Adolescent development and participation

The situation

Adolescence is a time of both great opportunity and vulnerability in Namibia. Teens flourish when they are valued in the community and have access to support systems and opportunities to be useful to others. However, they are also vulnerable to a host of threats, which undermine their development and participation in society.

In Namibia, access to secondary education is low and teenage girls in particular are at high risk of abuse and sexual exploitation in schools, homes and communities, including rape, early marriage and marital sex at a young age. Adolescent boys are affected to a lesser extent than girls to various forms of violence and exploitation, including child labour.

Children who are out of school face a bleak future. Most 15 to 19 year-olds are unemployed (56.3 per cent in 2012 according to the Namibia Statistics Agency). Out-of-school children have limited job choices and end up in menial vocations such as domestic work, gardening, street vending or working in agriculture as labourers.

Girls often get married young and put themselves at risk when they also start having babies early. Teenage pregnancy has been on the rise in the past decade and today, close to a fifth (19 per cent) of young women between the ages of 15 and 19 have begun child bearing. Sexual and reproductive health care is not readily accessible to teenagers, and life skills teaching in schools is of poor quality.

HIV is another burden carried by young people in Namibia. A growing number of adolescents who live with HIV were infected as infants and have survived into their teens. HIV testing among young people is low and many adolescents do not know their status; without this knowledge of their health, they become part of a relatively large youthful population that starts having sex early, often unprotected, and they risk transmitting HIV.

UNICEF in action

Vulnerable adolescents need understanding, guidance and better access to critical services to make healthy lifestyle choices, stop the transmission of HIV and have a say in the design and implementation of programmes that affect them. This is why UNICEF and its partners focus on improving access to health services for adolescents and creating platforms for participation through sports for development, child parliament and various life skill-based initiatives.
Results for children

Two HIV-prevention extra-curricular programmes – My Future is My Choice for Grades 8 to 12 and Window of Hope for Grades 4 to 7 – were rolled out to 70 per cent of schools across the country, benefiting 15,000 learners. My Future is My Choice has now been integrated into the schools’ core life skills curriculum and is taught by life skills teachers.

Around 3,000 girls were reached by healthy lifestyle messages, including how to prevent teenage pregnancy and HIV infection, through the Galz and Goals sports for development programme, which combines girls’ football with life skills education.

Eight hospital-based teen clubs were established in eight health districts to support and guide adolescents living with HIV and AIDS.

Because of the high teen pregnancy rates, UNICEF supports the Government to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. There has been a rapid decline in babies contracting HIV from their mothers, from 33 per cent in 2002 to 7% in 2015 (GARPR 2015). Global AIDS Response Progress Report, as a result of increased coverage of prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) services. UNICEF is also supporting behaviour change initiatives that educate male partners about HIV and encourage them to support their wives/girlfriends through PMTCT.


What more needs to be done?

Adolescent development and participation cuts across UNICEF programmes in health, HIV, education and child protection. With communication as a key strategy, UNICEF will:

- Provide technical assistance to roll out the All In to End Adolescent AIDS initiative, a new platform for action to drive better results for adolescents by encouraging strategic changes in policy and engaging more young people in the effort,
- Advocate for child-related legislation, particularly the passage of the Child Care and Protection Law,
- Continue supporting the Galz and Goals programme and helping institutionalise sport for development in school physical education as a way of reaching more girls and boys,
- Mobilise adolescents and young people, using theatre and dance for development, to act against violence against children, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV infection and alcohol abuse.
- Help develop a national school-based HIV testing and counselling model for adolescents and young people,
- Support the PMTCT programme to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV among teenage mothers,
- Support adolescents living with HIV to take and adhere to treatment and disclose their status to their families,
- Provide secretariat support to the Ministry of Sport, Youth and National Service on the National Technical Working Group on Adolescents and Young People,
- Help incorporate the child parliament into the national parliament, creating a space for adolescents and young people to debate and contribute to issues related to their rights and responsibilities in Namibia,
- Strengthen national institutional capacity to deliver education services which keep children in school. This will help to increase social and economic opportunities in their lives.