

Kenya's Key: Investing in Young People



This is Emma and her husband Manu.

When they were young, they had access to reproductive health information and services, which made it easier for them to be healthy, finish school, and find jobs.

When they married, they agreed to use family planning. Today they have three healthy children.

Access to reproductive health care has helped Emma and Manu's family be healthier, more educated, and contribute more to the community and nation. For Kenya, this means that poverty is being reduced, and the economy is stronger.



The people of Kenya recognize the importance of reproductive health. According to our constitution:

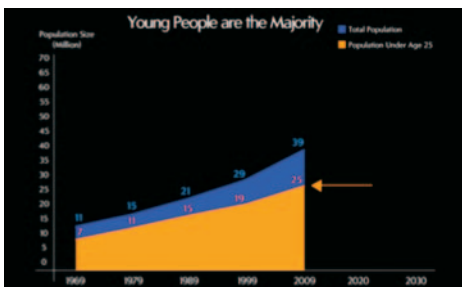
"Every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, which includes the right to health care services, including reproductive health care."

This pertains to people of all ages, including young people, because reproductive health is important throughout our lives. It is also a central component of our nation's development.¹



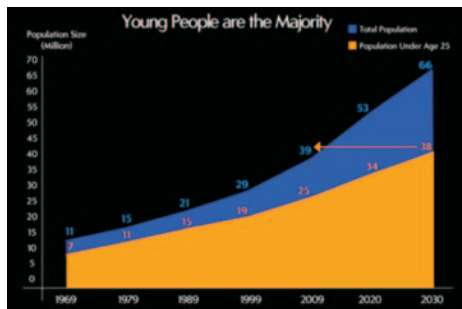
Today we have the largest generation of young people in history. A large young population is a great opportunity for our nation.

But it also presents challenges because of the increasing demand for social services and natural resources.²



Kenya's population has been growing rapidly. In just the last four decades, the entire population has nearly quadrupled in size, from 11 million people in 1969 to about 40 million today.

There are more people in the younger age groups than the older age groups. Today approximately 25 million people are under age 25.³



The size of our large young population is a result of high birth rates. The average woman has between four and five births during her lifetime.⁴

By 2030, even if fertility drops to an average of just below four children per woman, the total population will still grow to 66 million people, and the number of people under age 25 will increase to more than 38 million people—that’s almost the size of Kenya’s entire population today!⁵



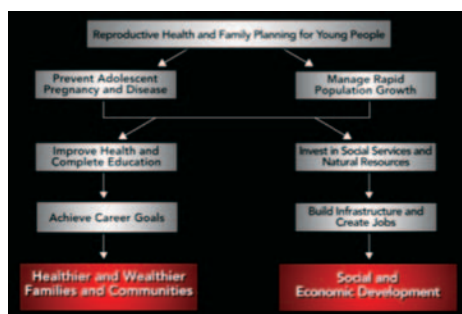
The fertility rate is strongly influenced by the reproductive health and family planning needs of young people.

Nearly one out of three young women has an unmet need for family planning, meaning they wish to delay childbearing, but are not using any method of contraception, and are at risk for having an unintended pregnancy.⁶



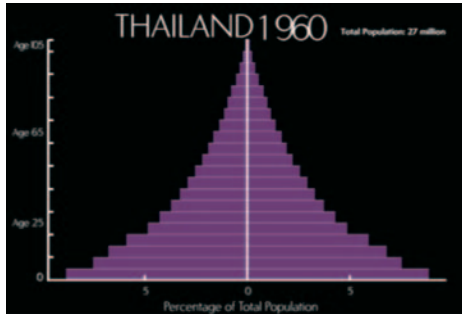
Research demonstrates that reproductive health and family planning for young people lay the groundwork to:

- Improve health and well-being,
- Manage rapid population growth, and
- Achieve social and economic development, including Kenya’s Vision 2030 and the Millennium Development Goals.⁷



Reproductive health is a crucial component of health and well-being for young people, and helps manage population growth, while contributing to Kenya’s economic productivity.⁸

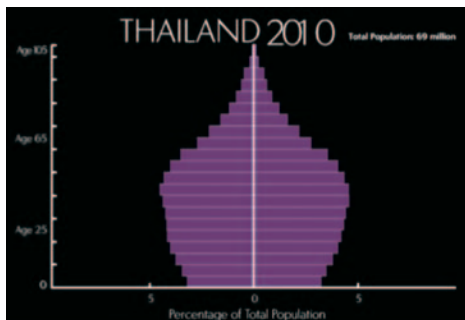
Countries around the world have shown us that with investments in young people, it is possible to experience rapid and transformative economic growth.



Looking at Thailand's population pyramid from 1960, we see that after a period of rapid population growth, the majority of the population was under age 25.

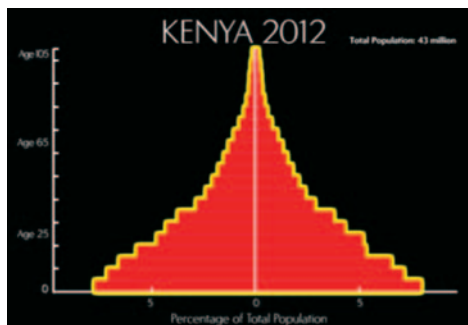
During the 1960s and the decades that followed, Thailand increased access to and use of voluntary family planning to slow rapid population growth.

With fewer births, Thailand has been able to invest more resources per child, leading to more secondary school completion, as well as delayed marriage, and delayed childbearing.⁹



By 2010, Thailand's age structure of the population evolved to have fewer children and a productive adult labor force.

Thailand has demonstrated how increased access to reproductive health care combined with investments in health, education, and a productive labor force can help a country transform their demographic prospects.¹⁰



Today, Kenya has a population structure similar to the pyramid of Thailand in 1960, with a majority of the population under age 25.¹¹

Investments in the reproductive health of young people will help to ensure a healthy transition to adulthood, lower birth rates, and create the conditions necessary for development.

All adolescent girls complete secondary school
 +
 All adolescent mothers employed instead of becoming pregnant
 = \$3.4 billion added to Kenya's gross income each year

Imagine the impact of investments in reproductive health combined with investments in health, education, and the labor force.

If all adolescent girls in Kenya completed secondary school, and all of the adolescent mothers were employed instead of becoming pregnant at such a young age, the cumulative effect could add \$3.4 billion to Kenya's gross income each year!¹²



In order to improve the health and well-being of young people, including increasing access to reproductive health care, government officials must support youth-focused policies and allocate resources that ensure young people are healthy, educated, and employed later in life.

The line ministries must implement multisectoral approaches that actively engage young people in policymaking and program implementation.¹³



Health sector leaders should work with service providers to expand age-appropriate reproductive health services for young people.

These services must be tailored to meet the diverse and evolving needs of young people.¹⁴



Education sector leaders, including teachers, must prioritize initiatives that help young people, especially girls, stay in school, and ensure that reproductive health information is included in the school curriculum.¹⁵



Leaders at all levels, including religious and civic leaders, elders, and parents, must be sensitized to understand the consequences of early marriage. They should relay this information to their communities and ensure young people have access to reproductive health care.¹⁶



Young people must educate their peers about the benefits of reproductive health. This involves engaging boys and girls in efforts to reach their peers most effectively with accurate information.

And they must be actively involved with the planning and implementation of their reproductive health policies and programs.¹⁷



Our young people are the future of Kenya.

By empowering young people with reproductive health today, including family planning, we can build a more prosperous Kenya.

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Acknowledgments

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