

SEPTEMBER 2010

## ADVANCING POLICIES TO ADDRESS THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF YOUTH

“The substantial increase in the number of young people globally presents us with more opportunities than challenges. Equipping this uniquely energetic and technologically minded population group with the best of the resources we have offers the best opportunity to move our world forward like never before.”

Opening Plenary Speech by Her Excellency, Hajia Turai Umar Yar 'Adua, First Lady of Nigeria, Adolescent Health Conference, Abuja, Nigeria, April 2008

### Why Policies for Youth Matter

With almost half the world's population under age 25, investments in young people are vital to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and improve social and economic outcomes. Youth have a diversity of needs, and when they have access to schooling, job opportunities, and health services, they are able to contribute fully to national development. The period of transition for young people can be a time of heightened vulnerability to unintended health outcomes. Policies encourage government mandates that acknowledge the importance of youth and the need for resources and services. These policies, in turn, support programs that help youth avoid unplanned pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and sexually transmitted infections. Similarly, through progressive policies that address traditional behaviors such as child marriage, harmful cultural practices, and gender-based violence, young women can live healthy and productive lives. When effective youth-friendly policies exist, young women and men can make a healthy transition into adulthood and enjoy full participation in public life.

### Lessons Learned

To improve the health of young people, decision-makers must often make difficult choices about where to allocate scarce resources. To make such decisions, policymakers and program planners need accurate data on young people in their country or region and opportunities to understand young people's perspectives. Youth advocates and civil society groups require solid evidence to raise public awareness, build coalitions, and overcome opposition. To enhance the policy environment for youth-related issues, PRB learned the importance of:

- Providing accurate and timely data on youth demographics and health and education indicators to inform evidence-based decisionmaking; information must be

accessible and understandable to policymakers and advocates and presented in print and electronic formats.

- Highlighting the needs of youth at every opportunity, whether training policy champions or journalists; working with governments and civil society groups; hosting events or online discussions; or creating resources for educators, policymakers, advocates, and students.
- Engaging youth as active partners in youth development initiatives and providing opportunities to share their stories with the media and decisionmakers.
- Recognizing that responding to the needs of youth requires a multisectoral approach that involves health, education, employment, and gender—as well as political commitment to support policy changes.
- Presenting evidence on the diverse status and needs of youth across countries so that donors and policymakers can target programs and resources to areas with greatest need.
- Monitoring trends on the health, education, and economic activity of youth to document and highlight where change is occurring and where change is needed.

### PRB's Comparative Advantage

PRB is a widely known and trusted resource for up-to-date and accurate information and is uniquely positioned to communicate information about the health and well-being of youth. We engage policymakers, researchers, educators, and development specialists in discussing the evidence-based policy actions needed to improve the lives of youth and their ability to contribute to economic and social

development. This work is facilitated by the youth-relevant expertise of PRB staff in gender, education, reproductive and maternal health, and the environment. This diversity encourages cross-sectoral collaboration and coalition building. Increasingly, we reach young people around the world directly, using their preferred interactive communication tools such as Facebook, blogs, and YouTube. In our work with the media, we have included youth to share their perspective on sexual and reproductive health matters. At the same time, we have taken journalists to visit youth centers that offer job skills, HIV/AIDS counseling and testing, and sexual and reproductive health services.

## Outstanding Results

Under the BRIDGE project, youth is a cross-cutting issue that has been incorporated into a wide variety of PRB's work:

- **Reaching policymakers with information.** Our publications have provided policymakers with information about youth and strengthened the evidence base for investing in youth development. PRB's widely-referenced *World's Youth 2006 Data Sheet* is a global resource on population, education, and youth reproductive health. Our 2010 chartbook, *Improving the Reproductive Health of Sub-Saharan Africa's Youth: A Route to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, draws attention to concrete actions that can assist countries in meeting the MDGs by improving the health, education, and economic well-being of youth. Several PRB policy briefs on youth issues offer concise and insightful information and specific policy recommendations.

The BRIDGE (BRinging Information to Decisionmakers for Global Effectiveness) Project, funded from September 2003 through September 2010 by USAID's Bureau for Global Health, contributed to improved health, population, and nutrition policies and programs through effective policy-learning activities. BRIDGE disseminated information on priority health and population issues to policy audiences; worked with news media to enhance the quality and quantity of coverage of key health and population issues; and strengthened the capacity of individuals and institutions to use data and research effectively in disseminating information to policy audiences.

- **Working with the media.** PRB's media seminars have exposed hundreds of journalists and editors to the realities that many young women face, including female genital mutilation/cutting, trafficking, and unplanned pregnancy. Study tours have also enabled journalists to see firsthand how programs are supporting youth by providing them with job skills, peer counseling, and a safe environment for social activities. Our media investments are paying off: In West Africa, young women reported they were influenced by PRB-sponsored media programs to begin using family planning.
- **Building capacity.** PRB has strengthened the capacity of youth advocates to communicate about youth issues and has nurtured youth champions through its Fellows Program, which trains graduate students from top universities in policy communication. Program alumni continue to contribute to policy dialogue about youth at meetings and conferences.
- **Fostering dialogue.** PRB serves as a bridge between the research and policy communities by organizing live and virtual events on topics essential to youth development. For example, our Discuss Online series has engaged researchers and policymakers in dialogues on the economic and social implications of a youthful age structure, youth and global security, and strategies to help girls attain self-esteem. PRB has championed efforts to abandon female genital mutilation/cutting and is at the forefront of activities marking the International Day of Zero Tolerance Day to FGM.



## POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

The Population Reference Bureau **INFORMS** people around the world about population, health, and the environment, and **EMPOWERS** them to use that information to **ADVANCE** the well-being of current and future generations.

[www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)

## POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

1875 Connecticut Ave., NW  
Suite 520  
Washington, DC 20009 USA

202 483 1100 **PHONE**  
202 328 3937 **FAX**  
popref@prb.org **E-MAIL**