

## HIGH-LEVEL MINISTERIAL MEETING

# THE YOUTH DIVIDEND—RETURN ON INVESTMENT IN FAMILY PLANNING

12 November 2013 | African Union Conference Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

## TOWARD PROSPERITY

Forty-three percent of people around the globe are under the age of 25 and Africa is the world's most youthful continent. These young people can become a driving force for prosperity, if they are educated, employed and can access the family planning and reproductive health services they need.

On November 12, 2013, 356 participants from 47 countries gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia at the High-Level Ministerial Meeting (HLMM) of the International Conference on Family Planning. These included 26 leaders from African ministries of health, youth, economic planning and development, and finance, 75 additional ministerial representatives and 15 members of parliament. More than 100 individuals from the donor community were present as well as 136 distinguished guests from non-governmental organizations.

The theme of the HLMM was “The Youth Dividend: Return on Investment in Family Planning.” Its objective was to increase African leaders' understanding of the benefits of investing in family planning to realize a [demographic dividend](#)—the economic growth that may result from a rapid decline in fertility and subsequent changes in a country's population age structure.

Policymakers and distinguished guests explored the investments in education, employment and health needed to maximize the potential of Africa's young people and voiced

*“Investing in youth is a choice  
between poverty and prosperity”*

— ELIZABETH LULE, DIRECTOR OF FAMILY  
PLANNING, BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

their support for meeting the contraceptive and broader development needs of youth.

Four key themes emerged during the HLMM. They reflect achievements at the country level and strategies for improving young people's reproductive health and overall well-being. They also reflect increased dialogue and partnership between governments and civil society:

- 1 *Investing in the family planning needs of youth is the keystone to achieving the demographic dividend;*
- 2 *Increasing youth access to family planning depends on cultivating champions, strengthening community support and engaging young people;*
- 3 *Future socioeconomic prosperity comes from harnessing the creativity, energy and talents of today's youth and supporting their health, education and employment now; and*
- 4 *Forging diverse partnerships for high-impact youth family planning outcomes is essential.*



Ministers and other high-level delegates at the November 12 meeting. (Photograph by Antonio Fiorente.)

## INVESTING TO UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL OF AFRICA'S YOUTH

Harnessing the potential of Africa's young people for social and economic development requires immediate investment in three areas:

- 1 Policies that address health needs across the lifecycle enable young people to develop into healthy adults who can contribute more significantly to economic growth. Greater political commitment and increased resources for family planning not only ensure youth health and well-being, but also transform fertility and population age structure—the first step toward a demographic dividend.
- 2 Expanding educational opportunities, particularly for girls, helps delay marriage and childbearing while increasing the number of skilled adults who can participate in the labor force. Comprehensive sexuality education is critical for encouraging healthy behaviors, including avoiding unintended pregnancies and preventing HIV and sexually transmitted infections.
- 3 Fostering job growth is essential for absorbing the incoming numbers of youth entering the workforce in Africa.

Together, today's strategic investments in health, education, and employment will allow African countries to harness their young populations for economic prosperity and improve the lives of young people now and in the future.\*

\* Population Reference Bureau (PRB). 2013. "The Potential of Youth for a Demographic Dividend: Investing in Health, Education, and Job Creation." *Policy Brief*. Washington, DC: PRB.

## KEY THEMES

### Investing in the family planning needs of youth is the keystone to achieving the demographic dividend

- There was broad consensus among policymakers that fulfilling the sexual and reproductive rights of young people—including access to information, services and supplies—is one of the most important investments for unleashing Africa's economic potential.
- Providing quality, non-judgmental services, and training health workers to respect and respond to youth needs is key for facilitating youth access to contraceptives. Many countries, including Burundi and Malawi, are prioritizing youth-friendly services by creating specific centers equipped to meet young people's sexual and reproductive health needs.
- Increasing access to comprehensive and accurate sexuality education for all from an early age is critical for avoiding unintended pregnancy and missed opportunities in education, employment and lifetime earnings. Young people must be involved in curricula and program design and implementation.
- To best respond to young people's unique needs, governments must ensure that young people are meaningfully engaged in national and local family planning policy and program design and implementation. For instance, Angola convened a national youth meeting where young people shared challenges to meeting their health needs and proposed meaningful solutions. Moreover, integrating family planning into existing youth initiatives is an important strategy for increasing societal support for sexuality education and access to contraceptive services.
- Successful youth interventions should be taken to scale. Governments have the ability to do so, with the help of donors and in tandem with investments in other sectors.

*“To unlock development, we must unlock the potential of adolescents and young people. To unlock their potential, they need access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and supplies, and to the exercise of their human rights therein associated.”*

— KATE GILMORE, DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNFPA

**Increasing youth access to family planning depends on cultivating champions, strengthening community support and engaging young people**

- Ministry leaders recognized that building support for youth access to family planning is necessary to address the pervasive socio-cultural barriers that harm the well-being of young people and undermine their contributions to national development. For instance, negative attitudes among parents toward the integration of sexuality education within school curricula are important barriers to preparing young people for the transition to adulthood.



*“In Rwanda, I went through a class that covered reproductive health. While we were taught how babies are made and the advantages of family planning, the methods of family planning and where to get services were left out of the class.”*

— CHRISTELLE KWIZERA, SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR

- Behavior change through social media outreach and other communications strategies is critical for generating buy-in from parents and community leaders for youth access to contraceptive information (including comprehensive sexuality education), services and supplies. For instance, Malawi is currently targeting traditional leaders to become agents of change for girls’ education and health. The president has appointed traditional leaders to a national advisory council and created committees headed by chiefs in rural areas to champion girls’ issues.



*“Comprehensive sexuality education programs should be factual, sensitive to youth, and begun early.”*

— HON. ANATOLE COLLINET MAKOSSO, MINISTER OF YOUTH AND EDUCATION, REPUBLIC OF CONGO



TOP TO BOTTOM: Christelle Kwizera, Social Entrepreneur; Hon. Hanny-Sherry Ayithey, Minister of Health, Ghana; Robert Clay, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Global Health, USAID. (Photographs by Antonio Fiorente.)

### Future socioeconomic prosperity comes from harnessing the creativity, energy and talents of today's youth and supporting their health, education and employment now

- Young people are the engines of countries' development. Ministry leaders recognized the urgent need to maximize opportunities for adolescents and young adults, particularly girls, to help them realize their full potential.
- A gap exists between youth expectations and the opportunities available to them. Under- and unemployment are pervasive problems for young people in Africa, and require deliberate public and private sector attention. The government of Kenya is taking steps to address youth unemployment, with 30 percent of new job opportunities being specifically tailored to young people. Ghana is also helping young people acquire entrepreneurial skills for self-employment, while Malawi and other countries are actively building the skills of young people in sectors like agriculture in order to reinvigorate their employment opportunities.
- Technology is playing a transformational role in society. Young people have a comparative advantage in the technology sector and in the use of mobile services. Both hold the potential to reach youth directly with the health information and services they need. Modernizing medical records and systems, as Kenya is doing, can both improve the quality of service provision and create employment opportunities for young people.

### Forging diverse partnerships for high-impact youth family planning outcomes is essential

- Fostering strong partnerships is essential to integrating the family planning, health, education and job training needs of young people.
- Partnerships strengthen local ownership through increased coordination and collaboration at national and local levels. Government leadership is pivotal to ensuring that family planning is owned by many, not by a few. When partnerships are guided by national plans and strategies, they are an effective way to sustain programs over time.
- Many models of partnership exist for realizing high-impact, youth-focused development: South-South sharing of policies and programs; national government and development partnerships; collaborations between government, the private sector and civil society, including service providers and community leaders; intergenerational partnerships between young people, parents and elders; cross-ministerial partnerships for integrated services; and policy alignment domestically and at various international fora, including U.N. negotiations.

*“Africa’s young people will be the force behind our economic progress. It entirely depends on the policy and funding decisions we make now.”*

— HON. SUFIAN AHMED, MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ETHIOPIA

*“Any leader will tell you that youth are the key to the future. Today, the world is blessed with the largest generation of young people in human history—a blessing that brings both challenges and opportunities.”*

— HON. PATRICIA HASLACH, U.S. AMBASSADOR, ETHIOPIA

*“There is no journey without leadership.”*

— DR. TEWODROS MELESSE, DIRECTOR GENERAL,  
INTERNATIONAL PLANNED PARENTHOOD FEDERATION



TOP TO BOTTOM: Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UNFPA; Dr. Sheila Nyawira Macharia, Senior Health Manager, Office of Population and Health, USAID Kenya; Hon. Dr. Kesetebirhan Admasu, Minister of Health, Ethiopia. (Photographs by Antonio Fiorente.)

## POLICY ACTIONS FOR HARNESSING THE POWER OF YOUTH AND SEIZING THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

There are rich experiences across the continent to be shared, replicated and scaled up. Strong government leadership is vital to developing successful family planning programs, protecting women’s rights and ensuring gender equity. The right policies and investments in family planning, maternal and child health, education and youth employment—with a strong focus on young women—will lead to enduring economic development in Africa. Governments must therefore†:

- **Prioritize and invest in youth-friendly reproductive health services** for both married and unmarried youth.
- **Remove legal and policy restrictions** that limit youth access to contraceptive information, counseling and supplies to avoid unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.
- **Improve the quality of secondary education and expand school enrollment**, especially among girls.
- **Invest in comprehensive, evidence-based sexuality education**, for young people both in and out of school.
- **Involve youth and foster youth leadership** in developing and implementing policies, programs and services intended for them at national and community levels.
- **Scale-up integrated, sustainable programs** that have proven successful in meeting the health, education and employment needs of young people.
- **Enact and enforce laws to prevent early marriage (before age 18).**
- **Collaborate with the private sector to expand and strengthen the job market** for young people, ensuring equal access for men and women.

† Population Reference Bureau (PRB). 2013. “The Potential of Youth for a Demographic Dividend: Investing in Health, Education, and Job Creation.” *Policy Brief*. Washington, DC: PRB.

**PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES WITH HIGH-LEVEL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATION**

Angola	India	Republic of
Benin	Japan	Korea
Burkina Faso	Kenya	Rwanda
Burundi	Malawi	Senegal
Cameroon	Mali	South Sudan
Chad	Mauritania	Swaziland
Cote d'Ivoire	Mongolia	Thailand
Democratic	Myanmar	Togo
Republic of	Niger	Uganda
the Congo	Nigeria	United Kingdom
Ethiopia	Philippines	United States
Ghana	Republic of	Yemen
Guinea	Congo	

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**AFRICAN UNION YOUTH PRE-CONFERENCE NOVEMBER 10-11, 2013**

Prior to the HLMM, the African Union Youth Pre-Conference in Addis Ababa brought together youth leaders from around the world in order to build skills for highlighting youth voices at the conference.

The participants articulated a clear plan for promoting harmonized growth in Africa, including the following salient recommendations for addressing youth health needs:

- 1 Facilitate youth leadership and their participation and inclusion in decision-making and program/policy design.
- 2 Establish an environment conducive for young people to realize their sexual and reproductive health rights. Important government actions include reviewing policies that criminalize safe abortion and extending global and regional initiatives like the Maputo Plan of Action beyond 2015.
- 3 Provide comprehensive sexuality education that is both accurate and sensitive to young people's needs.
- 4 Ensure high-quality services for young people, including training health workers so that services are youth-friendly.
- 5 Promote socio-cultural and behavioral change.

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