



Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

Fact Sheet: Youth in Africa

- Sixty per cent of Africa's population and about 36.9 per cent of its work force are youth.
- Young female literacy rates in Africa have increased from 58.0 to 66.9 per cent, in comparison to a smaller increase of 72.0 to 78.4 per cent for young men.
- HIV/AIDS accounts for over 53 per cent of deaths among Africa's youth, followed by maternal conditions at 16.7 per cent and tuberculosis at 4.5 per cent.
- In 2007, an estimated 3.2 million young people were living with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa alone.

Young people in Africa have made progress, albeit small. There has been an increase in school enrolment over the past twenty years and a narrower gender gap in education. While strategies to improve the livelihoods of youth in Africa have been put in place, as the youth population continues to increase, more work on youth issues must be done to ensure better health, education and employment conditions, both in rural and urban settings.

Young people currently comprise 60 per cent of Africa's total population with a projection to reach over 75 per cent in 2015.

United Nations and Youth in Africa

High-level advocacy through the African Union (AU) Conference Ministers in Charge of Youth and Africa Development Forum V on youth have enabled formulation of regional frameworks, policies and action programmes, such as the AU Youth Volunteer Youth corps programme and the AU Plan of Action for the Decade for Youth Empowerment and Development.

In addition, other commitments like the International Conference on Population and Development and the Banjul Declaration consider youth issues, hoping that Governments will provide education, skills development programmes, flexible labour market and gender-sensitive planning. This requires sustained efforts to address the needs of young people, especially female youth.

Progress

Youth account for about 36.9 per cent of the working population in Africa, where youth employment challenges are tied to education reform and a general lack of opportunities. While some countries have included youth employment in their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, much remains to be done to train youth with the skills that match labour market demands.

There have been general declines in HIV/AIDS prevalence, maternal mortality and morbidity and improvements in nutrition. However, the gains in youth health in Africa remain minimal compared to the rest of the world.





The main cause of death among African youth is HIV/AIDS, accounting for over 53 per cent, followed by maternal conditions at 16.7 per cent, tuberculosis at 4.5 per cent, sexually transmitted diseases — excluding HIV/AIDS — at 1.7 per cent, and malaria at 1.5 per cent.

In 2007, the Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS estimated that 3.2 million young people were living with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa. Another 5,000 young people were estimated to contract the virus on a daily basis through heterosexual transmission, with 78 per cent being young girls.

In Africa, there are large prevalence variations by country. In the North and West, nations have retained very low HIV prevalence rates of about one per cent or below. With one exception, there is no West African country with rates above five per cent. Conversely, countries with a 10 to 20 per cent prevalence rate are mostly from Southern African countries.

Over the last two decades, progress has been made in the area of gender equality. Young female literacy rates in Africa have increased from 58.0 to 66.9 per cent, compared to a smaller increase of 72.0 to 78.4 per cent for young men. However, young women continue to lag behind and higher education enrolment continues to favour young males.

With more than 250,000 annual deaths on the continent, constituting nearly half of all cases world-wide, maternal mortality rates among young women remain high. In some African countries, girls' access to health services is still low and violence perpetrated against them continues to rise, especially in conflict situations.

Efforts to engage youth in policy formulation have increased over the past few years at all levels. In 2006, the Heads of State adopted the African Youth Charter, and the New Partnership for Africa's Development launched a youth desk/youth programme that gave youth a dialogue platform and enabled them to contribute to policy debates.

In some countries, such as South Africa, joint actions have been undertaken with Government in designing, implementing and evaluating programmes. Youth are also participating in parliaments, youth forums, national youth councils, youth research, management of youth organizations and participation in national, regional and global conferences.

The way forward

Current measures, including youth-related laws, policies and programmes taken to address youth challenges are not sufficient and are sometimes ineffective. Ratification and implementation of the African Youth Charter would lead to more effective measures to promote youth development.

African countries, in collaboration with development partners, should: develop action plans and allocate sufficient resources to ensure that policies and programmes are operational; involve young people in all stages and types of policymaking, from developing poverty reduction strategies to national development plans and youth policies; and research youth development issues, collecting and analyzing disaggregated data through national statistical offices.





For further reading

- Forum on Marriage and Rights of Women and Girls (2004): Summary report of the Ouagadougou Technical Consultation on Early & Forced Marriage & the Rights of Women & Girls.
- UNECA, AUC and AfDB (2009): Assessing Progress in Africa towards the Millennium Development Goals Report, MDG Report 2009, Addis Ababa.
- UNECA (2010): Economic Report on Africa 2010, Promoting high level sustainable growth to reduce unemployment in Africa, Addis Ababa.
- UNECA, UNFPA and AUC (2009): Africa Regional Review Report: ICPD and the MDGs Working as one, Fifteen Year Review of the implementation of the ICPD Plan of Action, Addis Ababa.
- Africa Youth Report (2009): Expanding opportunities for and with young people in Africa, Addis Ababa.

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