



REFERENCE NOTES
ON POPULATION AND
POVERTY REDUCTION

The Case for Investing in Young People

as part of a
National Poverty
Reduction Strategy



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Reference Notes on
Population and Poverty Reduction

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Table of contents

<i>Foreword</i>	V
<i>Executive Summary</i>	VI
1. Introduction	1
Public Policy Perspective	1
2. Young People and the definition of Poverty	5
Dynamic view of poverty needed	6
Neglect of young people in poverty reduction strategies	6
Why are young people overlooked in poverty assessments?	7
3. The case for investing in young people	9
Argument 1:	
Young people need to get their fair share	9
Argument 2:	
Millennium Development Goals and Young people	10
Omissions from the MDGs	11
Young people in the MDGs	12
How young people are faring in relation to the MDGs	13
Argument 3:	
The Macro economic Case for Investing in Young People	20
Argument 4:	
Micro economic argument and evidence	22
Argument 5:	
Young people in poverty are socially vulnerable during their transition to adulthood	24
Three ways to categorise the poor	25
The poor as vulnerable	25
Argument 6:	
Capitalising on the demographic transition	26
Argument 7:	
Youth bulge and the increased potential for social conflict	28
Youth homicides increasing	28
The youth bulge and its association with civil conflict	29
4. Suggestions on how to present the case	33
The political value of robust evidence of program impact	33
Data limitations on the use of cost benefit analysis	34
Use of vulnerability profiles	34
Working out which are the most appropriate arguments for what context	37
Limitations of a rights-based approach	37
5. Conclusion	39
Attachment 1:	
Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and young people: content analysis	40
Identifying youth as a group in poverty	40
Health related PRSP initiatives for young people	41
Attachment 2:	
PRSPs and population and development issues related to young people	43
Attachment 3:	
Human rights principles to underpin development cooperation	44
Attachment 4:	
Countries ranked in order of their population's youth share	45



Foreword

Over the past 15 years, there has been an ever-greater acknowledgement in the international community that if we are to have any hope of realizing our goals for the planet, we must begin to focus on youth. Given that it is the young people of today who will be the adults of tomorrow, this focus makes intuitive sense. But it has also been backed up by empirical evidence, as study after study has shown that investing in the needs of youth — for education, for jobs, for health care, for information — is perhaps the single best way to bring benefits to society as a whole. It is not surprising, then, to find that youth have been given a larger and clearer place in major initiatives of the international system over the past decade, from the International Conference for Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) to the Millennium Summit (New York, 2000).

Unfortunately, however, the importance of youth is not always clearly reflected in policies and programmes at the national level. And even if policies are in place, implementation in many cases is lacking. Furthermore, young people are not really “full” members of society, in most places — they cannot vote; they do not have the requisite status to be heard; adult members of their families are presumed to “speak for them.” It is thus difficult for young people, themselves, to clearly and forcefully present their needs and wishes to decisionmakers.

This paper focuses on national efforts to reduce poverty, it presents ways of how we can argue for investments in youth to policymakers in language they understand. It begins by laying out a public policy framework, which acknowledges the many competing interests and imperfect tradeoffs that decisionmakers must work with in forming policy. It then presents, clearly and systematically, seven arguments for why national poverty reduction efforts must include a focus on youth if they are to be successful. Finally, it discusses the best ways of approaching busy policymakers to engage and convince them on this important topic.

The ultimate goal is to create arguments “on the ground” for investing in youth at the national level. If the approaches in this paper are employed assiduously and systematically, they will open up a conduit through which emphasis on youth can begin flowing into national-level policies. Once a national focus on youth begins to show results — in poverty reduction and in other areas — a “virtuous circle” is created whereby other countries will begin investing in youth, as well — not because international bodies argue for it, but because countries see it is in their own self-interest. It is in this way that a focus on youth can become truly self-sustaining.

We invite interested parties to read this paper and put it into practice, in the hopes of a better life for youth today, and for all of us tomorrow.



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Executive summary

More attention to the promotion and protection of the rights and the socio economic needs of young people needs to be an essential element of a country's efforts to eradicate poverty. Young people (defined as aged 10 to 24 years) account for 29 per cent of the population in low and middle-income countries (or 1.4 billion in number). Over a 100 countries have a significant youth bulge in their populations (see Attachment 4 at the end of the paper). Many young people in the world, however, lack basic literacy and numeracy skills and have no access to reproductive health care. As well, their economic prospects are extremely limited. To close this gap requires both additional resources as well as attention to gender inequality issues and the more effective delivery of existing services. This paper presents analysis and evidence to support these claims.

The purpose of the paper is not to highlight the vulnerability of particular groups of young people. This task has been performed admirably by recent publications such as the UNFPA's World Population Report 2003 on adolescent health and rights. Its aim instead is a more focused one — to show how best to present the case to policy makers for more attention to the needs of young people ahead of other competing claims for resources.

A PUBLIC POLICY PERSPECTIVE

The paper's starting point is a public policy perspective. It offers a framework for UNFPA country staff, as policy

WHY ADDRESS AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS, HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE?

At first glance, youth appears to be a relatively healthy — although not hazard-free — period of life. Young people account for 15 per cent of the disease and injury burden worldwide and over one million die each year, mainly from preventable causes.

Nonetheless, roughly 70 per cent of premature deaths among adults can be linked to gender discrimination and behaviours initiated during adolescence, such as tobacco use, poor eating habits, and risky sex. Young people face serious health challenges:

- About half of all HIV infections are in people under 25, with girls disproportionately affected.
- On average, one-third of women in developing countries give birth before age 20; a large proportion of these pregnancies are unwanted.
- Each year, between 2 and 4 million adolescents undergo unsafe abortion.
- Adolescent mothers are twice as likely as older women to die of pregnancy-related causes, and their own children are at higher risk of illness and death.
- Nutritional deficiencies such as anemia are widespread in both young men and women. They increase the risks that girls and young women face during pregnancy and childbirth.
- Millions of youth die tragically or suffer because of other pre-

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