

# Youth Programs Helping Girls Overcome Barriers to Societal Involvement

## USAID Global Health



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With more than 1.3 billion people in developing countries between the ages of 10 and 24, addressing the needs of youth remains an important objective of USAID programming. Adolescence is a period of dynamic change and represents a transition from childhood to adulthood that is marked by emotional, physical, and sexual maturation. Decisions about health, education, lifestyle, employment, and civic engagement made by adolescents will have long-term impacts on their futures and the future development of their countries.

Girls face particular disadvantages. They are more constrained from achieving formal education. The demand for their labor in the household can keep them out of school or from completing school, often forcing them to leave at an earlier age than boys. Sociocultural norms and traditions, such as early marriage, also can curtail schooling. Where schools are situated at a distance from homes, there are often fears for girls' safety while traveling to and from school. At school, lack of separate private latrines can mean that girls are unable to continue with school after reaching puberty. The school environment can also be important – teachers may reinforce societal perceptions toward girls, thus undermining confidence in their abilities. Girls can also face abuse from fellow pupils or even teachers within the school environment itself.

Since 1995, USAID has been committed to developing programs that provide young people with the knowledge, services, and social support they need to develop healthy lifestyle choices. If learned at a young age, these behaviors can significantly reduce the risk of early pregnancy, help avoid child marriages, and reduce the incidence of unintended pregnancy, obstetric fistula, gender-based violence, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. USAID pro-

grams are sensitive to the diverse needs of youth populations and work to address the differences between girls and boys, in- and out-of-school youth, married and unmarried couples, orphaned and vulnerable youth, and those who are HIV positive.

USAID programs reach young people through various methods, including comprehensive, medically sound, skills-based sex education; mass media; peer educators; and community groups. USAID also works in partnership with national ministries of health, youth and sports programs, and women and gender groups to ensure that countries can sustain progress on their own.

As youth populations continue to rise, USAID will maintain its focus on ensuring a successful transition to adulthood and work to strengthen the ability of youth to contribute to their countries' development.

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**Web site**

[http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_health/pop/techareas/youth/index.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/pop/techareas/youth/index.html)

**E-mail queries**

[GHCommunicationsTeam@usaid.gov](mailto:GHCommunicationsTeam@usaid.gov)