



DECEMBER 2005 NO. 19

EXCLUDED AND INVISIBLE CHILDREN: REACHING THE MOST VULNERABLE

Millions of children today are at risk because of discrimination, poverty and inequality, conflict and poor governance, and HIV/AIDS. Though the international community has made a series of promises to children and young people over the years, many children still lack access to basic services such as clean water, health care, schools and hospitals. Still others are denied their right to a formal identity, face early marriage, or are forced into armed combat or dangerous work. As a result, many children face multiple levels of exclusion. In honor of the 2006 *State of the World's Children* report on excluded and invisible children, *Voices of Youth* held discussions on how young people think these children can be reached.

OVERVIEW

Young people are aware of the extent to which poverty, HIV/AIDS, conflict and discrimination negatively impact on the lives of children and adolescents. They are speaking out on *Voices of Youth* on behalf of their peers around the world who don't have the opportunity to speak out themselves. Whether children and adolescents are being excluded due to physical, social or political barriers, young people are insistent that action must be taken to restore basic rights.

Voices of Youth members have also discussed the challenges of reaching out to those who are excluded and vulnerable, and have offered intelligent and practical solutions toward achieving this goal. Their solutions are holistic in approach, ranging from equipping and training individuals to educate children and adolescents about HIV/AIDS in villages, to initiating mentoring programs, to educating young people about their rights.



CHINA

"Think of the riots in France; although what concerns these young people is not basic needs such as food, shelter and medication, they have been denied rights to speak out. That's why they feel agitated, and [have] sought ways to attract attention from the government and the general public. It is important that we reach out to these people actively." *girl, 18*

The following is a summary of what young people are saying about the root causes of exclusion—poverty and inequality, conflict and poor governance, HIV/AIDS, and discrimination—and about how we can reach out to the most vulnerable. Their comments speak to governments, international organizations, civil society organizations and other young people.

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How can we reach the most vulnerable children and young people? Tell us what you think! [Join the discussions](#) and share ideas with young people from more than 180 countries.

For every child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY

NEW ON VOY

EXPLORE

[State of the World's Children](#)

A youth-friendly version of the 2006 report is now available. You can also see the [official report](#), including videos and real life stories.

[Reports from youth journalists](#)

A group of youth journalists report on the Latin American/Caribbean AIDS summit (in Spanish only)

SPEAK OUT

[UN Study on Violence](#)

Join the new discussion in Arabic!

[Young people and conflict](#)

Ideas for recovery and rebuilding

TAKE ACTION

[The C8 Children's Forum](#)

UNICEF has launched the official C8 website.

[World AIDS Day contest](#)

Winning entries will be featured on *Voices of Youth*.

[Children and HIV/AIDS Campaign](#)

Profiles of the young leaders who participated in the global campaign launch.

FROM OUR ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

« Notre generation est fatigué de la corruption gouvernemental. Exigeons pour une meilleur réponse de la problematique nationale et internationale. » *girl, 15, Mexico*

COMING SOON ON VOY

The 4th World Water Forum

UPCOMING ISSUE
Children and work



EXCLUDED AND INVISIBLE CHILDREN

ISSUES IN CONTEXT

December 2005

Click on a link to read what young people are saying about reaching the most excluded and vulnerable children

[Poverty and inequality](#) [Conflict and poor governance](#) [HIV and AIDS](#)

[Discrimination](#) [Join the discussion now!](#)

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Children who are victims of poverty and inequality are most at risk of exclusion. *Voice of Youth* members recognize that children in poverty often have no choice but to work and support their families, and thus miss out on an education, which might eventually offer them an escape from hardship.



COLOMBIA

"Poverty is not an excuse to force children to labour. I wish parents would not make their small children work; it should be the parents' responsibility to provide their children's needs & not the other way around. Children should be in school learning and having friends. They should be free from the hardships and the difficulties of life." *girl, 15*

Young people have used the discussions as a place to offer creative strategies for reaching children in the poorest countries, including those in rural areas.



MOROCCO

"I have always thought that one of the root causes of poverty is those resources which are unequally distributed in some countries. Establishing democracy and transparency should be one of the challenges of less-developed countries.... There are many interdependent issues that have to contribute to erasing poverty from the earth." *girl, 16*



AUSTRALIA

"Growing up in poverty may make children think that there is no hope for the future; that there is nothing better for them in the world. I think that bringing in mentors, who have come from a

poor background themselves and have achieved success, to talk to poor children would be a good strategy. It would instill self-confidence in the children, [and make them believe] that they can shape their futures." *young person, 17*



INDIA

"It is difficult to reach out to poor people living in the rural areas of the developing countries, but nothing is impossible. In rural areas, they do not even have radios and the children there have too little knowledge of the ways they can communicate with outsiders. But it is possible if we all go there ourselves and spend time with them so that they open up and talk to us. So hope for some organisation to plan our trip to some of the rural places." *boy, 16*

CONFLICT AND POOR GOVERNANCE

Armed conflict robs young people of their youth, and poor governance increases their risk of exclusion. *Voices of Youth* members understand that young people who are denied protection from conflict and lack basic services become victims of their environment, and as a result may even become perpetrators.



VIET NAM

"Young people might have no other option but to become foot-soldiers at a very young age. After witnessing their loved ones massacred, their innocence will be lost forever and they may turn to the thirst for revenge. What is more brutal than when a child, whose family was killed, starts to kill others?" *girl, >21*



COLOMBIA

"Quisiera a traves de este espacio invitarlos a conocer que la violencia colombiana no es solo lo que muestran

en otros paises, no es un conflicto de guerrillas solamente, ni es un conflicto que solo se da entre los grupos al margen de la ley. Hay un conflicto mucho mas crudo que nos acerca mas y nos amenaza mas a los que vivimos en las ciudades y es la violencia de la pobreza, No es una guerra de adultos es una guerra de niños de 13 y 14 años saben empuñar un arma en ves de estudiar, han metido vicio y saben que es vivir en al calle, esa violencia nos toca mas, porque esta mas cerca a nosotros, por que esta en nuestras ciudades." *girl, 17*

Young people are calling for better, more attentive governments and the guarantee of basic rights, as well as more empowered civil society organizations.



CANADA

"Young people are only an obstacle to peace when the adults in their world exploit them.... If those in political power guarantee basic fundamental human rights, then children are provided with the tools to be positive players in peace movements. Civil society and public institutions can help give the right tools to young people. Otherwise, they are victims of their own violent environment and will ultimately become perpetrators of human rights violations because adults condone it." *girl, >21*

HIV AND AIDS

The HIV/AIDS pandemic makes children and young people vulnerable on a multitude of levels. Not only does HIV/AIDS threaten the survival of children and young people, it is also wiping out their parents, family members, teachers and health workers.



UNITED STATES

"One major effect of HIV/AIDS is the negative impact on a region's economic development. Most people who are affected by the virus are young, active adults. Their inability to work obstructs productivity while placing strain on limited health programs. Many children are orphaned because their parents die from AIDS, and enrolment in school declines." *girl, 19*

EXCLUDED AND INVISIBLE CHILDREN

Still, young people remain hopeful; many agree that improved education is the first essential step to preventing the spread of HIV. They stress the importance of extending these efforts to rural and marginalized communities and of getting young people involved.



NIGERIA

"In my country, most of the awareness and education is focused in the urban areas. If we are given the opportunity to fully propel this fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic we are going to strive where many dare not. And for the Millennium Goals to be achieved, the youths have to be actively involved in programs that are going to be youth oriented and managed. I am saying this with experience in my country: any program managed by youth succeeds better than most other projects. Let's make our voice heard. Now is not too late, but tomorrow might be." *boy, 18*



UNITED KINGDOM

"In China when they implemented the one child policy they came up with the idea of "barefoot doctors".... Perhaps the same thing could be implemented and they can train an adult (or several) in how to run youth clubs." *girl, 18*



UGANDA

"I think young people can help to fight AIDS by acting as voices for AIDS workers in society. This can be done by encouraging them to educate their families on true facts about AIDS. Merely talking and not implementing is not enough. We young people can also act as voluntary workers and be willing to educate our people about AIDS. In societies where it is considered taboo to talk about AIDS we can team up with other organisations at work. This might sound difficult, and I know it is, but the motto is, 'never give up.'" *girl, 16*

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination according to gender, ethnicity or disability often leads to the exclusion of young people from important services and creates in them a profound sense of marginalization.

Young people in the discussions on *Voices of Youth* are particularly concerned with violence as a result of discrimination.



SERBIA & MONTENEGRO

"Here in Serbia I met discrimination and bullying based on ethnicity. It was forbidden to resist. The teachers even said: 'we can not do anything'. Only the most brave parents could stand up, but of course only for their child. I am not quite sure how things are nowadays in Serbia when you compare to the past, because I am older and stronger now and no one dares to bully or discriminate against me. It was impossible to take action before, but now I do, by speaking out." *boy, 19*



UNITED STATES

"Out of all the children, disabled children [find it] especially hard to express their opinions about abuse or violence. Many of them are kept in their homes. I think abusing disabled children is one of the cruelest actions that humans can do because they are one of the weakest people." *young person, 17*

Young people are also concerned about the stigma associated with HIV and put out a strong call for acceptance and tolerance.



INDIA

"The moment a person is found to be infected [with HIV], he is trashed by most [and accused of] having loose morals. Doctors look down upon them and make them feel guilty. The HIV+ people and their family members also have the right to live, but when their children are denied admissions in schools and are discriminated against, this is a sheer violation of human

rights. Doctors don't even see them as persons and make them feel that they are going to die soon. More than the sensitisation of HIV+ people regarding the disease, the sensitisation of doctors towards them is important!" *girl, 15*



CHINA

"Everybody is born to be equal. Every one is the same in essence. So why do we treat HIV+ people as if they are from another planet? They have the right to be treated fairly! If we consider things from the point of view of HIV+ people, discrimination against them will disappear. Fairness does not rest in charters and covenants alone, it lies in the hearts and minds of people." *young person, 17*



UNITED KINGDOM

"HIV carriers are normal people. Yes we carry a stigma, however I don't [let it bother me]. Everyone knows I have HIV and my true friends are fine with it. I have HIV and I don't choose to keep it a secret, but I also don't chose to brag. I don't want to live in fear that my friend finds out or the school bully. I am open and strong enough to deal with what life throws at me." *girl, 15*

CONCLUSION

Young people are eager to reach out to excluded and invisible children. They have a keen sense of justice and innovative ideas, but they need our ongoing support to put their insights to work.

For more information, read past newsletters from *Voices of Youth*:

[October 2005: "Young people in conflict and recovery: untapped potential"](#)

[August 2005: "The Millennium Development Goals"](#)

[April 2005: "Young people call for equal rights for all"](#)

VOICES OF YOUTH

<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>

Since 1995, VOY has focused on exploring the educational and community building potential of the Internet, and facilitating the active and substantive participation of young people on child rights and development related issues. Through web boards, interactive quizzes, youth leadership profiles, live chats and more, *Voices of Youth* provides more than 20,000 young people from over 180 countries with an opportunity to self-inform, engage in lively debate, and partner—with their peers and decision makers—to create a world fit for children.

EXCLUDED AND INVISIBLE CHILDREN

THE LAUNCH OF UNICEF'S GLOBAL CAMPAIGN: UNITE FOR CHILDREN. UNITE AGAINST AIDS.

Every day, there are nearly 1,800 new HIV infections in children under 15, mostly from mother-to-child transmission; some 1,400 children under 15 die of AIDS-related illness and more than 6,000 young people aged 15–24 are newly infected with HIV.

Millions of children, adolescents and young people in the path of the pandemic are at risk and in need of protection. AIDS is redefining the very meaning of childhood for millions, depriving children of many of their human rights – of the care, love and affection of their parents; of their teachers and other role models; of education and options for the future; of protection against exploitation and abuse.

As part of the launch of UNICEF's global campaign against HIV/AIDS, four young activists, all of them affected by HIV, spoke about their experiences at a roundtable discussion.



Nakwan Leknork, 20, has been helping to educate other young people in Thailand about HIV/AIDS since the age of 14. She joined the Youth-to-Youth Education Project after both of her parents were infected with the virus; her father subsequently died of the disease.



Livey Van Wyk Samaria, 20, is from Windhoek in Namibia. She has been living with HIV since the age of 16. The birth of her son inspired Livey to seek counselling and support and to speak out about her HIV status. Now Livey has trained to be a peer educator and works with young people.



Kerrel McKay is 20 years old and the President of the Portland AIDS Committee Adult Group. She also works with the 'Bashment Bus', a mobile health clinic which will travel around Jamaica entertaining young people, offering HIV testing services, and raising awareness about HIV/AIDS.



Irina Kalinichenko, 21, has been living with HIV for three years. She is currently working as a deputy director of a non-governmental organization providing services for people affected by HIV/AIDS in Ukraine.

See their stories on *Voices of Youth* at:

http://www.unicef.org/voy/takeaction/takeaction_2446.html.

You can also see the work of young journalists from Latin America and the Caribbean at the launch of the Campaign in El Salvador:

http://www.unicef.org/voy/spanish/explore/aids/explore_2518.html.