

Adolescents are deeply concerned about climate change and should be encouraged to be integral partners along with adults in decision-making. *On 4 December 2009, youth delegates held up a copy of their finalized Declaration during the closing ceremony of the Children's Climate Forum in Copenhagen, Denmark.*



CHAPTER 3

Global Challenges for Adolescents

CLIMATE FORUM

Nov 28 - Dec 4

Copenhagen 2009

Our World, Our Future Children's Climate Forum Declaration 2009

Children's Climate Forum (CCF) is a global organization of children and youth from over 100 countries who are working to raise awareness about climate change and to influence decision-makers to take action. CCF is a non-profit organization that is committed to the well-being of the planet and the future of our children. We believe that children and youth have a right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable planet. We are calling on governments, businesses, and the public to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to protect the environment for future generations.

Environmental Action

[The following section contains numerous handwritten signatures and names in various colors, including blue, red, and black ink, organized in columns.]

[A small white rectangular tag with text, likely a name tag or identification card, hanging from a lanyard.]

CHALLENGES AND

This chapter considers some of the key global challenges that are shaping today's world – including environmental sustainability, peace and security, and key economic and social trends – and assesses their potential impact on and relevance for adolescents.

Climate change and the environment

Along with severe pollution and loss of biodiversity, climate change is the most urgent and alarming threat to the environment. Contributing to environmental degradation, loss of vital natural resources and the conditions that undermine food and water security, it disrupts the very context in which adolescents live and develop.

Climate change and increased frequency and severity of humanitarian crises have the potential to adversely impact not only young people's health and nutrition, but also their

education and development. For instance, families who lose their livelihood to drought may no longer be able to afford sending children to school or paying for health care.¹

Climate change is not just an 'environmental' issue. It requires collective action that brings together sustainable development, energy security, and actions to safeguard children's health and well-being. While children and young people are most seriously affected by the accelerating deterioration of the environment, they can become effective agents of change for the long-term protection and stewardship of the earth if they are provided with knowledge and opportunity. Some community-based monitoring and advocacy activities already involve young people in efforts to improve living conditions in their environments.

Natural disasters are increasingly frequent, and they most severely effect those developing countries that lack the resources to restore 'normality' quickly. At times of crisis, children and adolescents are most vulnerable. While the youngest are most likely to perish or succumb to disease, all children and young people suffer as a result of food shortages, poor water and sanitation, interrupted education and family separation or displacement.²

Two other facts are clear. The first is that this generation of adolescents will bear a major portion of the burden and cost of mitigating and adapting to climate change. Adolescents will be harder hit than adults simply because 88 per cent of them live in developing countries, which are projected to suffer disproportionately from the effects of rising global average temperatures. An estimated 46 developing and transition countries are considered to be at high



If water, food and fuel insecurity intensify as a result of climate change, adolescents, most often girls, can expect to bear the brunt of the additional time it will take to acquire drinking water. A 16-year-old girl carries a jug of water across the sand towards her family's nomadic compound in the Sahara Desert, Morocco.

OPPORTUNITIES

risk of climate change worsening already existing problems and heightening the possibility of conflict; a further 56 countries face a lower but still marked risk of climate-exacerbated strife.

Adolescents are deeply concerned about climate change

The second is adolescents' passionate concern for the issue. Adolescents are extremely conscious that their own future, as well as future generations, will be severely jeopardized by climate change. The advent of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has spurred the already vibrant dialogue and advocacy among adolescent and young people across the globe on this issue.

In particular, since the 11th Conference of the Parties (COP) – the governing body of the UNFCCC – held in Montreal in 2005, youth involvement in the UNFCCC process has intensified. In 2008, the UN established the Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change, which has spurred the integration of efforts for and by adolescents and youth on climate change at the international level.

The year 2009 also saw considerable youth engagement in global climate change issues, with youth officially recognized as a civil society actor in the UNFCCC negotiating process.³ In that same year, children and youth from some 110 countries participated in a discussion of the challenges of climate change at the TUNZA International Children and Youth Conference organized by the United Nations Environment Programme and held in Daejeon, Republic of Korea.⁴

At the UN Climate Change Talks, held in March–April 2009 in Bonn, a young woman from the United Kingdom

caused a stir when she posed the following question to the delegates: “How old will you be in 2050?” Her intervention won a round of applause. By the following day, hundreds of people in Bonn were wearing T-shirts emblazoned with that question – including the Chair himself, who started the next day's session stating that he would be 110 in 2050 but that his children would then be in their fifties. The question encapsulated young people's acute sense that climate change is an issue that demands an intergenerational response involving adolescents as integral partners along with adults in decision-making.^{5,6}

“To build a green world, we must give priority to tree plantation and eco-living practices.”

Abu Bakkor, 10, Bangladesh

Adolescents and young people are calling for urgent action on climate change. At both the 2008 UN Summit on Climate in New York and COP 15, delegations of youth and adolescents appealed to world leaders to act more quickly and comprehensively to stem the rising tide of carbon emissions. An online space, Unite for Climate, has been developed by UN agencies and other international organizations to enable children, young people and

experts to collaborate on climate issues. Time and again, their discourse has urged governments to take bold and decisive action.

Consideration of the impact on adolescents and children should be an integral part of all international frameworks and national programmes established to counter climate change. But merely considering the needs and interests of young people is insufficient, since their participation is also urgently required. All national and local initiatives aimed at adapting to climate change or at reducing disaster risks should involve adolescents from the outset.⁷ Incorporating adolescents' perspectives and knowledge and encouraging their participation in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation strategies is not just a matter of principle – it is an imperative.

Establishing a protective environment for vulnerable children



A 17-year-old volunteer helps a girl complete a questionnaire during an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign to promote healthy lifestyles, Ukraine.

“The under-five mortality rate has continued to decline, from 21 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 15 per 1,000 in 2009.”

Ukraine has undergone a period of profound transformation since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Despite a deep recession in the late 1990s, the country’s economic growth between 2001 and 2008 – an average annual 7.5 per cent – was among the highest in Europe. Education and health indicators for children and adolescents continue to be the best in the Central and Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) region. Literacy is almost universal, and the net secondary enrolment ratio for both girls and boys was almost 85 per cent in 2009. The under-five mortality rate has continued to decline, from 21 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 15 per 1,000 in 2009.

Yet Ukraine remains one of the poorest countries in Eastern Europe and disparities are widening. As in other transition countries, large families, women and children are the most affected by poverty.

An urgent challenge is the continuing spread of the HIV epidemic and the particular vulnerability of adolescents to HIV infection and other risks. Ukraine has the highest HIV infection level in Europe, with an adult prevalence rate of 1.1 per cent. While injecting drug use remains the primary route of HIV transmission, sexual transmission is growing.

Children and young people – particularly those living on the street, orphans, those in correctional facilities, and those in families or communities where drug use is common – constitute a group whose risk of contracting HIV is particularly high. A recent study indicates that young people account for a significant number of infections among injecting drug users in Ukraine as well as the CEE/CIS in general. Baseline research conducted among young people by UNICEF and partners shows that almost 15.5 per cent of those surveyed reported injecting drugs; almost three quarters had experienced sexual debut (most prior to age 15); roughly half of females reported receiving money, gifts or a reward for sexual intercourse; and condom use was low.

Many Ukrainian adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 live in unsafe environments. Although official figures are lacking, a large number of most-at-risk

adolescents live and work on the streets. This puts them in a particularly risky situation, vulnerable to sexual and labour exploitation and violence, as well as to HIV risk behaviour and infection. Additionally, many adolescents on the streets face a high level of exclusion from education, health care and legal and social services.

Addressing the increasing prevalence of the HIV epidemic and protecting adolescents has become a major concern for Ukraine. Collaborative efforts between the Government and partner agencies are under way. For instance, since 2007 UNICEF has provided assistance to the Government in building an evidence base on most-at-risk adolescents, strengthening the capacity of local research institutions and developing national norms and standards and evidence-based programming on HIV prevention for these young people.

The intervention also supported the integration of most-at-risk adolescents into the National AIDS Programme 2009–2013, which set a national coverage target of 60 per cent for at-risk groups (defined as “injecting drug users, orphans, homeless children, detained or incarcerated children, children from families in crisis, sex workers, men who have sex with men, migrants and other similar groups”). The 2006 State Programme on Homelessness and Neglect of Children also lays out the Government’s commitment to protecting children and adolescents and preventing drug abuse among the most-at-risk groups.

Ukraine still has much to do to address the critical needs and concerns of its young population and the HIV epidemic in general. Concerted efforts, including a comprehensive HIV and AIDS information, education and communication strategy at the national and sub-national levels, are needed to safeguard the rights of most-at-risk adolescent girls and boys and provide them with access to essential services and protection from violence, abuse and exploitation.

See References, page 78.

Poverty, unemployment and globalization

Adolescents are often seen as the next generation of actors on the social and economic stage. While it is true that the future economic development of nations depends on harnessing their energy and developing their skills, this view does not take account of the social and economic contribution that many adolescents and young people make today. It also fails to acknowledge that many young people are struggling to find adequate employment that can provide them with a safe foothold above the poverty line – and that their prospects of attaining such security have worsened amid the global economic malaise that has taken hold since 2007. Most young people in general are in a better position to take advantage of global development than any previous generation, due in part to improved levels of education and better health. However, many of them remain excluded from the opportunities afforded by globalization.

Lack of appropriate skills and a dearth of work opportunities are denying adolescents and youth a future of stable, productive work

Adolescence is a time when poverty and inequity pass to the next generation. This is particularly true among adolescents with low levels of education. Almost half of

the world's adolescents of appropriate age do not attend secondary school. And when they do attend, many of them fail to complete their studies or finish with insufficient skills – especially those high-level competencies that are increasingly required by the modern globalized economy.

This skills deficit is contributing to bleak youth economic employment trends. In August 2010, the International Labour Organization released the latest edition of *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, whose central theme was the impact of the global economic crisis on youth aged 15–24. In its introduction, the report summarized some key long-term trends in youth participation in the labour force between 1998 and 2008. Youth unemployment is a significant concern in almost every national economy. Prior to the crisis, youth unemployment rates were falling and stood at just over 12 per cent in 2008. At the same time, the youth population has grown at a faster pace than the available employment opportunities.

In 2008, youth were almost three times as likely to be unemployed as adults, and suffered disproportionately from a deficit of decent work. This is unfortunate not least because decent work can provide adolescent girls and boys with opportunities to develop and apply skills, responsibilities and resources that will be useful throughout their lives.

Figure 3.1: Word cloud illustrating key international youth forums on climate change



Source: Derived from United Nations, *Growing Together in a Changing Climate: The United Nations, young people and climate change*, UN, 2009.



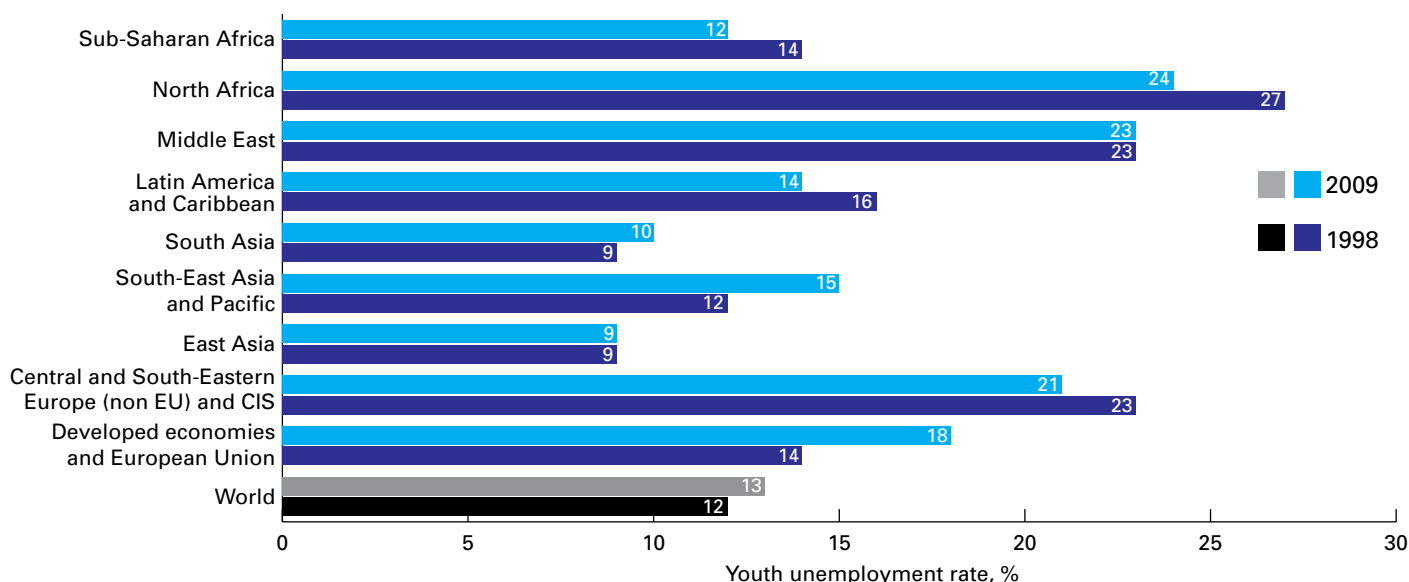
Vocational training enables adolescents and young people to acquire marketable skills. A 16-year-old boy makes a sandwich while his instructor watches during a cooking class at the Wan Smolbag Theatre Centre in Tagabe, a suburb of Port Vila, Vanuatu.

Almost one quarter of the world's working poor were young people in 2008; moreover, these 150-million-plus young poor workers tended to be predominantly engaged in agriculture, which left little time for them to gain the skills and education that could improve their earnings potential and future productivity. While education and demographic trends were easing pressures on youth in regional markets for most of the first decade of this century, the youth labour force continued to expand in the most impoverished regions of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Across the world, however, youth employment trends were fairly bleak, particularly in CEE/CIS and the Middle East and North Africa regions.

The economic crisis has resulted in the largest cohort of unemployed youth ever, estimated at around 81 million worldwide in 2009. Moreover, the ILO report indicated that youth unemployment has proved much more vulnerable to the crisis than adult unemployment. This bodes ill for the new entrants to the global labour market – particularly young women, who typically experience more difficulty than young men in finding work. In most developing regions, the gap between male and female unemployment rates has widened during the crisis. Going forward, youth unemployment rates and numbers are only expected to begin to decline in 2011, but the projected recovery will be slower than for adults.⁸

Throughout the world, a major difficulty in tackling youth unemployment is that many adolescents who have been to school are emerging with insufficient skills – especially those

Figure 3.2: Global trends in youth unemployment



Source: International Labour Organization, *Global Trends in Youth Employment*, ILO, Geneva, 2010, Annex 1, Table A5.

The effects of climate change in Kiribati:

A tangible threat to adolescents



by His Excellency
Mr. Anote Tong,
President of the
Republic of Kiribati

“Climate change is eating away [adolescents’] future and putting their physical and mental development at risk.”

For adolescents in the Republic of Kiribati, climate change is not up for debate – it is real and it is happening now. Our young people feel its impact whenever high tides flood their houses; they taste its effects as their drinking water becomes salty. Rising sea levels, which have already brought pools of brackish water to the doorsteps of many homes, are consuming our tiny islets, contaminating our vegetable gardens and poisoning our freshwater wells.

Kiribati is a Pacific island country with a total land area of 811 square kilometres. We have 33 atolls and reef islands, which are home to over 97,000 people – nearly half of whom are children. Global warming will change the lives of our young people in more ways than we can imagine. In 30 to 40 years, their nation, their home may no longer be habitable – it may not even exist. It is time to face facts. We need to act swiftly and decisively to minimize the adverse impact that climate change is having and will continue to have on Kiribati.

Global warming destroys our ability to grow the variety of foods required to provide our children with a balanced and nutritious diet. Resources are diverted away from their education and health as expenses to maintain basic infrastructure increase due to the encroaching sea. Climate change is eating away their future and putting their physical and mental development at risk. Failure to react to climate change now will result in high cultural, social and financial costs. For low-lying countries, such as Kiribati, which are at the frontline of climate change, the threat it poses is real and immediate. The economic disruption could be catastrophic, even requiring the population to relocate to other countries.

While the Convention on the Rights of the Child – the only United Nations Convention to have been ratified by every independent Pacific island country – does not explicitly mention the right to be protected from natural disaster, climate change directly affects children’s right to life, survival and development. As the Convention states, every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for her or his physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Our children’s right to preserve their identity, including their nationality, and their right to the enjoyment of

the highest attainable standard of health are being threatened. Climate change also jeopardizes the sustainable development agenda established by the Millennium Development Goals.

When I speak with teenagers in Kiribati about global warming and its effects, it is clear that their knowledge of the issue varies significantly depending on where they live. For those who live in remote atolls, limited access to information may lead to confusion and anxiety. We cannot afford this. We need to ensure that every child and adolescent in Kiribati is provided with the means to partake in this vital debate. Investing in information communication technology across the country will enable us to teach, learn and share information on climate change and its related issues much more quickly. As the ones facing the brunt of this global challenge, our children and adolescents must be at the forefront of tackling the problem. Adolescents in particular are often quick to grasp problems and apply great energy and enthusiasm to finding solutions. They are our future and they need to be empowered to take action.

This year, we celebrated 31 years of independence. It is my fervent hope that our children, grandchildren and future generations will be able to celebrate many more years of independence in Kiribati. As a small island developing state (SIDS), we cannot afford the needed investments or solve the issue alone. This is a call to action for families, communities and governments of developed nations to partner with us as we work to give our children and adolescents a chance to have a future. Let us re-examine the impact on our shared environment of what we are all doing right now and determine how we can collectively tackle the challenges of climate change together with our children and adolescents. Let us begin today.

Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati since July 2003, is serving his second term. He holds a Master of Science degree from the London School of Economics. His professional experience includes work at the University of the South Pacific and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, as well as senior civil service positions in the Government of the Republic of Kiribati before he went into politics in 1994. From 1994 to 1996, he was the Minister of Natural Resources Development.

Strengthening the participation rights of adolescents



Youth reporters record a segment for Kabataan News Network, Philippines.

“In 2009, the country was home to almost 20 million adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19.”

The Philippines lies in the Pacific Ring of Fire, a region of high volcanic and seismic activity, making it one of the most risk-prone countries in the world. Recurrent natural disasters, together with periodic bouts of conflict and social unrest, are among the challenges the country faces in advancing the rights and development of adolescents. Yet the Philippines has made considerable progress towards meeting most of the Millennium Development Goals – in poverty reduction, child mortality, gender equality, combating HIV and AIDS, and access to safe drinking water and sanitary facilities. The net primary school enrolment ratio for girls was 93 per cent in 2008, exceeding that of boys, for whom it was 91 per cent. The Philippines ranked sixth in the world in providing equal opportunities for women according to the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index in 2007.

Over the past decades, the country has made the transition from a mainly rural to a predominantly urban society. Around half of the population live in urban areas, with the metropolitan area of Manila, the capital, accommodating the largest share of rural-to-urban migrants. In 2009, the country was home to almost 20 million adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19. Real growth in the gross domestic product averaged 5.8 per cent in 2003–2007, helping to improve the lives of many. Inflows of remittances from Filipinos working overseas have been an important driver of the economy. It is estimated that around 10 per cent of the population live abroad, making the Philippines the third largest migrant-sending country, after China and India.

There are still significant challenges to sustaining and amplifying the advances that have been made. Growing disparities and inequalities are apparent across and within the country’s provinces. According to the country’s 2009 report under the aegis of UNICEF’s ongoing *Global Study on Child Poverty and Disparities*, poverty increased from 24.4 per cent in 2003 to 26.9 per cent in 2009. Two out of three poor people live in rural areas. The other third live in the country’s megacities, where they face overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and limited access to basic health services.

The Government of the Philippines has taken steps to realize the fundamental rights of children and adolescents and has incorporated the Convention on the

Rights of the Child into national laws. For instance, the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act of 1991 recognizes the ‘best interests’ principle with explicit reference to the Convention. The Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 reaffirms this principle and calls for the participation of children in programme and policy formation and implementation relating to the Act. There is no comprehensive national youth strategy.

The Government has developed a number of policies that support young people’s civic engagement, including an article in the Constitution of 1987 and the Youth in Nation Building Act of 1995, along with institutional mechanisms to implement these policies. Youth civic engagement programmes, integrated into school curricula, address a wide variety of issues. These programmes are often run by youth-led organizations. For example, the Sangguniang Kabataan (National Youth Council) provides various incentives and support mechanisms for decentralized youth participation. The representatives, aged 15–21, are elected by other young people at the local level.

Other adolescent participation initiatives are also under way. The Kabataan News Network (KNN), for instance, is a network of young people from around the country, with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, who engage in the media. These young people have produced their own nationwide TV programme, *KNN* – a first for the Philippines. In addition, the Philippines hosted the first ASEAN meeting of adolescents in October 2010, a landmark in young people’s participation in South-East Asia.

Progress towards realizing the rights and development of adolescents is encouraging, but more concerted efforts will be critical to increasing their meaningful and positive participation. The country still confronts many challenges – particularly in addressing disparities and inequalities among the regions, and ensuring progressive legislation, such as the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act, is fully implemented. Maintaining political stability and security throughout the country, including protecting young people from involvement in armed conflict, will be crucial to further improving the lives of adolescents in the years ahead.

See References, page 78

high-level competencies that are increasingly required by the modern globalized economy. In the developing world, while primary enrolment has risen significantly in the developing world, this has not always been matched by attainment levels, and there are still far too few places available in secondary schools, as chapter 2 attests. Standardized tests have shown that many pupils completing primary school in developing countries have not reached the same levels of knowledge and skills as those in industrialized countries, prompting concerns about the quality of the basic education being offered. More than 20 per cent of companies in developing countries surveyed – including Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, China and Zambia – consider the inadequate education of workers to be a significant obstacle to higher levels of investment and faster economic growth.⁹

In many developing countries the lack of formal employment opportunities is a long-established reality. In the absence of productive full-time employment, many adolescents and young adults wrestle with underemployment – taking bits and pieces of casual work where they can, or else engaging in the informal economy. This may involve working for low pay in exploitative conditions for employers who do not observe national labour, health and safety standards. Alternatively, it may involve engaging in petty commerce on the street, which entails a precarious day-to-day subsistence and can operate on the margins of more dangerous and illegal activities, from organized crime to prostitution.

Such unemployment or underemployment is a depressing waste of young people's energy and talents. At a time when they should be learning new skills and adapting themselves to the needs of their community and society – while earning themselves a living wage that offers the prospect of a secure future – their first experience of work is all too often one of disillusionment and rejection that locks them into poverty.

This represents a double disadvantage to society. Not only is it failing to make productive use of the capacities of the young, but the failure to do so may foster desperation and disenchantment, which can result in social fracture and political

protest as well as susceptibility to fundamentalism or crime. The World Programme of Action for Youth in 2007 recognized that while the global economic boom that lasted for much of the 1990s and 2000s had many positive impacts for young people, such as the cross-fertilization of ideas and the internationalization of opportunity for those with the necessary skills, it has excluded many young people in developing countries from its potential benefits. Today many still lack the education or the skills to meet the

demands of the global economy and cannot take advantage of either the enhanced information or the economic opportunities that globalization offers.

Now is the time to invest in the skills of adolescents

The need for concerted international action to confront these problems has long been recognized. In 1995, governments focused particularly on youth unemployment in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the conclusion of the World Summit for Social Development. The UN Millennium Declaration in 2000 explicitly committed

governments to pursue strategies aimed at providing young people with productive work opportunities.

The Youth Employment Network (YEN) – comprising the UN, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank – was set up to help them fulfil that commitment. In 2001, a team of youth employment experts appointed by the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, made recommendations in four key policy areas – employability, entrepreneurship, equal opportunities for young men and women, and employment creation – and the YEN is now working with many countries to devise or implement national action plans addressing them.

Countries across the developing world have taken up the challenge of tackling youth unemployment, primarily by establishing initiatives to enhance skills. Using the YEN recommendations, Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports, the Kampala City Council and Germany's international development agency (GTZ) developed a curriculum to



Young people can use their knowledge and skills to contribute in their homes, schools and communities. Adolescent girls learn to do embroidery in a home-based school in the Khairkhana neighbourhood of Kabul, Afghanistan.

complement formal schooling that teaches young people reading, writing and arithmetic skills while teaching them about their rights and giving them practical skills to improve their employment prospects. In El Salvador, the Ministry of Education and Labour, non-governmental organizations and GTZ targeted young rural women in particular to offer the skills, personal development and vocational and other training needed to promote employment. Among the national strategies adopted elsewhere have been youth entrepreneurship and leadership training, microcredit schemes, the establishment of new careers guidance services and the promotion of information and communication technology (ICT) skills.¹⁰

Despite the current economic storm clouds, there is no better time than the present to invest in developing the skills of adolescents and job opportunities for young people. The slowing of fertility rates worldwide represents a demographic opportunity for many developing countries. A large number of developing countries, particularly low-income nations, are approaching a period – long past in the industrialized countries and even some middle-income countries – when lower birth rates combine with higher numbers of adolescents and youth than ever before to make the productive workforce an extremely large proportion of the total population. While the number of dependents relative to the working population is falling,

TECHNOLOGY

Digital safety for young people: Gathering information, creating new models and understanding existing efforts

by Colin Maclay,
Gerrit Beger, Urs Gasser
and John Palfrey

One of the most profound changes in the past decade has been the widespread – although uneven – proliferation of information and communications technologies.

Social network sites, mobile phone operators and other private actors are implementing savvy methods designed to appeal to youth in developing countries. The following events are particularly interesting:

- Orkut, Google's social network site, was voted MTV India's Youth Icon of 2007.
- In response to the overwhelming presence of Orkut in India, Facebook made its social network site available in Bengali, Hindi, Malayalam, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu, to target Indian youth who are not fluent in English.
- Facebook has also been available in Swahili since the summer of 2009, targeting 110 million people in Africa.
- Facebook Zero was launched in May 2010 as a mobile site free of data charges and available in 45 countries – 10 in Africa – where access to the Internet can be slow and costly.
- Other sophisticated information and communication technology innovations include Mxit, the number one social network site in South Africa; and Sembuse, in East Africa, the first mobile network site to allow the cheap sending of messages up to 1,000 characters (compared to only 160 for regular short text messaging).

These developments are exciting and offer possibilities for transforming learning, civic engagement, innovation, entrepreneurship and much more. But they also pose risks.

A growing concern for parents, educators and others involved with the welfare and well-being of children and adolescents is related to young people's ability to use these tools safely and effectively. In addition, the explosive growth of ICT also presents challenges to young people's privacy, freedom of expression and physical and psychological well-being – and there remain fundamental knowledge gaps regarding their impact. Despite agreement that risks for young people exist, these have largely gone both unexamined and unaddressed in developing countries. At the same time, a mixture of genuine concern, powerful anecdote, traditional culture and diverse political forces is driving interventions in the name of child safety and may lead to ineffective or even counter-productive policies.

Effective problem solving begins with the definition and exploration of the problem in question. While it may seem straightforward, a comprehensive and uniform concept of what safety means in the online context is lacking. In addition, the interpretation and relative prevalence of risks varies. In developing nations, for instance, while some forms of aggressive behaviour may be less common, certain sexual risks – whether sex tourism, trafficking of children or production of child pornography – are likely to

a window for possible economic development of at least two decades opens, and many developing countries are just about to enter this phase. Some studies indicate that much of the success of East Asian economies in recent years derived from reaping this demographic dividend, which depends nevertheless on investment in human capital at the right time.¹¹

Information and communications technology can accelerate skills and knowledge acquisition

ICT offers the potential to remove barriers to education and literacy and to hand adolescents a key to unlock many of the benefits of the modern knowledge economy and not

be left adrift by globalization. The panels on youth and technology presented throughout this report highlight that adolescents and young people are particularly receptive to new technology and adapt to its demands with alacrity when they are given the chance.

The poor in many developing countries, however, remain largely excluded from ICT and its benefits. A vast digital divide continues to exist not only between the industrialized and the developing world – particularly the least developed nations – but also between rich and poor within countries. Access to ICT is also much more problematic for disabled adolescents and those from marginalized communities or

be more pressing. Coming to terms with a uniform concept of safety and arriving at ways to discuss and track the varying risks and behaviours are essential. Refining these risks to children's rights to protection from violence, abuse and exploitation from online sources is essential.

A range of factors – including the setting and means of access, usage patterns, attitudes and skill levels – is important in mapping risks and designing responses. Also important are factors such as age, gender and socio-economic status, as well as peer behaviour and mediation by caregivers. Whether a child accesses the Internet from home, school or a cybercafe, for instance, has significant implications for supervision, just as the speed of access and type of device (i.e., mobile versus computer) affect usage and risks. Information fluency and related digital skills to evaluate online materials and perform research are also the basis for identifying predators, avoiding risky situations and safely sharing personal information. These factors do not exist in isolation but interact with the broader technological, economic, institutional, educational and cultural context.

Current approaches to increasing digital safety for children and young people typically consist of some combination of new or improved national legislation against child pornography and stronger law enforcement; filtering technologies at the individual access point as well as the network level to screen out child sexual abuse images or other forms of pornography

in particular; and awareness-raising and educational campaigns targeted at parents, teachers and children. Within these broad categories, differences exist with regard to the actual design and use of the instruments, including the procedural safeguards that should accompany them.

The transfer of 'solutions' from one context to another calls for a careful analysis of the institutional framework and of the interplay among the factors outlined above, including a comprehensive stakeholder analysis. Addressing knowledge deficits requires more research and capacity-building, both in developing and developed nations, including field experiments and meaningful engagement with young people. Programmes that genuinely try to improve the safety of children and young people in a digital context must be separated from the merely rhetorical, lest policymakers use the cover of protecting children to accomplish other goals such as broadly limiting access to information.

Colin Maclay, Urs Gasser and John Palfrey work at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University, while Gerrit Beger heads the Division of Communications Youth Section at UNICEF. The Berkman Center, which was founded to explore cyberspace and help pioneer its development, represents a network of faculty, students, fellows, entrepreneurs, lawyers and virtual architects working to identify and engage with the challenges and opportunities it offers.

“Effective problem solving begins with the definition and exploration of the problem in question.”



Information and communication technology offers the potential to remove barriers to education and literacy. *Young women who are youth volunteers learn computer skills at a computer and literacy training centre run by the Afghan Red Crescent Society.*

ethnic minorities. And in some societies adolescent girls may also find it more difficult than boys to gain access to the technology itself and the training necessary to harness it, owing to factors similar to those that tend to exclude girls from education and equal participation in household and community life.

Social protection is also a critical area for investment

Another area of necessary investment in adolescents is the provision of social protection, especially child-sensitive social protection. In industrialized countries this is a common mechanism for ensuring that the poorest and most marginalized sectors of the population – and especially their children – receive sufficient support to meet their basic needs. It encompasses social insurance, basic services and labour market regulation.

In developing countries, the social assistance aspect of social protection has a primary, broad role in reducing poverty and is a key component of development policy. In developing countries with the relevant experience, there is increasing evidence that social protection programmes can not only improve children’s health, nutrition and educational achievement but also reduce the danger of abuse and exploitation. Social protection is vital if countries are to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and offer

the economic opportunities so badly needed by adolescents and young people entering the job market.^{12, 13}

Juvenile crime and violence

Adolescents are sometimes perceived as a threat to community peace and security. This view is by no means confined to the scaremongering or routine stereotyping of youth in the mass media; the UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, for example, considers that the combination of a booming adolescent population with unemployment and urbanization can raise the risk of civil strife.

The suggestion is that if adolescents are not productively employed or feel disaffected from society, particularly males, they more likely to express their frustrations through violence. But despite the difficulties of making the transition to adulthood, the fact is that the vast majority of young people function as stable members of society going peacefully about their affairs.¹⁴

In practice, while a small proportion of adolescents develop bad habits of drug abuse, violent behaviour and criminality that adversely condition the course of their adult lives, the overwhelming majority move on to an adulthood in which they accept the prevailing codes of conduct and themselves come to be concerned about the criminal behaviour of later generations. According to the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines), “youthful behaviour or conduct that does not conform to overall social norms and values is often part of the maturation and growth process and tends to disappear spontaneously in most individuals with the transition to adulthood.”¹⁵

As with every other age group in society, adolescents are infinitely varied in their characteristics, life situations and attitudes. In the literature about young people and violence, there is generally a marked absence of material pointing to the positive contributions to society made by adolescents, or reference to the vast majority who do not become involved in violence of any kind.

In today’s world, the word ‘juvenile’ is being seen followed by the word ‘delinquency’ to a disturbing degree. Clearly adolescence is an uncertain period that can put some young people in conflict with the law and endanger their health and well-being. Moreover, there are global trends that

Reclaim Tijuana: Put an end to drug-related violence



by Brenda Garcia, 17,
Mexico

“The drug trafficking trade has the power to silence people.”

Growing up in Tijuana, I often heard stories of the time when it was considered the Mexican Promised Land. This frontier city on the Mexico-United States border offered hope to settlers from other parts of the country, like my grandparents, who sought a better standard of living. As it grew, Tijuana turned into one of the most prosperous cities in Mexico. I was told that school attendance and employment rates soared, people felt safe and tourists from the United States would crowd the main shopping street, Avenida Revolución, on weekends.

As I grew up and started reading local newspapers, I realized that bad things were happening. Over the last few years, a wave of violent crime related to drug trafficking has hit Tijuana as well as other Mexican cities. Kidnapping, torture, murder, persecution, threats, military intervention, innocent lives destroyed – all in the place I call home. Tijuana today is one of the most dangerous places in the country. This has ruined the tourism industry and caused a dramatic loss of jobs.

In the last year, we have seen some progress: Key drug cartel leaders have been arrested and the drug trade’s influence has diminished. However, with the cartels’ activities disrupted, violence has increased and may get worse before it gets better. Confronted with the global economic downturn, and upsurge in violence, some Mexicans have migrated to the United States. While many residents are terrified and avoid leaving their homes, others say it is an issue between gangsters and does not concern them. Yet how can we look the other way when we learn of shootings in hospitals or outside kindergartens?

There is a difference between apathy and ignorance. I was ignorant. I thought Tijuana was a peaceful city and that the media’s stories were exaggerations. However, once you learn that your neighbour has been shot or that a close friend has lost his father, you stop and think: How can we end this?

Many residents feel that Tijuana’s lack of adequate law enforcement has allowed violence to grow. Consequently, the community has lost faith in its representatives. This makes people – both young and old – feel helpless and discourages them from being active

citizens. The drug trafficking trade has the power to silence people. In my opinion, young people in Tijuana no longer expect change; they have lost hope. It is hard for citizens to trust authority when they hear that part of the police force has been involved in the drug trafficking.

People get used to violence; they end up accepting it. I hear teenagers and parents say that violence in Tijuana is ‘normal’. When they hear about a new murder, they say “that is not news.” The drug trade even transforms dreams. Some teenage boys are fascinated by the illusion of glamour it offers and call themselves *mangueras*, which means aspiring gangsters. They say their dream is to become a drug dealer so that they have money to attract women and buy cars. What happened to people like my grandparents, who wanted a better, safer life for their children?

I know that we often blame the government when things go wrong, but we must do more than complain or throw up our hands. We need honest law enforcement officials and a responsive criminal justice system. In order to move forward, we need to restore public confidence and hope in the local community. It is time to reclaim the city of Tijuana.

Brenda Garcia grew up in Tijuana, Mexico. She is a university student and speaks Spanish, English, Italian and some Portuguese. She plans to major in international security and conflict resolution.

Advocacy through sports: Stopping the spread of HIV among young people



by Emmanuel Adebayor,
professional football player
and Goodwill Ambassador
for the Joint United Nations
Programme on HIV/AIDS
(UNAIDS)

“Only 1 in 7 young women in Togo understands the ways in which HIV can be transmitted.”

As a youngster growing up in Lomé, Togo, my passion and love for football were fuelled by my desire to play with my friends, to compete, win and, of course, sometimes lose. Today, my profession gives me the chance to see people of varied backgrounds, religions and faiths come together to watch the exciting game of football. In doing so, they celebrate diversity from all corners of the earth. Sports and games possess the unique virtue of cutting across cultural and generational gaps. While young people may at times find it hard to communicate with adults, engaging in sports allows families, friends and, perhaps, even adversaries a window to put aside differences and cheer in unison.

I am grateful to have a career in football and to participate in top-level clubs. Throughout the time that I have played, however, I have carried with me the awareness that my homeland – while culturally rich and vibrant – was suffering from the effects of poverty, ill health and lack of access to education. I witnessed first-hand the effects of HIV on Africa. I noticed the singular hardships that confront young people living with HIV, especially those who are marginalized, who live a life of poverty and despair, and those most at risk: adolescent girls. In sub-Saharan Africa, girls account for an overwhelming majority of all infections in young people. Their voices often go unheard. These same young people face stigma, discrimination and exclusion.

Motivated by what I had seen, I teamed up with UNAIDS in 2008 to spread global awareness about HIV – particularly to young people, as the majority of our football fans are young. I seized the opportunity to promote a cause in need of special attention. Thanks to UNAIDS, I have the chance to pass on a life-saving message to young people who may not have access to the information I have regarding HIV. We must all do our part.

HIV stands out, not only because of the number of people living with the virus, but because we know how to prevent it. Of the 2.5 million HIV-positive children under age 15 in the world, more than 90 per cent are in sub-Saharan Africa. At last count, there were 120,000 people living with HIV in Togo in a population of just 6.6 million. Many of them were infected at a

young age. Only 1 in 7 young women in Togo understands the ways in which HIV can be transmitted.

During my first year as a Goodwill Ambassador, I learned that giving clear and sound information on HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is one thing – but changing peoples’ attitudes, beliefs and behaviour towards those who are infected or seen as vulnerable to HIV infection is a much bigger challenge. Many who are living with HIV still encounter discrimination or are reluctant to approach counselling centres, accept advice on preventing mother-to-child transmission or seek antiretroviral treatment for fear of social alienation. In sub-Saharan Africa, 12 million children have been orphaned by AIDS. In Togo alone, 88,000 have lost one or both parents to the epidemic, and 94 per cent of those do not receive any medical, educational or psychological support.

If young people are to have a chance at living up to their full potential, they urgently need to know how to protect themselves from HIV infection and where to find counselling and treatment. This is our only chance to halt the spread of HIV. I hope to inspire adolescents around the world to speak out on the issues surrounding HIV with the same ardour that I and other advocates do.

With the increasing global popularity of football, sports play an important role as a vehicle for change. HIV can be prevented if each person plays his or her part in stopping its spread. I have faced hardships in life, like everyone else, but I have also been fortunate to have enjoyed success on the football pitch. I see the power of young people every time I play. There are more young people on this planet now than ever before. Their energy and dynamism present a tremendous opportunity for change. We owe it to them to overcome HIV, so that future young people can live in an HIV-free world.

Emmanuel Adebayor is a Togolese professional football player titled African Footballer of the Year in 2008. He was named Goodwill Ambassador for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in 2009 and continues to use his popularity to raise awareness about the epidemic globally, particularly the importance of preventing new infections among young people.

are exacerbating those risks, including rapid population growth and urbanization, social exclusion and the rising incidence of drug abuse. Yet juvenile crime or violence is only part of the story. It is important to recall that many adolescents come into contact with the law as victims.

Whatever the circumstances, effective social work with youthful offenders and victims is generally lacking in many national and local settings. Worldwide, UNICEF estimates that at any given moment more than 1 million children are detained by law enforcement officials.¹⁶ And this is likely an underestimate. In the 44 countries with available data, around 59 per cent of detained children had not been sentenced.¹⁷ A 2007 report studying El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago found that adolescents 15–18 years old – particularly boys – are the most at risk from armed violence and confirmed that children are much more frequently the victims of armed violence rather than the aggressors.¹⁸ In prisons and institutions across the world, adolescents are often denied the right to medical care, education and opportunities for individual development.¹⁹ Detention also exposes children to serious forms of violence, such as torture, brutality, sexual abuse and rape, as well as poor conditions.²⁰

The most disadvantaged adolescents are at greatest risk of coming into conflict with the law

The adolescents most at risk of coming into conflict with the law are often the product of difficult family circumstances that might include poverty, family breakdown, parental abuse or alcoholism. A large number of juvenile offences are actually ‘status offences’ – actions, such as truancy or running away from home, that would be acceptable behaviour in an adult and are only outlawed on the basis of age. Another very large body of crimes, however, is much more serious and tends to emerge from adolescents’ involvement in gangs. At their worst, gangs can act as precursors of adult criminal groups and can effectively involve a ‘career choice’ of criminality.

Adolescents in gangs, or groups tend to be hierarchically organized but tight-knit, with a rigid internal code of behaviour. Many use violence as a routine mechanism for resolving interpersonal conflict, and this culture of violence is likely to spill over and influence members’ behaviour towards people outside the group as well, establishing a pat-

tern or likelihood of criminality. Territorial gang members commit many more crimes than adolescents who do not belong to gangs, with the most frequent offences involving violence and extortion.

Juvenile crime is much more likely to be committed by males than females. In part this is because in some cultures girls are more restricted by their families and the society at large as to what they can do, and many cultures are more tolerant of deviant behaviour among boys than among girls. In addition, aggression is often an established part of the construction of masculine identity in male-dominated societies. Though gang culture often does involve the rejection of some established adult values, it tends uncritically to import and apply very rigid gender roles.

The majority of adolescents who come into conflict with the law are still children, whose rights under the Convention must be protected and respected

The problem of juvenile crime tends to be exacerbated by economic decline and focused especially in the poorer areas of big cities. Juvenile crime is primarily an urban problem. It also has a relationship with the consumer lifestyle portrayed by the mass media, which creates a desire for products and experiences that are materially inaccessible to whole sectors of the population unless they resort to illegal activities. Drug abuse is also a major factor driving juvenile crime, as addiction is virtually impossible to finance with the incomes available to adolescents. Adolescents from disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities and migrants, are disproportionately likely to offend.²¹

Most adolescents who come into conflict with the law are still children, and they need to receive special treatment from the criminal justice system that reflects their status. There are still too many countries where adolescents are simply absorbed into the adult justice system, both to be tried and to serve any eventual sentence. Adolescents who spend periods of pre-trial detention or serve prison sentences alongside adults are much less likely to be reintegrated into society when they are released and much more likely to revert to criminal behaviour.

While incarceration is clearly unavoidable in some circumstances, it is essential to explore alternatives to custodial

“I wish for peace and stability on the African continent.”

Kingford, 19, Ghana

Migration and children: A cause for urgent attention



An official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in Thailand reviews a logbook of migrant workers and victims of trafficking who have been officially repatriated to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Today, it is estimated that approximately 214 million migrants live outside their countries of birth. This figure includes 33 million young children and adolescents under the age of 20 who have migrated either with their parents or unaccompanied. There are also many other children and adolescents who are directly or indirectly affected by migration, including those left in the country of origin when one or both of their parents emigrate.

Figures from the recently created United Nations Global Migration Database show that in industrialized countries, adolescents aged 10–19 account for around 53 per cent of international migrants under 20. Overall, however, developing countries tend to host a greater number of migrants under 20, of which around 68 per cent are adolescents aged 10–19.

There are wide geographical variations in migration trends for young children and adolescents. For instance, migrants under the age of 20 constitute the largest group of the total migrant population in Africa (28 per cent). They also make up a substantial percentage of migrants in Asia and Oceania (20 per cent), the Americas (11 per cent) and Europe (11 per cent).

A gender gap exists among the global migrant population under 20, with 94 migrant girls for every 100 migrant boys. This trend is in line with the global gender balance for that age cohort. In industrialized countries, however, migrant girls outnumber boys, with 100 girls for every 98 migrant boys under 20. This gap is sharply reversed in developing countries, with only 80 migrant girls under 20 for every 100 boys of the same age.

The risks of adolescent migration

Young children and adolescents – especially those who are undocumented or have been separated from their families – are particularly vulnerable to violations of human rights and protection abuses directly or indirectly related to migration and migration policies and regulation. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants has underscored the exceptional vulnerability of children across the spectrum of migration. A fundamental concern is that young children and adolescents crossing borders may not be entitled to the same protection and rights as those who reside in a given country, leaving them at greater risk of invisibility, discrimination and exploitation. And while it is often reported that many migrants are not necessarily among the poorest in their countries of transit or destination, it is also true that they often disproportionately face discrimination and exclusion in their countries of origin, transit or destination – or all three.

The urgent need for a child and adolescent perspective in migration policies

A rights-based approach to migration is urgently required to reinforce the steady build-up of support and attention to migration issues at the international and national levels. This approach must begin by addressing the root causes of migration (e.g., poverty, inequality, discrimination, instability) in the country of origin, and it should incorporate policies specifically targeted for young children and adolescents, girls and young women, and vulnerable populations, including those left behind when family members migrate.

The absence of a child and adolescent perspective in migration-related detention, deportation and repatriation policies, and in fulfilling the economic, social and cultural rights of children is widely evident in both industrialized and developing countries. Urgent action is required to ensure that migration policies meet the principles of the Convention and other human rights treaties and that, in all cases, the best interests of the child are paramount.

Encouragingly, across the world, governments and their partners are increasingly working on research, policies and programmes aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of children and adolescents affected by migration. Though much more remains to be done, the examples that follow illustrate what can be achieved when political will is combined with adequate resources and sound strategies.

- In the **Philippines**, the Government has devised policies and institutions such as the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, which manages a trust fund that supports health care, welfare assistance education and training programmes for migrant workers and families. The Philippines Overseas Employment Administration is also working to protect the rights of migrants and of families left behind.
- In **Mexico**, the National Family Development System (NFDS) and the National Migration Institute (NMI) jointly operate eight care units in northern border states to provide essential services, rest and communication with families for repatriated children. In conjunction with non-governmental organizations, the NFDS also provides a network of 27 transitory shelters to protect unaccompanied children and adolescents. A special corps of child protection officers, currently numbering over 300, has been established within the NMI since 2008; the corps has recorded higher rates of detection of and response to trafficking, sexual exploitation and violence and abuse against these children.
- In **Albania**, a programme launched by the Government and the UN, and supported by Spain's Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund, aims to provide job opportunities and streamline national strategies for youth employment and migration. Through labour programmes targeting at-risk youth, this programme specifically aims to reach youth employees in two regions, Shkodra and Kukes, which are characterized by high levels of informal employment and youth migration. In addition, it seeks to foster ties between communities of origin and expatriate Albanians, using social media and web-based tools.

See References, page 78.

sentencing wherever possible, including counselling, probation and community service, as well as restorative justice that involves the child, family, community and victim and promotes restitution and reconciliation.²² The ultimate aim must always be that of reintegration, of encouraging young people towards responsible citizenship.

Conflict and emergency settings

A lack of peace and security exacerbates the difficulties of growing into adulthood

Conflict is one situation of violence that has clear and unequivocal risks for all adolescents. Although they are

not as vulnerable as young children to death and disease produced by conflict, this group is at greater risk in other ways. Adolescents may be targeted for recruitment by military groups, whether to carry weapons and participate in atrocities or to act in effect as sexual and other types of slaves. Although the activities may involve violence, adolescents may also become involved because of their growing interest in actively participating in politics.

In emergencies, adolescents, particularly girls, are often forced to discontinue their education, owing to disruption, economic considerations or because they have to care for younger siblings in the absence of parents. They may

ADOLESCENT VOICES

Striving for equity: A look at marginalized adolescents in Zambia



by Cian McLeod, 17,
Ireland

“Girls who are disabled run a greater risk of physical and mental abuse.”

Although I believe we are closer than ever to living in an equitable world, societies must still work towards changing social norms that allow discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. This is most apparent when we consider disabled children, girls' education and children living with HIV.

In November 2009, I had the opportunity to volunteer for a couple of weeks in a home for disabled children in Mongu, Zambia, and I gained a vivid insight into their lives. I was shocked by the marginalization of these children, as they are among the most cheerful and playful I have ever met. As in many other countries, disabled children in Zambia are sometimes sent away and even disowned. They may be left unattended and uncared for; they may also receive less food.

Disabled children are often excluded from school because the education system makes no allowance for them. In addition, their parents do not recognize their right to education or development. They are denied the chance to learn the skills they need to work and achieve independence as adults.

Gender inequality is evident as well. Girls who are disabled run a greater risk of physical and mental abuse. Girls are not valued, and neither is their education. I see the rise in HIV and AIDS as a direct result of this social outlook.

Education plays a vital role in the prevention of sexual transmitted infections. In order to halt the spread of

HIV, it is fundamental that all adolescents learn about prevention and treatment. Although school enrolment of girls has increased in developing countries, it is still not equal to that of boys. In Zambia, when a family member is HIV-positive, the family's financial resources shift from education to health. As girls are responsible for the traditionally female tasks – cooking, cleaning and nursing – they are expected to drop out of school to care for the sick.

Globally, nearly 5 million young people were living with HIV in 2008. In Zambia, if a girl or boy is thought to be infected with HIV, she or he is no longer sent to school. This lack of education leads to a vicious cycle of gender inequality, increased HIV infection and poverty. When girls and women are not given access to education, they cannot gain independence from men; when girls do not learn about HIV prevention, they are more likely to be exposed to the virus.

It is evident that we do not yet live in a fair and non-discriminatory world: The rights of marginalized children need to be better protected. It is the responsibility of adolescents to focus our endeavours towards creating a more equitable society in our lifetime.

Cian McLeod lives in Balbriggan, Ireland. He is involved in his community's sports development programme and peer mentoring. His experience volunteering in Mongu was with the Sporting Fingal Zambian Mission. Cian's goal is to work as an economist for developing countries. He would like to make the world a fairer place.

Releasing the potential of adolescents: Education reform in the Middle East and North Africa region



by Her Highness Sheikha
Mozah bint Nasser
Al Missned, UNESCO
Special Envoy for Basic
and Higher Education

“In order to release the potential of the next workforce – adolescents – we must ensure that their education properly prepares them for a career”

On 12 August 2010, the second United Nations International Year of Youth commenced. We stakeholders and advocates for children must therefore turn our attention to the problems adolescents face today. In the Middle East and North Africa region, these are particularly serious in the areas of education and future employment.

The region is also experiencing an unprecedented youth bulge. In the next 10 years, 65 per cent of the population will be 24 years old or younger. In addition to the demographic pressure, young people are finding it increasingly difficult to break into the labour market, especially with the larger number of new entrants every year. The region has a rapidly growing labour force, and both unemployment and underemployment are major concerns for young people trying to provide for themselves and their families. By the time a 13-year-old today turns 23, as many as 100 million jobs will be needed to accommodate these rising numbers. That means creating 6.5 million jobs per year.

While the Gulf countries have experienced a surge of wealth during recent decades, this has not been entirely beneficial for our young people. Many adolescents have grown accustomed to a materialistic lifestyle that distracts them from reaching their full potential. Likewise, the seduction of consumerism traps adolescents in an endless quest for possessions and encourages them to disregard their role as citizens responsible for community involvement and positive self-development. Moreover, the labour market cannot support the current youth bulge, impeding young people's ability to achieve financial independence. Unable to find work, they extend their studies, in turn delaying marriage and parenthood.

Acknowledging that our youth are consumers rather than producers is alarming, but it is not their fault alone. The education system in Arab countries is partly responsible for the soaring unemployment rate, because it focuses more on granting diplomas than on effectively training students in practical skills. It does not prepare young people for the global job market, as it neither encourages versatility nor enables them to apply a diverse set of abilities across a number of

disciplines. In today's rapidly changing technological world, young people need to learn critical thinking, writing skills and flexibility – areas virtually absent from our curricula at present. If we do not reform our current practice and aim to transform today's adolescents into creative, productive and diligent contributors, our economies will not be able to compete globally.

My work with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations inspired me to launch Silatech, a regional youth initiative whose name derives from the Arabic term 'your connection'. Particularly active in the Gulf countries, the initiative aims to partner young people with leaders, corporations and organizations globally to promote opportunities for innovation and enterprise. In order to release the potential of the next workforce – adolescents – we must ensure that their education properly prepares them for a career. If we do not invest in this generation, I believe that the devastating cycle of unemployment will continue. Adolescents represent a tremendous asset for our future, and this historic opportunity to empower them and help them flourish must not be missed.

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned serves as Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development; Vice Chair of the Supreme Education Council; President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs; and Chairperson of the Sidra Medical and Research Center project. She established the Silatech initiative to help generate new jobs and opportunities for young people in the Arab world.

be stranded in poverty by conflict or other emergencies, unable to pursue a livelihood, and they are often at greater risk of sexual violence and exploitation.²³ They may be lured or dragged into participation in criminal activities as a way of coping with the material and emotional uncertainties of their lives.²⁴

The risks adolescents face, and the contributions they make in conflict and emergency settings, deserve great recognition

The past two decades has witnessed a growing recognition of the impact of armed conflict on children and youth, and a strengthening international response to the issue. The Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that children under age 15 should not take a direct part in hostilities and should be protected from the effects of armed conflict. This legal safeguard was then extended and reinforced in the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000 and which entered into force in 2002. The Optional Protocol raised the minimum age for recruitment into military service to 18 and criminalized the recruitment of children under 18 by rebel groups.

The bar was raised even farther in 2007, when representatives of 59 countries committed themselves to ending the unlawful recruitment and use of children and adolescents in armed conflicts in what were called the Paris Commitments and Principles. As of the beginning of 2010, 84 countries had endorsed the Commitments.

Adolescents are not only victims and witnesses to conflict, however; given the chance, they can also be an integral part of its resolution and societal renewal. Ever since the first International Youth Year was designated in 1985 with a theme of ‘Participation, Development and Peace’, UN organizations have regularly attempted to stress the positive contribution adolescents and youth have made to resolving social problems and the even greater contribution they could make.

During the two-and-a-half decades that have ensued between the first and the current (August 2010–2011) UN International Year of Youth, the focus on involving adolescents and young people in conflict resolution and postconflict rebuilding has been greatly strengthened. There has also been increasing recognition of the importance of adolescent participation in emergency situations, as noted in chapter 2. Encouraging the participation of adolescents in all aspects of community life is not only the best way to realize their potential but also

often the best means of ensuring their protection – though care clearly has to be taken when adolescents are politically outspoken in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Adolescent participation in challenging situations can be both a means and an end. It can allow young people to develop their problem-solving and negotiating skills while fostering a wider atmosphere of tolerance, democratic practice and non-violence. There is a virtuous circle within reach here: Just as adolescents are more likely to flourish and realize their potential in conditions of peace and security, so those conditions of peace and security are more likely to be attained if young people are encouraged to play a full part.