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Securing the future of children and youth

CIDA'S CHILDREN
AND YOUTH STRATEGY



Canadian International
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de
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Canada

SECURING THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

CIDA'S Children and Youth Strategy

Issue

Nearly half of the planet's population of 7 billion is under the age of 25, forming the largest generation of children and youth in history. With the necessary support, today's children and youth will grow into active and productive young adults. More than 90 percent live in the developing world, representing an unprecedented chance to impact on the long-term development prospects of the poorest countries.

However, these children and youth face some of the world's most urgent challenges. In many countries, services that are crucial to their survival, well-being, and future capacity are in short supply or of poor quality; the systems that support them are fragmented and fragile.

These children and youth are vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and neglect, principally in situations of conflict or crisis. They are also especially vulnerable to environmental risks, such as water quality and inadequate sanitation. This is particularly true for girls and young women, who do not have the same opportunities as boys and young men and are therefore less well educated, less healthy, and enjoy fewer rights and freedoms.

In Canada and around the world, children and youth are entitled to secure and safe environments and to freedom from violence and discrimination. CIDA's Children and Youth Strategy will build on CIDA's long history of child-focused programming by scaling up in areas proven to achieve results and by supporting long-term approaches to enable the world's children and youth to reach their full potential.

The case for action

Demographic urgency: Today's population of children and youth in developing countries—currently 3 billion strong—is a great resource, offering opportunities to establish a solid foundation for development if it gets the head start needed in life. This growing population of children and youth also poses significant fiscal, economic, and security risks, especially where services and opportunities for employment and participation are limited. Countries with a large proportion of young people face escalating demands for jobs, health services, and education. When those expectations go unmet, youth may turn to crime or violence.

Child mortality: Every year, close to nine million children die before reaching the age of five, many from preventable causes. A child born in a developing country is more than 13 times liable to die within the first five years of life than is a child born in an industrialized country. The basic interventions that save children's lives are well known, for example, bed nets, micronutrients, immunization, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. The challenge lies in ensuring that health systems are able to deliver these interventions to all children.

Maternal mortality: More than half-a million women continue to die in pregnancy and childbirth every year. Maternal health is vital to the survival, health, and development of children. When a mother dies in childbirth, her child is four times more likely to die also. One that survives is less likely to attend or complete school. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to complications during pregnancy for a number of reasons, including HIV/AIDS. Childbirth is the leading cause of death for girls aged 15 to 19 in the developing world.

Violence and abuse of children and youth: Millions of children and youth—disproportionately girls—experience violence and abuse. This violence comes in many forms and occurs in families and broader communities through armed conflict, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and harmful forms of child labour, as well as through risky cultural practices such as female genital mutilation. Children subjected to violations of their rights are at increased risk of death, poor physical and mental health, HIV/AIDS, poor education, displacement, and homelessness. This violence and abuse undermines other investments made to ensure child survival and access to basic education.

Lack of education and skills: Getting a basic education is critical for children and youth if they are to develop the skills they need for life and work. However, in developing countries, 67 million children—53 percent of them girls—still do not have access to schools. At the same time, those children and youth who do manage to get to school often receive an education of poor quality. Girls in particular face major challenges in attending school and completing a basic education, even though evidence shows that educating girls has a greater positive effect in terms of social and economic impacts.

Under-investment in girls: Addressing the needs of girls requires focused attention. In many developing countries, girls and young women are likely to marry and have children at a very early age, drop out of school, be engaged in prostitution, or experience sexual violence. Despite this, there is increasing evidence and recognition that investments in girls yield higher development results and a higher rate of return than investments in any other demographic group. Investments in the health, education, and safety of young women have a ripple effect, reaching their families, their communities, and their future children.

The benefits to society of investing in children and youth are wide-ranging and long-term. Investing in children and youth today is investing in the future stability, quality of life, and economic self-sufficiency of developing countries.

Statement of objectives

With this Children and Youth Strategy, CIDA will support young women and young men to become healthy, educated, and productive citizens of tomorrow by:

- encouraging efforts to **improve child and maternal health** through ensuring children have the best possible start to life, beginning with healthy mothers;
- improving the equitable access of children and youth to **quality education and learning opportunities**, with a special emphasis on girls; and
- helping ensure the **rights and protection of children and youth**, particularly girls, from violence, exploitation, and abuse.

In pursuing those objectives, this Children and Youth Strategy will ensure equality between women and men, environmental sustainability, and governance and human rights are integrated across all CIDA programming and that CIDA programming is aligned with CIDA's strategies on sustainable economic growth and food security.

CIDA will work to ensure children and youth in situations of emergency, conflict, post-conflict, and fragility have access to relevant and appropriate services and opportunities.

Paths to action

CIDA's children and youth efforts will be using the following three paths:

- **child survival, including maternal health**, to ensure the survival of newborns and that of children to the age of five and a safe delivery for pregnant girls and women through strengthening national health systems to provide quality services;
- **access to quality education** to improve the quality and relevance of education for girls, boys, and youth, as a basis for poverty reduction, social development, and economic growth; and
- **safety and security of children and youth** to support efforts to ensure safe and secure environments for children and youth so that they can contribute to society.

Child survival, including maternal health

A greater focus on child survival, including maternal health, will help ensure today's children have the best possible start in life. Nearly nine million children under the age of five die every year, largely from preventable and treatable conditions. Many more become sick, sometimes with life-long consequences, or fail to thrive due to a lack of appropriate health care. Diarrhea, malaria, and respiratory infections are some of the biggest killers of children under the age of five. In addition, every minute of every day, a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth, increasing further the risk of her child dying.

Women's safe and healthy pregnancy and delivery can be ensured through antenatal care and assisted delivery by skilled and properly equipped health professionals (physician, nurse, or midwife). Preventing and treating the major childhood illnesses through high-impact interventions (e.g. immunization, malaria bed nets, micronutrient supplements, safe drinking water, basic sanitation and hygiene programs, prevention of parent-to-child transmission of HIV) are crucial to ensuring children survive beyond the age of five. As a prerequisite to child and maternal health, national health systems must be strengthened with sufficient human and financial resources. This will make it possible to provide reliable and safe basic health programming that meets the needs of mothers and their children. Interventions will focus on scaling up and improving delivery programs to ensure the health and survival of mothers and children.

To help meet its Children and Youth Strategy objectives, CIDA will:

- work to improve access to maternal healthcare in an effort to reduce maternal and newborn sickness and deaths;
- invest more in child-specific health interventions such as immunization, nutritional supplements and clean water to improve child health;
- invest more in the prevention of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, to benefit mothers and children; and
- strengthen sustainable health systems that can provide quality healthcare to mothers and children.

Outcomes

CIDA's efforts in improving child survival, including maternal health, will help ensure:

- more mothers are sufficiently healthy to care for their children under the age of five;
- more children survive infancy and thrive;
- major infectious diseases that primarily affect mothers and children are prevented and treated; and
- country health systems meet the health needs of mothers and children under the age of five.

Access to quality education

An educated workforce is essential to long-term, sustainable development and to reducing extreme poverty. Access to quality education not only provides children and youth with labour market skills, enabling them to take advantage of economic opportunities but also with life skills, enabling them to become better members of their societies and better parents.

While there has been remarkable progress in terms of increasing access to education in developing countries, significant challenges remain. There are still about 67 million school-age children—35.5 million of them girls—who do not attend school because of financial, social, health, or security reasons.

A particular problem is girls' education. Even though investing in education for girls and young women has shown to bring about significant social and economic rewards, many parents withdraw their girls from school before they even complete primary school. This is done for a number of reasons, such as the safety and security of schools, the lack of female teachers, the absence of separate toilet facilities, and the belief that future prospects for girls do not justify the cost of keeping them in school.

Increased efforts are needed to ensure children complete the full 10-year cycle of basic education and have a chance to learn the skills required to deal with everyday life and take advantage of economic opportunities.

Another key challenge is ensuring better quality education. Improving learning outcomes depends on strong national education systems, but in many developing countries, the quality of the major components of well-functioning schools is poor. Renewed emphasis is needed on recruitment and training of sufficient numbers of teachers, development of relevant and culturally appropriate curricula, and access to high-quality learning materials for every student.

CIDA will build on its considerable experience in education by scaling up proven approaches to advance quality education. This will be done through program-based and sector-wide approaches that enable governments to strengthen national education systems and allocate resources according to national priorities.

To help meet its Children and Youth Strategy objectives, CIDA will:

- improve access to basic education, particularly for girls;
- improve the quality of education and promote learning achievement, with special focus on teachers and teacher training, relevant curricula, and quality teaching/learning materials; and
- increase access to relevant learning opportunities for youth, in and out of school.

Outcomes

CIDA's efforts in providing access to quality education will help ensure:

- more children, particularly girls, go to school and complete basic education;
- country education systems are strengthened to provide quality basic education; and
- youth are literate and numerate and get the skills they need to become productive members of their communities.

Safety and security of children and youth

Violence, exploitation, and abuse have devastating effects on the ability of children and youth to grow into productive and engaged members of society. Many children and youth are subjected to physical violence, trafficking, and the worst forms of child labour. While violence against children is widespread, girls are vulnerable to specific forms of violence (e.g. sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, sexual assault). The security and protection of children and youth is especially challenging in fragile and conflict-affected states and in humanitarian situations where children are displaced and separated from their families. Special concerns comprise the killing of children and youth, sexual violence, abandoned and orphaned children, and child soldiers.

A number of important challenges must be overcome to better ensure the safety and security of children and youth. Many developing countries have weak legislation, policies, and regulatory frameworks to protect children and youth. Particularly weak is the basic data to determine which target groups of children and youth are especially prone to harm, stigma, and abuse. For example, the safety of working children, including those engaged in the worst forms of child labour, is often ignored because developing countries lack the effective policies, regulations, and child-focused services needed to address the issue. Those governments also lack the capacity and knowledge to stop violence and the worst forms of abuse toward children and youth. Moreover, they have limited experience in addressing the specific needs of girls in violent situations. In fragile and post-conflict situations, children and youth frequently face violence. In many cases, children and youth who have been victims of violence have no protection or avenues by which to re-engage as positive members of society.

Fundamentally, investments in health, education, and other sectors cannot yield sustainable improvements in the lives of children and youth if protection and security issues are not addressed.

To help meet its Children and Youth Strategy objectives, CIDA will:

- strengthen and implement national protection frameworks to safeguard the human rights of children and youth and build capacity in the public sector to protect children and youth, particularly girls, at risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse;
- ensure schools are safe and free from violence and abuse and are child-friendly learning environments; and
- support efforts to create opportunities for youth-at-risk to find alternatives to violence and crime and become engaged as positive members of their societies.

Outcomes

CIDA's efforts in providing safety and security will help ensure:

- countries have the legal frameworks necessary to protect children and youth;
- more children and youth, particularly girls, are protected from violence and abuse;
- schools are safe and appropriate environments for learning; and
- youth gain opportunities to become productive members of their societies.

Accountability and compliance

CIDA will review its progress against the Children and Youth Strategy and report this progress and any lessons learned on a regular basis. All activities associated with the development and implementation of this strategy are in compliance with the *Official Development Assistance Accountability Act (2008) c.17*.