



Access to quality sexual and reproductive health care can help end extreme poverty

Statement of UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17 October 2016

To eradicate poverty – like any other goal to improve the human condition – we need to fully understand the world’s demographics.

Poor countries with burgeoning youth populations may find it difficult to meet many of our global development goals, as they face more people entering primary and secondary school age, more people looking for health care, and many more entering labour markets, looking for productive jobs in the coming years.

Yet, demographic trends can also create huge opportunities for accelerated economic and social development, if countries make the right investments in their young people, particularly adolescent girls, so that they can enjoy their human rights and achieve their potential.

Access to quality sexual and reproductive health care, including voluntary family planning, can reduce maternal deaths by one third, and child deaths by as much as one fifth. Many families may choose to have fewer children, which reduces fertility levels. And when countries’ age structures change favourably, meaning that they have more people of working age than dependents, they can see a boost to development, known as a demographic dividend, provided that they empower, educate and employ their young people.

With fewer dependents to support, parents can invest more in each child, have healthier children and spend more time earning money. By doing so, they will be able to speed up economic growth and social development, and create the conditions for raising living standards and reducing poverty.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for the total eradication of extreme poverty, building on the success of the Millennium Development Goals in halving it. UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is helping countries bring about the demographic dividend by empowering often-overlooked young people, especially girls, and protecting their rights. So the theme of this year’s International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, “*Moving from humiliation and exclusion to participation: ending poverty in all its forms*”, is at the heart of our work.

Investing in the sexual and reproductive health needs of women and girls is the cornerstone to realizing a demographic dividend. More and more countries are declaring their ambition to move in this direction, which will lead to accelerated social and economic development and higher living standards. UNFPA is fully committed to supporting these efforts.

Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person can reach their potential will not only allow women and girls to exercise their fundamental rights; it will also help countries speed up their demographic transition and create the conditions for reaping the demographic dividend and ending poverty for every woman, man and child.
