

Protecting the Promise of Youth



PATH's Adolescent Health Strategic Program

Adolescence is a formative and dynamic phase of life. It is a period marked by creativity, energy, and resilience—all of which, if cultivated, can lay the foundation for a promising future.

While adolescence is generally a healthy period of life, complications from pregnancy, childbirth, and unsafe abortions have become the major causes of death for girls aged 15 to 19.¹ According to the United Nations Population Fund, young people aged 15 to 24 have the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Yet young people are often less informed, less experienced, and less comfortable accessing family planning and reproductive health services than adults.

PATH has been working with adolescents as well as governments and international organizations to improve young people's sexual and reproductive health since the earliest days in our 25-year history. PATH's commitment is guided by the values of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Platform of Action, which recognizes the broad range of reproductive health issues that develop throughout the life cycle and the need for a human rights approach to meet individual needs.

¹United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Early marriage: child spouses. *Innocenti Digest*, No. 7 (March 2001).

Our Approach

Youth-focused interventions are most effective when they address individual behaviors as well as the social and contextual environments that influence them. The experiences and needs of youth are extremely diverse, based on a range of factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, disability, marital and socioeconomic status, schooling, and sexual experience. Interventions that address these factors help ensure a healthy transition through adolescence and, ultimately, to adulthood.

PATH's work in adolescent sexual and reproductive health focuses on three critical areas:

- ▶ fostering a supportive environment;
- ▶ improving youth knowledge, attitudes, and skills;
- ▶ increasing access to and use of reproductive health services and commodities.

PATH's adolescent programs address gender and power relations at multiple levels: by challenging gender bias within communities, institutions, and health systems; by recognizing the impact of family and social norms on how girls and boys are socialized into adult roles; and by fostering positive interactions between boys and girls as they grow into adulthood. PATH works to enhance the skills and assets of youth and engages youth in every aspect of the program to develop potential and tap their creative energy.

Fostering a Supportive Environment

Social environments have a profound influence on young people's lives. PATH's adolescent health programs foster an enabling environment by increasing community and political support for youth development and reproductive health. Our strategies include:

- ▶ parent/adult education;
- ▶ community mobilization;
- ▶ capacity-building and institutionalization, advocacy, policy formation, and networking.



T. Shapera, M/MC Photoshare (www.jhuccp.org)



L. Gilbert



Improving Youth Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skills

Youth need the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make responsible choices, assess risks, and set and realize goals for the future. PATH's programs ensure that youth are equipped with correct information about sex and reproductive health and the skills to carry out the informed choices they make. We tailor our interventions to the developmental stage of young people and increase their self-efficacy through skills-building, condom negotiation, risk reduction, and values discussion.

To strengthen healthy sexual behaviors, our programs involve:

- ▶ youth development and life-skills training,
- ▶ peer education,
- ▶ school-based programs,
- ▶ work-based and livelihood programs,
- ▶ supporting materials and media.

Increasing Access to and Use of Reproductive Health Services and Commodities

Adolescents often experience resistance—or even hostility—from adults when they try to obtain reproductive health information and services. Fears of negative provider attitudes—as well as concerns about privacy and confidentiality—may prevent young people from accessing health services. As a result, they may be at increased risk of STIs, HIV, unintended pregnancy, and other negative health consequences.

PATH trains providers to recognize biases, correct misinformation, and increase the availability of knowledgeable, youth-friendly reproductive health services. We help pharmacy staff, traditional healers, peer educators, staff at work-based and livelihood programs, and clinic staff strengthen the services they provide to youth.

Adolescent Health Activities

To date, PATH has developed and implemented adolescent health programs in 53 countries. Our recent activities include:

Reaching high-risk youth. In the Philippines, PATH and its partners implement the AIDS Surveillance and Education Project (ASEP). Evaluation of the program suggests that its activities—including outreach and peer-education programs aimed at sexually exploited children and youth and a mass-media campaign to increase public awareness about HIV—contribute to the slow pace of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country.

Enabling youth decision-making. PATH and the China Family Planning Association (CFPA) are partners on a five-year adolescent reproductive health project. Located in 14 sites and reaching an estimated 80 million adolescents, the project helps delay sexual debut, reduce the number of sexual partners, and prevent unwanted pregnancy, STIs, and coercive sex.

Reaching young adolescents. In Nicaragua, PATH's Entre Amigas ("Among Friends") program works to protect and promote the healthy development of 10- to 14-year-old girls in resource-poor settings. Through multisectoral programs and integrated services, the project interventions focus on four key areas of influence on girls' development: policy, community, parents/adults, and youth peers.

Eliminating female genital mutilation. PATH is a global leader in efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation (FGM) and, where appropriate, helps communities adopt alternative rites of passage. PATH works with community-based organizations in several countries in Africa to sensitize communities about the harmful effects of FGM and has enabled thousands of girls to opt for alternative rites of passage.

About PATH

PATH is an international organization dedicated to developing, implementing, and evaluating innovative solutions to public health problems. Our mission is to improve health, especially the health of women and children. We share knowledge, skills, and technologies with governments and nongovernmental partners in low-resource settings around the world.

For additional information about PATH, please visit our web site at www.path.org.

PATH's Adolescent Health Strategic Program is based in Washington, D.C.

PATH
1800 K Street, N.W., Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20006
USA

Phone: 202-822-0033
Fax: 202-457-1466
Email: info@path-dc.org