous responsibility for resolving many long-standing complex problems, ranging from poverty to climate change, yet they have mostly been excluded from participating in the decisions that will determine

what the future looks like. Young people must therefore have a say now in shaping the policies that will have a lasting impact on humanity and the health of the planet.

As the sustainable development goals that will follow the Millennium Development Goals are being defined, policymakers must not neglect to prioritize the needs of young people and make room for them to carry the next development agenda forward. Young people should be involved in all aspects of the process. Only through meaningful representation by and collaboration with youth will it be possible to move away from an entrenched mindset of delivering basic services to youth towards an approach that empowers young people and enables them to realize their potential.

Ms. Tümer, 23, is a former Women Deliver Youth Leader and member of the European Youth Parliament. She lives in Turkey.

There are more young people between the ages of 10 and 24 today than at any other time in human history.



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