

UN International Year of Youth Launch  
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Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, ladies and gentleman, good morning. I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General, in particular, for bringing light to such a crucial and timely topic for the coming year. I also want to thank our distinguished colleagues from the United Nations for inviting us to be a part of such an important event.

USAID works with many partner nations around the world, and supports youth-focused programming in more than forty countries. Our field missions are at the forefront of delivering programs that seek to empower and engage youth. We work to understand and address the multi-faceted nature and the diverse needs of youth development so that young people can become more powerful forces for positive change in their communities.

This is a critical moment for us all to focus our attention on youth. With the global youth population approaching 1.5 billion around the world, the current youth population is the largest to ever transition into adulthood. And while there are major challenges in addressing the needs of this exceptionally large group, these are also unprecedented opportunities. Youth are the bridge between generations and a great asset. Working with them will ensure more effective investments and a better future for our communities, our countries and the world. But we cannot just hope for this future. We have to act. How we engage youth, and provide effective channels for youth to positively contribute at all levels of societies, will affect our future for decades to come.

As the world becomes more interconnected, so must our approaches to improving and strengthening societies. For example, many of the world's youth have grown up in the age of information technology. Without doubt, their fluency with these technologies can provide greater opportunities for innovation, data-driven solutions, and more socially connected populations across communities and nations.

And youth can bring a different kind of ‘renewable energy’ to development, an energy with the power to illuminate and move things forward. It is our collective job to help harness that energy for the good of all. We will need it if we are to effectively tackle the biggest challenges of our time, from climate change, food security and violent extremism, to global health, human rights, gender equity, economic growth and education. We must listen to and support youth’s natural optimism and rely on their energy to bring new solutions to old problems.

I am pleased to say that USAID continues to work on the development of a comprehensive and innovative youth approach that incorporates technology and supports entrepreneurship. For example, we are supporting aspiring tech entrepreneurs and media companies in African countries by providing support to start-up and growing technology and media enterprises.

Additionally, we are always looking to partner with other institutions to strengthen our efforts. For example, USAID is working with UN-Habitat on a Youth Empowerment Project in Afghanistan, aimed at increasing the participation of young Afghan women and men in the reconstruction and advancement of their country. In the first year alone of this joint effort, we have trained over 2,500 youth in rural and urban areas in Civic Education, supported more than 150 self-initiated projects designed and implemented by youth, and facilitated the drafting of a National Youth Policy.

This year’s International Year of Youth is rightly called “Dialogue and Mutual Understanding.” This does not just mean dialogue amongst youth but between youth and governments, multi-lateral institutions, public and private sector leaders, and across generations. USAID field missions in every region of the world can help build productive conversations with youth, integrating youth concerns and capacities into our broader programs so that we can be more effective in supporting development.

Last week USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah joined President Obama when he hosted a conversation with 120 young leaders from nearly 50 African countries as part of the President's Forum for Young African Leaders.

And we must continue to reach out to youth to challenge our thinking, and to help us develop cutting-edge, comprehensive and innovative approaches.

With our colleagues at the State Department and other US government agencies, USAID will be using this year to build our capacity to better support and engage youth. We will be collaborating with stakeholders in youth development around the world so that we can provide opportunities for youth to more fully develop their creativity and innovation.

Working to build our next generation of leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs just makes good development sense – it's in everyone's best interest. We are better off – our communities, societies, and countries – when youth feel a sense of empowerment and have the opportunity to live up to their potential. To the youth leaders in the hall, I say that you represent the brightest hope for a peaceful, prosperous future and we stand ready to help you take on the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thank you all.