

How best to present the case for investing in young people as part of a National Poverty Reduction Strategy

An advocacy tool

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Introduction

More attention to the socio economic needs of young people should be an essential element of a country's efforts to eradicate poverty. Young people (defined as aged 10 to 24 years) account for 29 per cent of the population in low and middle-income countries (or 1.4 billion in number). Over a 100 countries have a significant youth bulge in their populations (see accompanying paper for a specific list of countries).

However, many young people in the world, however, lack basic literacy and numeracy skills and have no access to reproductive health care. As well, their economic prospects are extremely limited. To close this gap requires both additional resources as well as the more effective delivery of existing services.

Why address the health and development of young people?

At first glance, youth appears to be a relatively healthy - although not hazard-free - period of life. Young people account for 15 per cent of the disease and injury burden worldwide and over one million die each year, mainly from preventable causes.

Nonetheless, roughly 70 per cent of premature deaths among adults can be linked to behaviour initiated during adolescence, such as tobacco use, poor eating habits, and risky sex. Young people face serious health challenges:

- About half of all HIV infections are in people under 25, with girls disproportionately affected.
- On average, one-third of women in developing countries give birth before age 20; a large proportion of these pregnancies are unplanned.
- Each year, between 2 and 4 million adolescents undergo unsafe abortion.
- Adolescent mothers are twice as likely as older women to die of pregnancy-related causes, and their own children are at higher risk of illness and death.
- Nutritional deficiencies such as anemia are widespread in both young men and women. They increase the risks that girls and young women face during pregnancy and childbirth.
- Millions of youth die tragically or suffer because of other preventable health hazards such as road accidents, substance abuse, suicide, and infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis.

Source: World Bank: Adolescent health at a glance.

Investing in Youth Helps Break the Cycle of Poverty.

Poverty and inadequate health systems compound adolescent vulnerability to sickness and early death:

When a young person becomes infected with HIV or resorts to unsafe abortion to terminate an unplanned pregnancy, poverty is often the root cause.

A poor adolescent is more than three times as likely to give birth as a wealthy adolescent.

Poor Health exacerbates poverty, by disrupting and cutting short school opportunities, by weakening or killing young people in the prime of their working lives, or by placing heavy financial and social burdens on families.

Poor youth are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. Girls in many countries report having sex in exchange for money or gifts.

Youth from AIDS-affected homes, including 13 million under age 15 orphaned by the disease, often have to forgo schooling and other opportunities, which diminishes their livelihood prospects, pushes them deeper into poverty, and increases their own chances of contracting HIV.

Source: World Bank: Adolescent health at a glance

Advocacy tool objective

The purpose of this advocacy tool is to enable UNFPA country staff to work out how best to highlight the position of young people. The specific context for use of this advocacy tool is a national or regional plan for poverty alleviation. The tool presents a four-step process to help UNFPA advocates to identify when and where to intervene in the policy process. The specific focus of this policy intervention is to direct more resources to or make better use of existing resources to meet more comprehensively the needs of young people, particularly in relation to their sexual and reproductive health needs.

Policy intervention through a four-step process

1. Identify the opportunity to develop a comprehensive strategy to reduce poverty

The challenges for an advocate of a greater policy focus on young people in the context of a national strategy to reduce poverty are several. The first is to work out what national policy process is in place, if any, to develop or refine a strategy to reduce poverty. There are likely to be several opportunities for doing this. One opportunity for countries which are part of the PRSP process is to develop or report progress on poverty reduction as a precondition for getting debt relief (see Box 1 below). Some 32 countries have completed their initial Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper by September 2003 and another 45 or so countries have still to reach that stage. In

the former cases, many countries are now undertaking in-depth poverty and social impact analyses to assess the medium-term and distributional impact of the new policies.¹

Box 1: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) are prepared by the member countries through a participatory process involving domestic stakeholders as well as external development partners, including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Updated every three years with annual progress reports, PRSPs describe the country's macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs over a three year or longer horizon to promote broad-based growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs and major sources of financing.

Source: IMF <http://www.imf.org/external/np/prsp/prsp.asp#cp>

Other opportunities for developing comprehensive poverty reduction strategies at a country level are outlined in Table 1. These instruments include Millennium Development Goals Reports, National/regional Human Development Reports, Common Country Assessments, and the UN Development Assistance Framework. Table 1 also notes under the heading partners for preparation that governments take the lead in the first two reporting processes and UN agencies in the other three instances. Another context for developing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy may be offered by government and donors seeking to achieve better aid harmonization.

¹ IMF, 2003, 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers—Detailed Analysis of Progress in Implementation', International Monetary Fund, Washington, September 15, pp12-13.

Table 1: Key advocacy and/or analysis instruments for United Nation agencies

Report	Output	Purpose	Partners for preparation	Primary target group
Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper	Medium-term action plan describing national poverty reduction programmes	Strategic planning document and pre-condition for certain World Bank and IMF lending and debt forgiveness programmes	<i>Government</i> takes lead in participatory process; UN supports process	World Bank and IMF boards, and national partners
Millennium Development Goals Report	User-friendly report on status of progress to date and distance to travel to reach MDGs	Public information and advocacy tool for raising awareness, monitoring progress and mobilizing action to attain the goals	<i>Governments</i> (including national statistics offices) with support of UN country team	General public, parliamentarians, civil society, professional associations, media and donors
National/regional Human Development Report	In-depth, nationally owned policy analysis document with bold policy messages	Generate debate and catalyse action for human development progress	Participatory and inclusive process involving leading national experts and intellectuals; UNDP facilitates process	Policy makers in government, NGOs, private sector, general public, UN country team, World Bank/IMF& donors
Common Country Assessment	Comprehensive and concise overview of development situation in a country	Common instrument of UN system used as a basis for coherent UN programming	<i>UN</i> with government inputs	UN country team, donor community and government
UN Development Assistance Framework	UN's business plan to support national priorities	Identifies areas of development support	<i>UN</i> with government inputs	UN country team, donor community and government

Source: Derived from UNDP's Human Development Report Toolkit for national and regional HDR Teams (<http://hdr.undp.org/nhdr/toolkit/>)

2. Identify who the stakeholders are and who is making the decisions

The second step for the policy change advocate is to form a good overview of the different elements of the policy process, working out which actors are involved and who is making decisions at which stages in the policy development process. The following table outlines a five-step policy development process and describes the likely policy actors or audience who may be involved at these different stages.

The outline of the policy process, presented below in Table 2, should not, however, be taken to suggest that policy formulation/implementation is a simple process with clearly delineated accountabilities. The process of policymaking is often complex, requiring the revisiting of different stages to respond to a range of pressures and expectations. In many cases, there is at best confusion and at worst conflict over which government agency has responsibility for the different inputs into and outputs from the process. Lack of leadership is a common phenomenon.

Table 2: Outline of a policy process to develop a poverty reduction strategy.

Steps in policy process	Description of process	Key audience
Consultation	Encourage participation of key stakeholders in identifying key issues to be taken into account in the design of the strategy and in subsequent monitoring and evaluation	NGOs, private sector, and the poor
Poverty diagnosis /assessment	Describe who the poor are and where they live using existing data and analyse macroeconomic, social, structural and institutional constraints to poverty reduction.	Likely to involve main line departments (ie serve providers such as education and health) official central secretariat, monitoring unit, or coordinating body such as a Ministry of Planning
Policy formulation	Policies need to be costed and prioritised as far as possible so that they are not reduced to becoming a 'wish list'.	Thematic groups involving different agencies Core agency such as the Ministry of Finance
Policy implementation	Define medium and long-term goals for poverty reduction outcomes (monetary and non-monetary), and establish indicators of progress, and set annual and medium-term targets.	Poverty Monitoring Steering Committee with broad membership of several types of stakeholder (Tanzania); National Development Planning Commission, Ghana
Monitoring and Evaluation.	Develop capacity, including use of participatory mechanisms wherever possible	Special monitoring unit within government, such as Uganda's Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit, Ministry of Finance and NGOs

Sources: derived from Key Process Steps

http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/overview.htm#key_steps Erin Coyle, Zaza Curran, and Alison Evans, 2003, 'PRS monitoring in Africa: synthesis note 7 and Erin Coyle and Alison Evans, 2003, 'Experience of PRSs in Asia: synthesis note 8', PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project, Department for International Development (UK) and Overseas Development Institute.

3. Work out which arguments to offer to which key players

The third step for a policy change advocate is to work out which arguments with supporting evidence are likely to have greatest impact. The choice of argument and evidence will depend on the stage of the policy process at which the advocate is seeking to put their case and who the key decision makers are at this stage of the process.

Presenting a case at the initial consultation stage may require use of realistic examples that can be easily digested at open meetings. However, at the poverty diagnosis/ assessment stage, more systematic evidence will be needed, based on reliable data that are representative of the population as a whole so that comparisons between subgroups can be made. At the policy formulation stage, evidence about the relative cost effectiveness of different forms of intervention to meet a particular policy goal will be needed.

4. Work out the best way to communicate the message

The fourth step is for the policy advocate to work out innovative ways to communicate the relevant arguments and supporting evidence in an effective way. These can vary from the use of development narratives based on simplified stories or scenarios, making good use of personal experiences in delivering programs, or the use of an expert to offer an authoritative opinion.² Effective communication also often involves tapping into formal or informal networks of like-minded people who are interested in sharing ideas around common interests (see Box 2).³

Box 2: A range of practical tools that can be used by those wishing to communicate effectively

These include... the use of stories and of images. People relate more easily to stories than to abstract discussions, and they identify more readily with a person in another part of the world if they are given a name and a picture. Stories are also easier to remember and reproduce. If they include an element of surprise they are more likely to attract attention. The power of visual images is also a key element in effective communication – frequently, ‘seeing is believing’.

Source: http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Lessons/Theory/Theories_simplestsurprisingstories.html

The long and the short term perspectives

Two broad sets of arguments can be offered in favour of directing resources to young people in more relevant areas as a means of reducing poverty in developing and transition countries.

- One approach is based on a long-term focus and emphasises the positive benefits to be gained. Investing in young people’s education, health and opportunities for employment leads to improved productivity and security from enhanced human and social capital. Investing in young people can also reduce the chances of in-country armed conflict and hence improve national security.

However, these types of long-term investments, of their nature, are more difficult to justify because of the expected time lag for the return on investment. The economic fortunes of a country are likely to have a big effect on whether a long-term perspective is attractive to policy makers. Policy makers in countries with low per capita incomes and low growth prospects are more likely to focus on the more immediate causes of poverty.

- The more common justification, therefore, for most policy makers to direct their attention to young people rests on the short-term benefits of doing so. This short-term perspective often views young people as either vulnerable or as a threat. Policy makers are more likely to respond to evidence of young people as high ‘risks’ in terms of adverse outcomes. These adverse outcomes can range from evidence of girls and young women’s increased vulnerability to HIV infection and poor health due to early childbirth to concerns about boys and young men, through their propensity for violence, as threats to

² Maxwell, S; 2003, ‘What kind of Policy Entrepreneur are you? A self-assessment questionnaire for researchers’, Research and Policy in Development, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London - <http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/index.html>

³ ‘Context, Evidence, Links’ , Research and Policy in Development, ODI, London http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Lessons/Theory/Theories_contextevidencelinks.html

the social order. While civil disorder may be more visible and have a more immediate impact on policy makers, it is up to policy change advocates to present reputable evidence of the more invisible vulnerabilities of girls and young women.

Seven arguments offered

Seven arguments with evidence can be offered to support the case for more public policy focus on young people in low and middle-income countries (see accompanying paper). The value of each of these arguments will depend on the context in which UNFPA advocates are making their case. This context is likely to be shaped by the stage in the policy process at which the case is put (ie consultation, evidence assessment, policy formulation, implementation or monitoring/evaluation). The case is also likely to be shaped by the type of stakeholders involved.

Working out which are the most appropriate arguments for what context

This advocacy tool provides a framework for finding the right argument for the right stage of the policy process and the type of policy makers addressed. Five policy stages have been identified. Attention to the policy makers is required to work out their particular interests and motives in terms of the agency he or she came from (eg line or core department, multilateral agency, international donor). The following table offers some suggestions about what arguments are better positioned for which stage of the policy development process and what audience (Table 3).

Table 3: Relating arguments to particular steps in the policy process and particular audiences

Best positioned arguments	Step in policy process	Key audience
Equity argument, MDGs and rights based argument, demographic bonus, national security	Consultation	NGOs, private sector, and the poor
Stage in the lifecycle, macro economic benefits	Poverty diagnosis/assessment	Likely to involve main line departments (ie serve providers such as education and health) official central secretariat, monitoring unit, or coordinating body such as a Ministry of Planning
Micro economic returns from particular forms of interventions	Policy formulation	Thematic groups involving different agencies Core agency such as the Ministry of Finance
Micro economic returns from particular forms of interventions	Policy implementation	Poverty Monitoring Steering Committee with broad membership of several types of stakeholder (Tanzania); National Development Planning Commission, Ghana
Equity argument, MDGs and rights based argument	Monitoring and Evaluation.	Special monitoring unit within government, such as Uganda's Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit, Ministry of Finance, involvement of NGOs

Seven arguments to put to policy makers in the context of a national poverty alleviation strategy

Below is presented a brief outline of each of the seven arguments. A detailed exposition of the arguments with supporting evidence is presented in the accompanying paper.

Argument 1: young people are due a fair share of resources

- The most straightforward argument that can be put to policy makers is a distributional one based on equity – young people’s large share of the population in all developing and transition countries justifies providing them with their fair share of resources.
- This argument has the most weight where the country has a low per capita income. In these countries, the extent of extreme poverty that applies to the population as a whole will apply to each broad age group, albeit with some small margin for variation.

Argument 2: Young people are a key focus in the Millennium Development Goals

- A more sophisticated case can be based on a rights-based argument presents a moral and legal basis for directing more resources to young people, especially girls and young women due to their great vulnerability to poverty.
- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) embody most elements of a human rights perspective by identifying the social and economic entitlements to development and the extent of disadvantage suffered. Showing the gap between current reality and the targets of the Millennium Development Goals in relation to young women’s access to education, for example, can help to generate among policy makers a sense of political urgency.
- The accompanying paper presents data in relation to the MDG targets to show how policy change advocates can highlight the extent of this gap for individual countries. Five Goals in particular are identified as explicitly referring to young people because they cover activities in which mostly young people are engaged. These are the MDGs that relate to: education attainment, gender balance in education, improved maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis and decent employment opportunities for young people.

The MDGs and the sexual and reproductive health of young people

- Adolescent health and education levels are a particular focus of the MDGs - more attention to these goals will also have a major impact on achieving the targets for other Millennium Development Goals.
- Action to reduce the incidence of high-risk pregnancies among undernourished adolescent girls will contribute significantly to reducing child mortality – the objective of Millennium Development Goal 4.
- Achieving higher education levels for girls as well as improved nutrition for young mothers will have a broader impact by helping to lower the prevalence of underweight

children under-five years of age, one of the indicators for Millennium Development Goal 1 - the reduction of hunger.

HIV/AIDS Prevention, Protection Efforts Aren't Working For Women: Annan

... women make up nearly two-thirds of those under 24 years old with HIV. Women [also] have less access to information and health than men do, and often face greater stigma than men if they have HIV/AIDS and are victims of discrimination and violence because of it. AIDS is contributing to women's poverty because it often forces them out of the work force to take care of an ailing family member.

Source: World Bank Press Review, 9 March, 2004

- The absence of a specific focus on adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues in the Millennium Development Goals does not make irrelevant on this issue. The links are there but may need careful demonstrating.
- UNFPA advocates may need to point out to policy makers the direct connections between preventive action in relation to young people's sexual and reproductive health and achieving the MDG targets through reductions in child malnutrition, child mortality, maternal deaths, and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Arguments 3 and 4: Economic benefits at macro and micro levels

Two arguments emphasising the medium-term benefits of investing in young people can also be made.

- The first relies on evidence of the macro economic benefits that can come from a virtuous circle of investing in the health and education of children and then building on this investment in the adolescent years to consolidate the initial investment.
- A micro economic argument can also be made about the economic returns from investment in certain programs based on the cost effectiveness data and information about which interventions are likely to have the greatest impact.
- Mention is made in the accompanying paper of how the rigorous evaluation results of PROGRESA, the Education, Health, and Nutrition Program of Mexico, were crucial in enabling the program to survive not only a major transition of government in 2000 but also to expand its coverage to urban areas.

Argument 5: Young people in poverty as a special case

- Why should young people require special attention ahead of other age groups?
- A more theoretically based argument, based on their critical stage in the lifecycle, can also be used to justify the treatment of young people as a special case for additional resources. This argument uses a dynamic view of poverty and highlights the compounding effects of the hurdles young people often encounter in their transition from dependence to independence.

Argument 6: Long-term benefits: the demographic bonus

Arguments which highlight the long-term benefits of investing in young people can be based on two cases.

- One is the value to the economy and society of taking advantage of a country's demographic transition to lower population growth. These potential benefits are available in particular to a country currently with a large youth population but with future age cohorts becoming smaller in size due to fertility decline – the so-called demographic bonus.
- This window of opportunity applies particularly to Latin American countries where fertility has declined sharply in the last two decades, thus increasing the share of the productive age group (15 to 60 years) in the population. This effect will have its peak in Latin America in the years 2018-2019.

Argument 7: Long-term benefits: reduction in the chances of violence and civil disorder

- The second long-term argument that may have particular appeal to risk-averse policy makers is based on improving national security by lowering the chances of young people engaging in violent criminal activity such as homicide and fostering civil strife. Young people are both disproportionately responsible for violent crime and are also more likely than other age groups to be the victims of such crime. The behaviour of some young males in particular may be a major source of urban insecurity. Male youth homicides are high in Latin America, the USA and the transition economies.
- A poor country's chances of experiencing civil conflict have been linked to the size of its youth bulge in the population and its young people's lack of education and lack of access to jobs as a result. Countries where young people have low levels of participation in education are more likely, other things being equal, to engage in civil strife. However, this small lowering of the exposure to future disorder also needs other forms of investment to create jobs to absorb those young people who have gone on to complete secondary schooling.

Use of vulnerability profiles

- The accompanying paper proposes, as an advocacy tool, the use of representative data to compile social vulnerability profiles for different groups of young people in the context of competing claims for the attention of policy makers. Carefully targeted investments based on social vulnerability profiles of different population groups offer the prospect of substantial gains in reducing poverty for only modest expenditures.
- From a social vulnerability perspective, girls and young women from the ages 10 to mid twenties in most poor countries are particularly prone to adverse outcomes. Young women are more vulnerable to disease and an early death than young men due to their greater exposure to coerced sexual relations, often with older males and to HIV/AIDS compared with males of the same age. Data at a country level can be used to show for girls and young women their level of education attainment, early marriage rates, early childbirth rates and age-specific maternal mortality rates.

- Development of social vulnerability profiles for young people requires comparisons between age groups and the sexes as well as comparisons between the sexes within the relevant age group. The first type of comparison is necessary to show policy makers to what extent young people need resources compared with other age groups. In relation maternal mortality, for example, it is first necessary to show which age group contributes the largest number of maternal deaths (it is mostly likely to be young women). Then data needs to be presented on who are the most vulnerable within that age group – what are the characteristics of the women that experience the highest maternal death rates in terms of household income, education level, ethnicity/race, and location.
- The accompanying paper presents an analysis of household data from six countries to show how these social vulnerability profiles can be produced.

Conclusion

Arguably, the best case for substantial investment in young people rests on the wide gap between the Millennium Development Goal targets and the current reality for young people. These poverty gaps for the 10 to 24 age group are particularly noticeable in relation to the key indicators concerning income and hunger, lack of access to employment and education, lack of gender equality, poor maternal health, HIV prevalence among 15-24 year old pregnant women, malaria and other diseases such as tuberculosis.

However, the case for investing in young people also needs to challenge the starting point for many poverty reduction strategies. The UNDP's 2003 Human Development Report has criticised the poverty reduction strategies of many poor countries for not being ambitious enough. A comprehensive strategy to eradicate poverty needs to first identify who are the poor in relation to a number of the dimensions of poverty. The next step is to obtain additional resources from the international community, on the basis of existing commitments, to close this gap within the specified time period.