INVESTING IN ADOLESCENTS

protection for communities made vulnerable by external shocks such as drought. Evaluations of the initiative have found that around 15 per cent of the cash transfers are used for education, and parents report keeping their children in school longer as a result. A programme component dedicated to building classrooms ensures that increased school attendance does not result in overcrowding.18

Similarly, Liberia’s Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) Project, a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Gender and Development, the World Bank, the Nike Foundation and the Government of Denmark, provides skills training for wage employment, combined with job placement assistance; at the same time it facilitates business development services and links to microcredit for young women entrepreneurs.19

Inequity is also a major barrier to the fulfillment of adolescent rights outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The importance of equal access to education was discussed earlier, but equal rights to health, employment, juvenile justice, religion, culture and identity are also imperative to the positive development of young people.

Adolescents today are healthier, better protected, better educated and more connected than ever. However, millions

COUNTRY: UNITED STATES

The Campus Initiative
Advocating for children’s rights at colleges and universities

On more than 100 college campuses across the United States, students are choosing to play a powerful role in helping the world’s children survive. The Campus Initiative, run by the US Fund for UNICEF, is a rapidly growing grass-roots movement of dynamic college students who champion the organization’s mission. The goal of the program, which began in 1988, is to build global citizens who will generate funding, attention and political will to help combat preventable child deaths.

Education, advocacy and fund-raising are at the heart of the UNICEF Campus Initiative’s work. Students initiate and conduct a wide range of activities that include advocating for child survival by contacting elected officials, writing campus newspaper editorials about UNICEF's work and partnering with local children’s organizations for service projects. During the 2009–2010 academic year, 2,033 active members – defined as those attending at least 50 per cent of planned campus activities – undertook 358 events between August and December 2009.

The US National Committee and a student-led Campus Initiative National Council provide support for campus clubs across the country. This team of staff and volunteers also sets the agenda by creating national goals and plans, and it implements the Campus Initiative Summit each year. The nationwide gathering enables club members and campus leaders to learn from each other and share best practices. The summit also provides leadership opportunities as well as skill-building and knowledge-building workshops, and it motivates campus members to stay engaged with UNICEF.

Keeping pace with the advancing digital age is pivotal for the Campus Initiative, as members of younger generations become more and more technologically savvy. To connect with individuals aged 19–24, we must provide them with the organizing tools they have come to expect in other areas of their online experience. Advocacy expertise and mobilization is another area of growth for the Campus Initiative. Students have shown time and time again that they will use their political muscle when they are motivated and supported.

A lifetime of service and commitment to children can be fostered among all levels of supporters, but especially among college students. Adolescents and young people can and should be an integral part of the solution to ending the preventable deaths of children, alleviating child poverty, fighting child exploitation and forced labour, combating HIV and AIDS, ensuring access to quality education and providing opportunities for the world’s children.

See References, page 78.