A keener focus on the development and human rights of adolescents would both enhance and accelerate the fight against poverty, inequality and gender discrimination. Hawa, 12 (at left), recently re-enrolled in school following the intervention of the National Network of Mothers’ Associations for Girls, which advocates for girls’ education, Cameroon.
GLOBAL CHALLENGES FOR ADOLESCENTS

The Emerging Generation
Adolescence is an age of opportunity for children, and a pivotal time for us to build on their development in the first decade of life, to help them navigate risks and vulnerabilities, and to set them on the path to fulfilling their potential.

The world is home to 1.2 billion individuals aged 10–19 years. These adolescents have lived most or all of their lives under the Millennium Declaration, the unprecedented global compact that since 2000 has sought a better world for all.

Many of their number have benefited from the gains in child survival, education, access to safe water, and other areas of development that stand as concrete successes of the drive to meet the Millennium Development Goals, the human development targets at the core of the Declaration. But now they have arrived at a pivotal moment in their lives – just as the world as a whole is facing a critical moment in this new millennium.

In just three years, confidence in the world economy has plummeted. Unemployment has risen sharply, and real household incomes have fallen or stagnated. At the time of writing, in late 2010, the global economic outlook remains highly uncertain, and the possibility of a prolonged economic malaise, with negative implications for social and economic progress in many countries, developing and industrialized alike, still looms.

This economic turmoil and uncertainty have raised the spectre of fiscal austerity, particularly in some industrialized economies, resulting in a more stringent approach to social spending and overseas development assistance. In developing countries, too, public finances have tightened, and social spending, including investments in child-related areas, has come under greater scrutiny.

In this context, the conventional wisdom might dictate that most resources be devoted to children and young people in the first decade of their lives. After all, that is when they are most vulnerable to death, disease and undernutrition; when the effects of unsafe water and poor sanitation pose the greatest threat to their lives; and when the absence of education, protection and care can have the most pernicious lifetime implications.

Such reasoning, though seemingly sound in theory, is flawed for several reasons, all stemming from one critical notion: Lasting change in the lives of children and young people, a critical underlying motivation of the Millennium Declaration, can only be achieved and sustained by complementing investment in the first decade of life with greater attention and resources applied to the second.

The imperative of investing in adolescence

The arguments for investing in adolescence are fivefold. The first is that it is right in principle under existing human rights treaties including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which applies to around 80 per cent of adolescents,
and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which applies to all adolescent females.

Second, investing in adolescence is the most effective way to consolidate the historic global gains achieved in early and middle childhood since 1990. The 33 per cent reduction in the global under-five mortality rate, the near-elimination of gender gaps in primary school enrolment in several developing regions and the considerable gains achieved in improving access to primary schooling, safe water and critical medicines such as routine immunizations and antiretroviral drugs – all are testament to the tremendous recent progress achieved for children in early and middle childhood.²

But the paucity of attention and resources devoted to adolescents is threatening to limit the impact of these efforts in the second decade of an individual’s life. Evidence from around the world shows just how precarious that decade can be: In Brazil, more adolescents die from violence than do children under five from disease and ill health.³ Global net attendance for secondary school is roughly one third lower than for primary school.⁴ Worldwide, one third of all new HIV cases involve young people aged 15–24.⁵ And in the developing world, excluding China, 1 in every 3 girls gets married before the age of 18.⁶ When confronted with these facts, it is hard to avoid the question: Are our efforts in support of children’s rights and well-being limited by a lack of support for adolescents?

Third, investing in adolescents can accelerate the fight against poverty, inequity and gender discrimination. Adolescence is the pivotal decade when poverty and inequity often pass to the next generation as poor adolescent girls give birth to impoverished children. This is particularly true among adolescents with low levels of education. Almost half the world’s adolescents of the appropriate age do not attend secondary school.⁷ And when they do attend, many of them – particularly those from the poorest and most marginalized households and communities – fail to complete their studies or else finish with insufficient skills, especially in those high-level competencies increasingly required by the modern globalized economy.

This skills deficit is contributing to bleak youth employment trends. The global economic crisis has produced a
large cohort of unemployed youth, which in 2009 stood at around 81 million worldwide. For those who are employed, decent work is scarce: In 2010, young people aged 15–24 formed around one quarter of the world’s working poor. In a recent survey of international companies operating in developing countries, more than 20 per cent considered the inadequate education of workers to be a significant obstacle to higher levels of corporate investment and faster economic growth.

The intergenerational transmission of poverty is most apparent among adolescent girls. Educational disadvantage and gender discrimination are potent factors that force them into lives of exclusion and penury, child marriage and domestic violence. Around one third of girls in the developing world, excluding China, are married before age 18; in a few countries, almost 30 per cent of girls under 15 are also married.

The poorest adolescent girls are also those most likely to be married early, with rates of child marriage roughly three times higher than among their peers from the richest quintile of households. Girls who marry early are also most at risk of being caught up in the negative cycle of premature childbearing, high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity and high levels of child undernutrition. And there is firm evidence to suggest that undernutrition is among the foremost factors that undermine early childhood development.

Adopting a life-cycle approach to child development, with greater attention given to the care, empowerment and protection of adolescents, girls in particular, is the soundest way to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Time and again, evidence shows that educated girls are less likely to marry early, less likely to get pregnant as teenagers, more likely to have correct and comprehensive knowledge of HIV and AIDS and more likely to have healthy children when they eventually become mothers. When it is of good quality and relevant to children’s lives, education empowers like nothing else, giving adolescents, both female and male, the knowledge, skills and confidence to meet the global challenges of our times.

The urgent need to confront these challenges is the fourth reason for investing in adolescence. Rich and poor alike, adolescents will have to deal with the intergenerational implications of the current economic turmoil, including the structural unemployment that may persist in its wake. They will have to contend with climate change and environmental degradation, explosive urbanization and migration, ageing societies and the rising cost of health care, the HIV and AIDS pandemic, and humanitarian crises of increasing number, frequency and severity.

Far more so than adults, adolescents are disproportionately represented in countries where these critical challenges are likely to be most pressing: those with the lowest incomes, the highest levels of political instability and the fastest rates of urban growth; those most exposed to civil strife and natural disasters and most vulnerable to the ravages of climate change. The adolescents of these countries will need to be equipped with the skills and capacities to address such challenges as they arise throughout the century.

The fifth and final argument for investing in adolescence relates to the way adolescents are portrayed. This quintile of the global populace is commonly referred to as the ‘next
On 12 January 2010, the central region of Haiti was devastated by the strongest earthquake the country had experienced in more than 200 years. Over 220,000 people were killed, 300,000 were injured and 1.6 million were displaced and forced to seek shelter in spontaneous settlements. Children, who make up nearly half the country’s total population, have suffered acutely in the earthquake’s aftermath. UNICEF estimates that half of those displaced are children, and 500,000 children are considered extremely vulnerable and require child protection services.

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of Haiti’s population is between the ages of 10 and 19, and their situation was extremely difficult even before the earthquake. As the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti lagged well behind the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean in many indicators, and even behind other least developed countries throughout the world. For example, net secondary school attendance in 2005–2009 stood at just 20 per cent (18 per cent for boys and 21 per cent for girls), compared to around 70 per cent for the region as a whole and roughly 28 per cent for the world’s least developed countries. Adolescent marriage and pregnancy rates are substantially higher than in other countries in the region. Among 20- to 24-year-old women surveyed in 2005–2006, nearly one third had married by age 18 and 48 per cent by age 20; 30 per cent gave birth for the first time before the age of 20.

These poor education, health and protection outcomes are a direct result of lack of access to services and basic necessities such as water and food due to poverty, political instability, violence and gender-based discrimination. Natural disasters have been a recurring challenge, but the recent earthquake destroyed infrastructure and lives on an unprecedented scale.

The Government has developed an Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti, with the goal of addressing both short-term and long-term needs. Working with international partners, who pledged US$5.3 billion in the first 18 months following the earthquake and nearly $10 billion over the next three years, the Government is committed to rebuilding the country to be better than its pre-earthquake state. The plan focuses on all aspects of redevelopment, from physical infrastructure and institution-building to cultural preservation, education and food and water security. It prioritizes the needs of pregnant women as well as children’s education and health.

A particularly notable aspect of the rebuilding process so far has been the significant role played by young people. Youth groups were critical as responders in search and rescue, first aid and essential goods transport immediately following the earthquake. Since then, they have been important community-based helpers, imparting health information and building infrastructure. The Ecoclubes group, with chapters in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, has been using Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization materials to provide information on malaria prevention to low-literacy communities. The Water and Youth Movement initiated a campaign to raise $65,000 to train and equip six poor communities with water pumps.

In addition, UNICEF, Plan International and their partners facilitated the voices of 1,000 children in the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) process. Child-friendly focus group discussions were held throughout nine of the country’s departments. Adolescents and youth who took part raised issues of gender, disability, vulnerability, access to services, disaster risk reduction, and participation in decision-making and accountability mechanisms for the PDNA.

Through partnerships that include young people, programmes have been initiated to vaccinate children, facilitate their return to school, raise awareness of HIV and AIDS, encourage holistic community development and promote sanitation. However, these and future efforts will require continued financial and moral commitment to overcome the host of challenges still to be tackled. One of these is meeting the pressing needs of the most disadvantaged, such as those who lost limbs in the earthquake.

Going forward, it will be critical to listen and respond to the voices of Haiti’s young people of all ages, in order to meet their needs, enable them to make the transition to adulthood in such turbulent times – regardless of their poverty status, urban or rural location, gender or ability – and rebuild a stronger, more equitable Haiti.
Early and late adolescence

Rim Un Jong, 10, sits in a fourth-grade mathematics class at Jongpyong Primary School in the eastern province of South Hamgyong, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

The manifest gulf in experience that separates younger and older adolescents makes it useful to consider this second decade of life as two parts: early adolescence (10–14 years) and late adolescence (15–19 years).

**Early adolescence (10–14 years)**

Early adolescence might be broadly considered to stretch between the ages of 10 and 14. It is at this stage that physical changes generally commence, usually beginning with a growth spurt and soon followed by the development of the sex organs and secondary sexual characteristics. These external changes are often very obvious and can be a source of anxiety as well as excitement or pride for the individual whose body is undergoing the transformation.

The internal changes in the individual, although less evident, are equally profound. Recent neuroscientific research indicates that in these early adolescent years the brain undergoes a spectacular burst of electrical and physiological development. The number of brain cells can almost double in the course of a year, while neural networks are radically reorganized, with a consequent impact on emotional, physical and mental ability.

The more advanced physical and sexual development of girls – who enter puberty on average 12–18 months earlier than boys – is mirrored by similar trends in brain development. The frontal lobe, the part of the brain that governs reasoning and decision-making, starts to develop during early adolescence. Because this development starts later and takes longer in boys, their tendency to act impulsively and to be uncritical in their thinking lasts longer than in girls. This phenomenon contributes to the widespread perception that girls mature much earlier than boys.

It is during early adolescence that girls and boys become more keenly aware of their gender than they were as younger children, and they may make adjustments to their behaviour or appearance in order to fit in with perceived norms. They may fall victim to, or participate in, bullying, and they may also feel confused about their own personal and sexual identity.

Early adolescence should be a time when children have a safe and clear space to come to terms with this cognitive, emotional, sexual and psychological transformation – unencumbered by engagement in adult roles and with the full support of nurturing adults at home, at school and in the community. Given the social taboos often surrounding puberty, it is particularly important to give early adolescents all the information they need to protect themselves against HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, early pregnancy, sexual violence and exploitation. For too many children, such knowledge becomes available too late, if at all, when the course of their lives has already been affected and their development and well-being undermined.

**Late adolescence (15–19 years)**

Late adolescence encompasses the latter part of the teenage years, broadly between the ages of 15 and 19. The major physical changes have usually occurred by now, although the body is still developing. The brain continues to develop and reorganize itself, and the capacity for analytical and reflective thought is greatly enhanced. Peer-group opinions still tend to be important at the outset, but their hold diminishes as adolescents gain more clarity and confidence in their own identity and opinions.

Risk-taking – a common feature of early to middle adolescence, as individuals experiment with ‘adult behaviour’— declines during late adolescence, as the ability to evaluate risk and make conscious decisions develops. Nevertheless, cigarette smoking and experimentation with drugs and alcohol are often embraced in the earlier risk-taking phase and then carried through into later adolescence and beyond into adulthood. For example, it is estimated that 1 in 5 adolescents aged 13–15 smokes, and around half of those who begin smoking in adolescence continue to do so for at least 15 years. The flip side of the explosive brain development that occurs during adolescence is that it can be seriously and permanently impaired by the excessive use of drugs and alcohol.

Girls in late adolescence tend to be at greater risk than boys of negative health outcomes, including depression, and these risks are often magnified by gender-based discrimination and abuse. Girls are particularly prone to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia; this vulnerability derives in part from profound anxieties over body image that are fuelled by cultural and media stereotypes of feminine beauty.

These risks notwithstanding, late adolescence is a time of opportunity, idealism and promise. It is in these years that adolescents make their way into the world of work or further education, settle on their own identity and world view and start to engage actively in shaping the world around them.

*See References, page 78.*
generation’ of adults, the ‘future generation’ or simply ‘the future’. But adolescents are also firmly part of the present – living, working, contributing to households, communities, societies and economies.

No less than young children do they deserve protection and care, essential commodities and services, opportunities and support, as well as recognition of their existence and worth. Indeed, in some contexts – particularly with regard to child protection risks such as child marriage, commercial sexual exploitation and children in conflict with the law – adolescents, out of all children, may have the greatest needs. Yet these are precisely the areas where investment and assistance for children are often most lacking and where the least attention is paid, in some cases as a result of political, cultural and societal sensitivities. Given the strong link between protection, education and child survival, it is clear that investing in adolescents, and particularly adolescent girls, is imperative to addressing violence, abuse and exploitation of children and women in earnest.

These facts point to an undeniable truth: Both now and in the coming decades, the fight against poverty, inequality and gender discrimination will be incomplete, and its effectiveness compromised, without a stronger focus on adolescent development and participation.

This truth is known and accepted by many. In the push to meet the Millennium Development Goals and other aspects of the Millennium Declaration, however, there is a risk that the needs of adolescents are not being given sufficient consideration. And their voices, though heard, are rarely heeded.

Adolescents have long demanded that we keep the promise made in the 2000 Millennium Declaration to create a world of tolerance, security, peace and equity – a world fit for children, adolescents, young people – indeed for all of us.

In recent months, UNICEF has begun to refocus its work towards achieving the Goals by redoubling its efforts in pursuit of equity for children, giving priority to those most disadvantaged within countries and communities. While much of the initial drive of the refocus has centred on promoting greater equity in young child survival and development, addressing inequity in adolescence is equally important and challenging.

It is in this phase of life, the second decade, that inequities often appear most glaringly. Disadvantage prevents the poorest and most marginalized adolescents from furthering their education with secondary schooling, and it exposes them, girls in particular, to such protection abuses as child marriage, early sex, violence and domestic labour – thus curtailing their potential to reach their full capacity.

If denied their rights to quality education, health care, protection and participation, adolescents are very likely to remain or become impoverished, excluded and disempowered – increasing, in turn, the risk that their children will also be denied their rights.

For these reasons, and in support of the second International Year of Youth, which began on 12 August 2010, UNICEF has dedicated the 2011 edition of its flagship report The State of the World’s Children to adolescents and adolescence.

The report begins with a brief discussion of the concept of adolescence and explains why a stronger focus on the second decade of life is imperative to meeting international commitments to children and creating a more peaceful, tolerant and equitable world. It then explores the historical context of adolescence, underscoring the growing international recognition of its relative social importance.

The second chapter presents an in-depth appraisal of the global state of adolescents, exploring where they live and the particular challenges they face in survival and health, education, protection and equality.

The third chapter assesses the risks to their present and future well-being posed by emerging trends in economics and employment, by climate change, demographic shifts, juvenile crime and violence, and threats to peace and security.

In its final chapter, The State of the World’s Children 2011 explores ways of empowering adolescents and young people, preparing them for adulthood and citizenship and investing in their well-being, holistic develop-
ment and active participation. Disaggregated data from international household surveys, supplemented where appropriate by national sources, provide a rich vein of hitherto little-used information on adolescents – mostly those in late adolescence (15–19 years) – that constitutes a central feature of the report. The voices of adolescents offering their own perspectives on the state of their world permeate the entire report.

**The complexities of defining adolescence**

Adolescence is difficult to define in precise terms, for several reasons. First, it is widely acknowledged that each individual experiences this period differently depending on her or his physical, emotional and cognitive maturation as well as other contingencies. Reference to the onset of puberty, which might be seen as a clear line of demarcation between childhood and adolescence, cannot resolve the difficulty of definition.

Puberty occurs at significantly different points for girls and boys, as well as for different individuals of the same sex. Girls begin puberty on average 12–18 months earlier than boys; the median age of girls’ first period is 12 years, while boys’ first ejaculation generally occurs around age 13. Girls, however, can experience the menarche as early as 8 years old. Evidence shows, moreover, that puberty is beginning earlier than ever before – the age of puberty for both girls and boys has declined by fully three years over the past two centuries, largely due to higher standards of health and nutrition.13

This means that girls in particular, but also some boys, are reaching puberty and experiencing some of the key physiological and psychological changes associated with adolescence before they are considered adolescents by the United Nations (defined as individuals 10–19 years old). By the same token, it is not uncommon for boys to enter puberty at the age of 14 or even 15, by which point they will have been effectively treated as adolescents within a school year group for at least two years, associating with boys and girls who are much bigger physically and more developed sexually.14

The second factor that complicates any definition of adolescence is the wide variation in national laws setting minimum age thresholds for participation in activities considered the preserve of adults, including voting, marriage, military participation, property ownership and alcohol consumption. A related idea is that of the ‘age of majority’: the legal age at which an individual is recognized by a nation as an adult and is expected to meet all responsibilities attendant upon that status. Below the age of majority, an individual is still considered a ‘minor’. In many countries, the age of majority is 18, which has the virtue of being consonant with the upper threshold of the age range for children under Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In other countries, this threshold varies widely. One of the lowest national ages of majority is applied to girls in Iran, who reach this threshold at just 9 years old, compared with 15 for Iranian boys.15 For those countries with ages of majority below 18, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body for the Convention, encourages States parties to review this threshold and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18.

Adolescence is a pivotal decade in an individual’s life that requires special attention and protection. A 12-year-old girl collects water. Since a tap was installed at the doorstep of her family’s house, she says that she has more time to do her homework, Pakistan.
The Emerging Generation

Perspective

In the 20 years since the Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force, the global community has pledged to safeguard children’s rights in education, health, participation and protection. These rights entail moral and legal obligations. Governments the world over are held accountable through the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the welfare of their children. Considerable progress has been made across the world in reducing mortality, improving access to basic health care and ensuring schooling for children during their first decade of life. These accomplishments have paved the way for promising strides in adolescence. We have seen increased secondary school enrolment, albeit from a low base; a decline in early marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting; and an increase in knowledge of HIV transmission. Thanks to global and local efforts to raise awareness, encourage dialogue and build policy, adolescents are better protected from abuse and exploitation. Still, for millions of adolescents, daily life remains a struggle.

A happy upbringing – with opportunities to learn, play and feel safe – is still a distant prospect for many. Instead, millions of teenagers face hazardous employment, early pregnancy and participation in armed conflict. Burdened with adult roles and deprived of their rights as children, adolescents are exposed to protection abuses. Denying this age group their childhood heightens their risk of exploitation in labour, social isolation associated with early marriage, and mortality or morbidity for adolescent girls from pregnancy- and childbirth-related complications. The enormous challenge of protecting adolescents at this vital time in their lives should not be underestimated – and adults have a crucial part to play in meeting it.

Adolescents currently make up 18 per cent of the world’s population, but they receive far less attention on the world stage than their numbers merit. Parents, family members and local communities bear a responsibility to promote and protect adolescent development. Implementing laws and pursuing concrete objectives such as the Millennium Development Goals are important ways of building momentum towards investment in adolescents. But if we really want these initiatives to be effective, we must invite young people to be part of the solution and ensure their voices are heard.

Adolescents do not consider themselves as ‘future adults’; they want to be taken seriously now. Article 13 of the Convention stipulates that children are free to express their ideas and opinions, through any channel of their choice. Exercising this right not only cultivates self-confidence but also helps prepare them for the active role of citizen.

Equally important, education encourages children to communicate and make their voices heard. Parents, friends and family members play an essential part in stimulating adolescents’ educational growth, as learning extends beyond the classroom. A parent’s role as mentor should not be underestimated; it deserves more support and appreciation.

I am heartened to hear young peoples’ responses to UNICEF Belgium’s What Do You Think? project. This effort sheds light on marginalized children: those who are disabled, live in institutions and hospitals, and suffer from poverty. I discovered during my visits with these children that their stories are not, as one might expect, expressions of despair. On the contrary, many articulate extraordinary hope for the future and eagerness to participate in the shaping of their world.

Listening to adolescents is the only way we will understand what they expect from us. This is a critical time in a person’s growth. Let us pay close attention to the particular needs and concerns of adolescents. Let us create opportunities for them to participate in society. Let us allow them freedom and opportunity to mature into healthy adults. As the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals draws near, every effort must be made to ensure the equal well-being of children worldwide. Their hopes and dreams are still very much alive. It is up to us to enable adolescents to reach their full potential. Let us work together with them to make life a positive adventure.

Her Royal Highness Princess Mathilde of Belgium is especially committed to children affected by and living with HIV. In her roles as Honorary Chair of UNICEF Belgium and UNICEF and UNAIDS Special Representative for Children and AIDS, HRH Princess Mathilde has undertaken field trips to Africa and Asia to promote the well-being of vulnerable people and generate awareness of children’s rights.

Adult responsibility: Listen to adolescents’ voices

by Her Royal Highness Princess Mathilde of Belgium, Honorary Chair of UNICEF Belgium and UNICEF and UNAIDS Special Representative for Children and AIDS

“Adolescents do not consider themselves as ‘future adults’; they want to be taken seriously now.”
agreement at which individuals are legally able to perform certain tasks that might be associated with adulthood. This ‘age of licence’ may vary from activity to activity, and there is certainly no internationally applicable standard. In the United States, for example, where the age of majority is 18, adolescents can legally drive a car at 16 in most states. In contrast, young US adults are generally unable to purchase alcoholic drinks until they are 21.16

The age at which marriage is first possible may also diverge significantly from the age of majority. In many countries, a distinction is drawn between the age at which anyone may legally marry and an earlier age at which it is only possible to marry with parental or court permission. This is the case, for example, in Brazil, Chile, Croatia, New Zealand and Spain, where the marriageable age is normally 18 but can be reduced, with parental or court permission, to 16. Many other nations have set a different marriageable age for males and females, normally allowing girls to marry at a younger age than boys. In the world’s two most populous countries, for example, the marriageable age for men is higher than that for women – 22 for men and 20 for women in China, and 21 for men and 18 for women in India. In other countries, such as Indonesia, minors are no longer bound by the age of majority once they get married.17

The third difficulty in defining adolescence is that, irrespective of the legal thresholds demarcating childhood and adolescence from adulthood, many adolescents and young children across the world are engaged in adult activities such as labour, marriage, primary caregiving and conflict; assuming these roles, in effect, robs them of their childhood and adolescence. In practice, the legal age of marriage is widely disregarded, normally to allow men to marry girls who are still minors. In many countries and communities, child marriage (defined by UNICEF as marriage or union before age 18), adolescent motherhood, violence, abuse and exploitation can in effect deprive girls especially, but also boys, of any adolescence at all. Child marriage in particular is associated with high levels of violence, social marginalization and exclusion from protection services and education. A similar situation occurs with child labour, in which an estimated 150 million children aged 5–14 are engaged.18

Weak national birth registration complicates efforts to enforce minimum age thresholds; just 51 per cent of children in the developing world (excluding China) were registered at birth for the period 2000–2009.19 Without such registration, which is a right under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is almost impossible to fully protect
When I look at the prospects my Térraba people face, my heart sinks for our dying land and drying river. While I do not know much of the world, I know what is right and wrong, and I know this harsh reality is not their fault. The flame of resistance passed on from my great-grandfather to my grandfather, to my father and to me, symbolizes our desire to keep our community alive. My hope is that our indigenous culture and language will endure.

The problem is, my brothers are afraid to live as Térraba Indians. Outside pressures, like teasing, discrimination and disregard for our basic rights have nearly brought our centuries-old struggle for survival to its breaking point. In addition, the country’s eight indigenous communities, including mine, have not been given adequate schools or proper health centres, nor has the integrity of our land been respected.

We want our lifestyle to be protected and our territory not to be invaded by industrial companies that destroy the harmony we have preserved — harmony paid for with the bloodshed our people have suffered. This, however, does not mean we want to be excluded from the world. We just ask for respect for our basic human rights — the respect that every human being deserves in this world. We ask to be seen and listened to.

Thanks to my beloved Térraba school, I am proud to be one of the first and few of my indigenous group to attain higher education and attend university in my country. The education system in Costa Rica is insufficient, and it is worse still for indigenous communities. Inequality is pervasive in the classroom, and the system seeks to preserve neither our identity nor our existence as Indians. I see the Government’s lack of investment in indigenous culture reflected in teachers giving lessons using outdated materials or teaching under a tree. I think the Government does not see the assets education can bring to our country, nor the benefit of investing in education for indigenous youth.

In order to provide quality education, our teachers must be provided with proper classrooms and new textbooks. If only the children in my village could access the world through a computer as do children elsewhere. I feel sad that they have been denied their right to education and to achieve their full potential.

Skin tone matters in Costa Rica. If equity existed here, girls in my village would have the same opportunities as the girls from other regions of the country — like better access to technology and secondary school. They would be equipped to promote and protect our culture.

I hope for a time when people will be truly interested in listening to and providing for indigenous people, a time when I would not be one of the few indigenous youth to write an essay such as this one, hoping that it be read and understood. With real equity we would have permanent health centres in indigenous territories, and our secondary education would include lessons in our own culture and language as part of the core curriculum. In spite of being pushed to forget our language and to be ashamed of our way of life, we hold on to our dreams and our will to be indigenous Térraba.

Paolo Najera was recently forced to leave school because of the effects of the economic crisis on his community and family. Paolo’s aim is to work in development in order to improve life for indigenous communities, such as his own, in Costa Rica.

"Keeping the flame alive: Indigenous adolescents’ right to education and health services"

by Paolo Najera, 17, Indigenous Térraba, Costa Rica

“We just ask for respect for our basic human rights — the respect that every human being deserves in this world.”

*Costa Rica has eight officially recognized indigenous peoples – the Bribris, Cabécares, Brunkas, Ngobe or Guaymi, Huetares, Chorotegas, Malekus and Teribes or Térrabas – about half of whom live in 24 indigenous territories. They make up an indigenous population of 63,876 (1.7 per cent of the country’s total population). The Térraba, descendants of Teribes from the Atlantic coast of Panama forced by missionaries to migrate to Costa Rica in the late 17th century, are the second-smallest of these groups, with a population of 621 according to the national census of 2000. Their territory is located in the Bóraca-Terre reserve, in the canton of Buenos Aires, in the southern part of Costa Rica.
the rights of adolescents or to prosecute cases of unlawful premature entry into adult roles such as marriage, labour and military service, when the exact age of the child or adolescent plaintiff cannot be determined.

**Adolescents and adolescence in the international arena**

Although there is no internationally accepted definition of adolescence, the United Nations defines adolescents as individuals aged 10–19: in effect, those in the second decade of their lives. This is the definition that applies to much of the analysis and policy advocacy presented in this report. While the term ‘adolescents’ is not mentioned in international conventions, declarations or treaties, all adolescents have rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other major human rights covenants and treaties. Most of them are also covered under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and adolescent girls are also protected under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and regional instruments such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

Defining adolescence as the second decade of an individual’s life makes it possible to collect age-based data for the purpose of analysing this transitional period. Today, it is widely acknowledged that adolescence is a phase separate from both early childhood and adulthood, a period that requires special attention and protection. This was not the case for most of human history.

Widespread acceptance of the importance of adolescence is relatively recent. Indeed, many societies and communities still barely demarcate the line between childhood and adulthood. Adolescents, and often even younger children, are expected to work, pay their own way and even bear arms. In this sense, they are regarded as smaller, less-developed adults.

In other societies, however, the transition from childhood to adulthood has been, or still is, marked by some rite of passage, acknowledging the moment when the individual is expected to assume the independence, responsibilities, expectations and privileges attached to full adulthood. Integral to the notion of a rite of passage is the sense that childhood is a separate space and time from the rest of human life, one that needs to be treated with special care and consideration.

Such precepts were first expressed in the international arena in the first half of the 20th century, through treaties that sought to protect children from exploitative and harmful labour. The first conventions drawn up by the International Labour Organization after the First World War had the goal of protecting child labourers, most of whom were over the age of 10. These included the International Labour Office (ILO) Convention No. 6, Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention of 1919, and ILO Convention No. 10, the Minimum Age (Agriculture) Convention of 1921. The first convention cited here stipulated 16 as the age limit for work in specified hazardous industrial settings, while the second placed clear limits on children’s participation in public and private work settings. Most other international legislation introduced between the world wars did not, however, explicitly specify rights for children or adolescents as distinct from those of adults.

After the Second World War, the burgeoning movement for children’s rights focused its attention on gaining special recognition for children and adolescents within the newly formed United Nations. This was achieved in 1959 with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which was significant in establishing legal provisions to safeguard children’s well-being rather than presuming that this could simply be met under the general principles of the major human rights instruments. Children’s welfare, rather than their political, economic, civic and social rights, was the principal motivation behind the push for the Declaration.

Two decades later, the UN declared 1979 to be the International Year of the Child, and this was swiftly followed by the first International Youth Year, in 1985. These initiatives raised the profile of global efforts to promote and protect the interests of children and young people. At the same time, advocates for children were busy drawing up an overarching human rights treaty for children by which all States parties would be bound. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, a decade in the drafting, was finally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989.

The treaty fulfilled all those hopes with its comprehensiveness and far-sightedness. The rights of all young children and adolescents under age 18 were expressed in such a way as to not only protect their welfare but also give them a central place as rights holders, providing an ethical basis for their active participation in all aspects of their lives.
Jordan is a lower-middle-income country with an average gross national income per capita in 2009 of US$3,740. Owing to the country’s limited natural resources, its economy is dominated by commerce and services, which account for more than 70 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and more than 75 per cent of jobs. Over the past decade, the country has enjoyed unprecedented growth, with real GDP growth averaging 6.4 per cent yearly between 2003 and 2007. This has been accompanied by improvements in social development indicators, particularly health and education.

Nevertheless, Jordan still faces some key challenges. There is significant income disparity: Almost 14 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, and between 1995 and 2007 the lowest 40 per cent of income earners earned less than a fifth (18 per cent) of the total income in the country. There are also high rates of unemployment, particularly among the young. While Jordan’s overall unemployment rate is 15 per cent, the rate among young people is almost 32 per cent. Nearly 70 per cent of the population is under the age of 30, and adolescents accounted for almost 22 per cent of the total population in 2009. With an annual growth rate of 3.3 per cent between 2000 and 2009, Jordan’s population is one of the fastest growing in the world.

According to a 2005 study by the European Training Foundation, almost 60 per cent of the job seekers in Jordan are below the age of 25. The main causes of youth unemployment are lack of career guidance counselling, lack of opportunities to find satisfying work following graduation, the difficulty of obtaining jobs compatible with qualifications, the mismatch between the skills of graduates and the needs of employers, social and cultural obstacles to the full integration of women into the labour market and the wider international economic situation. The risk of being unemployed is greater for women, despite their higher educational achievements. Currently, less than 12 per cent of women participate in the economic sector, putting Jordan close to the bottom of the list of Arab countries in female economic participation.

The Government of Jordan has engaged in a number of policy initiatives to address these challenges. For instance, the National Social and Economic Development Plan for 2004–2006 aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment. Section I of the plan emphasized the need to address human resource development, including public education, higher education, vocational and technical training and youth care. Its successor, the National Agenda for 2006–2015, focuses on reforming institutional frameworks. The Government has also strengthened collaborative efforts with partner and donor agencies. One example is the development of an Internet-based labour market information system with the support of the Canadian International Development Agency. Managed by the National Centre for Human Resources Development, the project links employers with job seekers and also has a professional career-counselling component.

Partner agencies have also taken steps to increase employment opportunities among young people. For instance, Mustaqbali (‘My Future’ in Arabic) was launched jointly by UNICEF and Save the Children in 2009 to increase opportunities for adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 to learn and develop skills that will ultimately enable them to improve their livelihoods and household economic security. It delivers an integrated package of career exploration and preparedness activities to adolescents at various youth and women’s centres, and also includes a community awareness component specifically for parents of adolescents, as well as sensitization sessions with private sector employers. The project has been implemented in a number of regions, as well as at the Jerash camp for Palestinian refugees (known locally as the Gaza camp), and has reached more than 250 adolescents, half of them girls. Currently, discussions are ongoing with various stakeholders, including the Government, to scale up the programme at a national level.

Addressing unemployment and poverty remains a critical concern for Jordan. A key part of any solution to this problem will be increasing the participation of women in the labour market. Preparing young people for employment and creating opportunities in the public and private sectors will have both economic and social returns.
The Convention was sufficiently inspiring and all-encompassing that in merely two decades from its adoption it has been ratified by all but two of the world’s nations, becoming the most widely supported human rights treaty in history. Its two Optional Protocols, both adopted by the United Nations in 2000, sought to further strengthen the rights of children by specifying provisions to protect them from involvement in situations of armed conflict and from trafficking, slavery, prostitution and pornography.

**Adolescent participation in key international forums has increased steadily in recent decades**

Prior to the adoption of the Convention, adolescents’ participation in international development and human rights forums was almost non-existent. The 1990 World Summit for Children provided an opportunity to dispel the notion that adolescents are incapable of making a contribution to the international development agenda in general on issues related to them specifically. At this global event, adolescents made their voices and opinions heard on issues affecting them and were instrumental in the formulation of the final outcome document.

This participatory process was replicated during the 2002 UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, which brought more than 400 adolescents from 150 countries to New York to exchange experiences and make demands of world leaders in a three-day Children’s Forum. Five years later, adolescents participated in the follow-up to the Special Session, and they also made presentations at the commemorative event celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Convention on 20 November 2009.

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**TECHNOLOGY**

**Digital natives and the three divides to bridge**

**by John Palfrey, Urs Gasser and Colin Maclay of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University, and Gerrit Beger of UNICEF.**

While we use the term ‘digital natives’ to describe the generation born after roughly 1980, not all young people fall into this category. Digital natives share a common global culture defined less by age than by their experience growing up immersed in digital technology. This experience affects their interaction with information technologies and information itself, as well as the ways they relate with one another, other people and institutions.

Reaping the benefits of digital tools, therefore, means more than just being born in a certain period or having access to a laptop. For adolescents to realize the full promise of new technologies, three divides must be bridged. The first has to do with basic access to these technologies and related infrastructure, such as electricity; the second involves the skills needed to use the technologies once they become accessible; and the third stems from our limited understanding of how young people navigate the online world. Each of these divides exists in every society, but their effects are felt most acutely in the developing world.

Over the past decade, access to the Internet, mobile devices and digital media has increased at a rapid rate. Approximately a quarter of the world’s 6.8 billion people have access to the Internet, and 86 per cent can connect to the world’s communications networks through mobile devices. Yet such access remains highly inequitable, with rates in Africa, for instance, far below those in Europe.

There are signs that committed investment may shrink the access divide. For example, Botswana is developing one of the highest rates of technology penetration in sub-Saharan Africa; the Communications Ministry stated in 2010 that there was "over 100 per cent" mobile coverage (though broadband household Internet access continues to lag behind). Meanwhile, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda has committed to making his country a leader in economic development through investment in new technologies and Internet infrastructure.

While necessary, such efforts are not sufficient. There is also a participation gap between those with sophisticated skills in using digital media and those without. In the developing world, many youth rely on mobile devices rather than fixed line connections with faster speeds. Basic literacy is also an issue.

Digital literacy – the ability to navigate a digitally mediated world – further separates youth who are likely to benefit from digital technologies from those who are not. Young people who do not have access to the Internet at home or in schools – and who lack the support that comes from teachers and parents equipped with strong digital skills – will not develop the necessary social, learning and technical skill sets.
Over the past two to three decades, the international community has paid increasing attention to the particular needs of adolescents. This reflects a keener understanding of participation as a right of all children and especially of adolescents. It also underscores a growing acknowledgement that advances in health and education achieved in early and middle childhood must be consolidated in adolescence so as to effectively address the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality. In part, this sharper focus has been forced by the global challenges – such as the AIDS pandemic, massive global youth unemployment and underemployment, demographic shifts and climate change – that have emerged as major threats to the present and future for millions of adolescents and young people.

The world is now waking up to the central importance of the rights of adolescents – and to humanity’s need to harness the idealism, energy and potential of the emerging generation. But even existing international commitments will not be met unless there is a much greater concentration of resources, strategic planning and political will towards the cause of adolescent rights.

Adolescents are as worthy of care and protection as young children, and as worthy of consideration and participation as adults. Now is the moment for the world to recognize both what it owes to them and the singular dividends that investing in this age of opportunity can generate – for the adolescents themselves and for the societies in which they live.

“Our challenge as a global society is to design and build online experiences for adolescents and young people that help them seize the opportunities – while mitigating the challenges – of life that are partially mediated by digital technologies.”

for success in a wired global economy. Without the opportunity to become familiar with electronic media, adolescents may have trouble navigating social interactions in online communities or recognizing biased, unreliable information.

The third divide is the lack of knowledge about how young people use digital media across societies. In some countries – such as the United Kingdom, the United States and parts of East Asia – both quantitative and qualitative data exist about the ways in which young people use new technologies, and these data have begun to reveal how electronic media are changing practices among youth. Beyond basic information on access, however, such data are scarce in most parts of the world. One challenge is that youth technology practices have only recently become subjects of research, especially outside of a few parts of the world.

It is clear, however, that engagement with digital technologies is transforming learning, socializing and communication among youth who are able to access and use them. For these individuals, activities like content generation, remixing, collaboration and sharing are important aspects of daily life. Many of these activities are ‘friendship-driven’, serving to maintain relationships with people already known offline. Others are ‘interest-driven’, allowing youth to develop expertise in specialized skill sets such as animation or blogging. In either context, the casual, frequent use of new media contributes significantly to the development of both technological and social skills. Electronic media also provide an opportunity for intense, self-directed, interest-driven study.

The benefits of far-reaching digital technologies extend beyond learning to promoting creativity, entrepreneurship and activism. Adolescents and young people are using these technologies to express themselves through videos, audio recordings and games. They are creating inspiring political movements, watchdog groups and new modes of organizing that combine the online and the offline. As they become young adults, some of them are inventing new businesses and technologies that create jobs and opportunities. They teach one another as they build out into the global cyber environment.

Our challenge as a global society is to design and build online experiences for adolescents that help them seize the opportunities – while mitigating the challenges – of life that are partially mediated by digital technologies. If the three divides of digital access can be bridged, new interfaces and experiences will expand adolescents’ minds, connect them to people around the world and enable them to participate in the making and sharing of knowledge in the information economy.