Meeting Summary

Protecting and Empowering Adolescent Girls:
Evidence for the Global Health Initiative

Sponsored by the Interagency Youth Working Group (IYWG)
Thursday, June 3, 2010

The third annual meeting of the Interagency Youth Working Group (IYWG) highlighted examples of innovative programs that address girls' vulnerability to HIV and reproductive health (RH) risks in more than 15 countries. These programs have used a variety of approaches, including school-based interventions, advocacy, empowerment, targeting of especially vulnerable girls, physical activity, and male involvement. One of the main purposes of the meeting was to formulate recommendations on women- and girl-centered approaches within the U.S. Government's Global Health Initiative.

Opening Plenary
Why Girls Matter: Measuring Up

Reasons to focus on girls

About 75 percent of young people with HIV are girls, and most of them become infected during adolescence. This vulnerability to infection is driven by many factors, including poverty, lack of education, absence of peer networks, early marriage, limited access to the media, and absence of youth programs. Girls also experience high levels of discrimination, sexual coercion, and violence. These factors, coupled with the large age differences common between girls and their sexual partners, make them more vulnerable to HIV than are boys of the same age.

Despite this vulnerability, many HIV programs for youth still favor treatment over prevention, and the young people with the fewest risk factors and the most social assets (usually boys) receive the largest share of the available services.

Investing in adolescent girls, ages 10 to 14, will be crucial for alleviating poverty, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equity, and addressing other factors that put girls at risk of HIV infection and other negative RH outcomes.

How to measure success

Programs focused on adolescent girls need to target the girls who are most in need of interventions and then determine what they can change in a certain period of time using meaningful measurements. Because health, social, and economic assets are all closely linked to girls, these assets can be good measures of program success. For instance, in its programs, the Population Council measures school status, marriage status, the density of friendship networks, access to a place to meet non-family peers, knowledge of HIV risks, financial status, and self-esteem. If girls make positive changes in any of these assets, the effect is a protective one.

Programs such as the Global Health Initiative, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) are taking a slightly broader approach to measuring success. They are looking to indicators such as changes in male norms and

behaviors, decreases in violence and coercion, increases in access to education and resources, and increases in legal rights and protections for girls.

More emphasis is also being placed on supporting country ownership of programs for girls and promoting the sustainability of these programs. In March 2010, UNAIDS launched an Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equity and HIV. This agenda will help ensure that governments and other UNAIDS partners around the world develop programs that meet the diverse needs of girls at the country level.

Concurrent Session 1
The Next Generation of School-based Interventions: New Research, Novel Programs, and Innovative Tools

School-based interventions offer a unique opportunity to reach a large segment of youth, especially at very young ages. New resources such as UNESCO's *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* and the Population Council's *It's All One* curriculum provide helpful guidance for school-based sexuality education. It is important to remember, however, that gender and socio-economic status affect in school attendance, so school-based interventions do not reach all children, and especially not those at the greatest risk. Several programs are working to reduce school absenteeism, foster safe school environments, and decrease risky sexual behavior in diverse settings in Africa:

- Huru International's program to produce and distribute sanitary pads in Kenya keeps girls from missing school, fosters opportunities for fellowship among female students, and creates local jobs.
- USAID's Safe Schools Program strives to change attitudes regarding the acceptability of violence among teachers and students in Ghana and Malawi.
- The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology designed an intervention in which information on local HIV prevalence rates, disaggregated by age and sex, were shared with female students in Kenya. Results showed that if they are provided the right information, girls can change their behavior and do have some say over who their sexual partners are.

Concurrent Session 1
Upholding Girls' Rights: Advocacy in Action

Advocacy efforts aimed at protecting adolescent girls from sexual and reproductive health (SRH) risks are most effective when young people and other key stakeholders (such as women, parents, and religious leaders) are involved in the social change and decision-making processes. Access to accurate, regional data is also essential for effective programming and policymaking. Strategic, specialized research is necessary for comprehensive and informed responses to the health challenges that girls worldwide face. A range of advocacy approaches can be used to protect and empower girls:

- The International Youth Speak Out Project works with Advocates for Youth and the Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network to address gender-based violence and youth SRH rights in Jamaica via youth advocacy, lobbying, policy recommendations, activities to raise awareness about these topics, and media appearances.
- Equality Now's Adolescent Girls Legal Defense Fund supports and publicizes strategically selected legal cases from around the world. These diverse cases represent the most common and significant human rights abuses of adolescent girls, including rape, incest, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, child marriage, and domestic servitude.

- The Safe Age of Marriage Program, implemented by the Extending Service Delivery Project/ IntraHealth is a community-based intervention that works with families, communities, and religious and political leaders in Yemen to change policies and social norms regarding child marriage.

Concurrent Session 2
Targeting Vulnerable Girls

Programs that have been unsuccessful in reaching girls have often either targeted the wrong population or targeted the right population with the wrong intervention. The challenge now is to find the girls who are most in need of help and to reach them with effective ways of developing their protective assets. To do this, program managers will need to understand the context in which girls live and to recognize the factors that make them most vulnerable. They will also need to engage the community in this process. Program plans should be made explicit and shared with the community, which will help make changes permanent. Several programs are using these principles to guide their efforts to reach the most vulnerable girls:

- The Population Council believes that a key intervention is to help develop and maintain girls-only spaces that can serve as platforms to build health, social, and economic assets. Two programs from Egypt that follow this model are the Berhane Hewan program (which uses girls' groups to help delay marriage and support married girls) and the Biruh Testa program (which reaches out-of-school girls in the slums). Girls groups are also an important component of the Binti Pamoja program in rural Kenya and the Abriendo Oportunidades program in the Mayan Highlands of Guatemala.
- The Packard Foundation and the NIA Foundation are working with local partners to target girls who are challenged with sensorial, physical, and intellectual impairments. They are providing vocational and life skills training, education on family planning and RH, and better access to educational materials. They are also working to empower the mothers and other family members of disabled youth.
- The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health is teaming up with Macro International on the Go Girls! Initiative to reduce vulnerability to HIV/AIDS among 10-17 year olds in Botswana, Malawi, and Mozambique. The partners are using a community-wide approach to identify and recruit the most vulnerable girls for this effort.

Concurrent Session 2
Empowering Adolescent Girls

Empowerment can be defined as the process of transition from limited life options to more options and the freedom to choose among them. Empowerment necessitates both resources and agency, or the ability to act in one's own interest. Economic empowerment programs provide access to financial products and resources and contribute to the building of economic and personal assets, skills, and social and economic networks. Critical ingredients of success include encouraging school attendance; addressing violence; integrating girls and young women in development planning across sectors; and engaging religious leaders, men and boys, role models, and peer educators as key change agents.

Follow-up research is needed to address the questions of how to implement a global program in local contexts, how to measure empowerment, and how to work with implementing staff to address their own social and gender norms and attitudes. Data collection on what happens after a girl's marriage is cancelled, after she receives a scholarship for education, or after participating in program interventions will inform next steps. The following are examples of programs working to empower girls in various settings:

- Pathfinder International's Women's and Girls' Empowerment Program equips girls and young women in Ethiopia with the information, skills, and support needed for appropriate SRH decision-making and improved health outcomes. The program does so by working with women's associations, health workers, local nongovernmental organizations, girls' clubs, youth centers, volunteer community health workers, and peer educators.
- CARE's Power to Lead Alliance promotes girl leaders in vulnerable communities in Honduras, Egypt, Malawi, Yemen, India, and Tanzania.
- The House-girls Health and Life Skills Project (HELP), implemented by FHI, works with house girls in Nairobi to increase their knowledge and use of services to prevent unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. The project also helps create awareness in the community about the vulnerability of female domestic workers.

Concurrent Session 3
Strong Girls: Physical Activity to Build Girls' Social and Health Assets

Girls can gain power, pride, resiliency, strength, self-confidence, and dignity from being involved in sports. Physical activity can also help prevent disease and promote individual development, gender equity, and social integration. The policy framework that supports girls' participation in sports is growing, and the number of programs that involve girls in physical activity is expected to increase rapidly in the next decade. To continue this momentum, new program models and methods of implementation will need to be developed and tested. The following are examples of innovative programs that have involved girls in sports:

- In 2005 and 2006, the Haitian Health Foundation piloted the Next Generation of Healthy Women program among 12- to 19-year-old girls. The program included responsible health education, health screening, football, and a youth group. An evaluation among the girls and young women in the program showed that the program significantly reduced pregnancies.
- In 2001, Moving the Goalposts began a football program for vulnerable 10- to 14-year-old girls in Kenya. The longer the girls stayed in the program, the more positive views they had of themselves. A separate study among the girls identified the factors that contributed to their vulnerability. The girls' stories and experiences were documented in the book *Playing by the Rules,* by Sarah Forde. Access the book at: www.createspace.com/3376110.

Concurrent Session 3
Allies for Change: Opening Doors for Girls

Involving men in protecting and empowering girls is the best way to fully achieve balanced gender relations and encourage young women to take control of their lives and bodies. Several programs, research studies, and advocacy efforts are involving both young men and young women in efforts to change gender norms to improve the RH of girls:

- Promundo's Program M and Program H engage young Brazilian men and women in promoting RH and gender equity through youth-led group workshops and campaigns.
- The Respond Project, implemented by EngenderHealth/ACQUIRE works with adolescent married couples in Nepal to increase the couples' RH knowledge through peer education. The project also promotes youth-friendly, supportive health services and encourages families and communities to support RH services for married adolescents.
- The Youth Coalition engages young men and women (ages 18-29) around the world in promoting the sexual and RH of young people through advocacy and information-sharing.

Closing Plenary
Prioritizing the Girl Agenda

Donor support

Donor support has historically been sparse for programs that focus on adolescent girls. However, the philanthropic sector is now demonstrating awareness of and lending support to these programs, which engage nongovernmental organizations, bilateral agencies, and a growing number of countries around the world. As more for-profit companies become interested in working with adolescent girls, public-private sector partnerships are also growing.

As this shift in thinking about adolescent girls continues, donors have a unique role in educating other funders about the importance of evidence-based programs for adolescent girls. They can fund program evaluations, communications, and advocacy activities, and they can influence the design and evaluation of future programs.

Considerations for program design

The United Nations Task Force on Girls, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank's Adolescent Girls Initiative, Standard Chartered Bank's GOAL program, and the Global Health Initiative are examples of programs that are trying to incorporate the following recommendations for program design:

- Programs for girls should be retargeted to reach the subgroups of girls who are most marginalized (for example those at risk of early marriage or dropping out of school) to ensure greater coverage of girls in general.
- Programs should be designed in response to what girls say they need, and they should give the girls a platform for success.
- Programs should also be holistic in nature and promote changes both in the people who have influence over the girls and in the girls themselves.
- Programs must be increasingly responsive to in-country needs, create demand from in-country stakeholders, and provide the best possible evidence on how to protect girls.

Measures of success

- Better data are needed on programmatic measures of success. Incorporating good measures of success can strengthen a program's sustainability, improve its design, and inform its scale-up. Better measures of success can also allow the program to serve as a role model for others in the field.
- Most program evaluations today seek to determine whether an intervention works. It may be important, however, to think about ways to identify "what works best" rather than just what does or does not work.

Scale-up

- Scale-up should be defined as "reaching those who need the program or intervention the most." It need not be national in scope.
- When developing innovative approaches for protecting girls, different prospects for scale-up should be considered. One strategy is to change the national policy environment and then implement the intervention more widely. Another is a franchise-type model, in which technology (such as a mobile

phone) is used to scale up through a market. A third strategy is to create an opportunity for the cultural diffusion of an idea, such as through the media.

- Social change is difficult to scale up, so it may be helpful to think of it as scaling both "up" and "out." Scaling up often entails using traditional methods to reach scale, while scaling out may refer to using less traditional, more multisectoral approaches.

Conclusions and Next Steps

This is a special moment for girls and women around the world. The U.S. President and his administration have the knowledge and commitment to address gender issues, and international support for these issues is strong. We also have a growing number of strong examples of what types of programs already work and what we can do better to empower girls to improve their lives. Although we do no not have nearly enough of these examples, there is extraordinary momentum for us to do more and to do better. The following are additional considerations for the future:

- Interventions that are not working should be stopped, and those that are working should be scaled up. Greater collaboration and coordination among partners will be vital.
- We need to shift the research focus away from identifying what we know how to do. We need to identify the key populations who have problems to be solved and look specifically at the needs of these subgroups, asking the important questions within these groups to inform our research.
- More discussion is needed about scale and best practices, as well as what to do with the programs that do not work. The Population Council will host conversations about scaling up programs for girls in the near future.
- It is important to involve private sector partners in future meetings so that they are represented and so that effective partnerships can develop.
- To best meet the programming and policy needs of adolescent girls, young people must be involved in the development, implementation, and decision-making processes.
- Increased donor investments are needed for innovative and rigorous evaluations and for longer funding cycles.