

The youth bulge: Social implications and future vision

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BULLETIN



The youth bulge: social implications and future vision

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INTRODUCTION

The present bulletin addresses the implications of demographic changes occurring particularly in the age structure of the population. One of the results emanating from those changes is the bulge of the 15-24 years old age group and its subsequent positive or negative impacts, in relation to the process of development on one hand, and to the human life cycle on the other hand. In that context, the present bulletin aims at: (a) highlighting the basic issues requiring the attention of the Arab communities in order to be able to benefit from demographic changes; (b) promoting policies and strategies for transforming that socio-demographic group into an effective group that interacts positively with society and participates in the decision-making at the political and social levels, by developing policies and strategies in conformity with the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

Youth in the United Nations World Conferences

Youth issues have been central priorities for the United Nations for decades. That importance is reflected in the world forums as follows:

- ▶ **World Conference on Education For All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, Jomtien, Thailand 1990**

Article 3 of the World Declaration on Education For All, states under the title "Universalizing access and promoting equity" that "basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults. Opportunity should be given to all children, youth and adults to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning". The article stresses the need to give optimum priority to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. Commitment was renewed to implement the Jomtien Declaration ten years later at the World Education Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal, from 26 to 28 April 2000.

- ▶ **International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo 1994**

Chapter VI, B entitled "Children and Youth" of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development states the following: "The ongoing and future demands created by large young populations, particularly in terms of health, education and employment, represent major challenges and responsibilities for families, local communities, countries and the international community.

First and foremost among these responsibilities is to ensure that every child is a wanted child. The second responsibility is to recognize that children are the most important resource for the future and that greater investment in them by parents and societies is essential to the achievement of sustained economic growth and development."

- ▶ **World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen 1995**

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development included in its principles and goals several commitments aimed at achieving social development. The following commitments encompassed indirectly the youth: (1) eradicating poverty including by focusing efforts on providing for the basic needs of all, with special priority given to the needs of children and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and persons; developing and promoting programmes designed for youth living in poverty and work to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty; (2) promoting the goal of full employment as a basic priority of economic and social policies and enabling all men and women to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods through freely chosen productive employment and work; (3) achieving social integration, promoting and protecting all human rights and participation of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons, promoting access for all to education, information and technology and contribution of all age groups, fostering dialogue between age groups in all parts of society, and ensure





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equal educational opportunities at all levels for children and youth with disabilities.

Commitments are followed by implementation actions, and special efforts should be exerted to protect children and youth, namely: (1) to meet basic human needs of all ensuring primary health care for all and making accessible the system of reproductive health; (2) to enhance social protection and reduce vulnerability, by giving due attention to people affected by the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS); (3) to improve employment opportunities, increase ways and means of helping youth to develop the skills they need to enable them to find employment and establish institutions that improve the employment opportunities of disadvantaged groups; (4) to implement programmes that channel the energy and creativity of children and youth towards improving themselves and their communities in order to prevent their participation in crime, violence, and drug abuse and trafficking.

► Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995

The Beijing Declaration addressed issues of girls and young women and the Beijing Platform for Action included under a chapter on the "Girl Child" the following Strategic Objectives and Actions:

(1) Promote people-centred sustainable development, including sustained economic growth, through providing basic education, continuous learning, literacy, training and primary health care for girls and women; (2) take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child, including discrimination against girls in the areas of education, skills development, training, health, nutrition, and the elimination of all negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls; (3) prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls; (4) eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work; (5) promote and protect all human rights for girls and the girl child and raise awareness on their needs and potential; (6) promote the girl child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life; (7) strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl child; (8) intensify the efforts to ensure the full enjoyment by women and girls who face several obstacles hampering their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability or because they are indigenous, of their human rights and fundamental freedoms; (9) ensure respect for international law, including humanitarian law, in order to protect women and girls in particular; (10) develop the fullest potential of girls and women, ensure their full and equal participation in building a better world for all and enhance their role in the development process.

► World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond

In 1995, Member States of the United Nations declared the importance of the role of youth in social, economic

and political life. The world community adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, which comprised a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the status of youth. The World Programme of Action for Youth lists ten priority areas as follows: education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women, and full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making. In 2003, and in the process of monitoring and evaluating those priorities, the World Youth Report recommended the addition of five other priorities as follows: globalization, information and communications technology, intergenerational relations, the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and armed conflict. The 15 priority areas were then identified in three clusters: (a) youth in the global economy; (b) youth in civil society; (c) youth at risk. In 2007, the General Assembly adopted the additional priorities in its resolution 62/126 of 18 December 2007.

► World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 26 August-4 September 2002

The representatives of the peoples of the world assembled at the World Summit on Sustainable Development renewed their commitment to implement Agenda 21 which was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, from 3 to 14 June 1992. The Summit noted that the involvement of today's youth in environment and development decision-making and in the implementation of programmes is critical to the long-term success of Agenda 21. The chapter on the role of children and youth in sustainable development included the following programme areas as means for ensuring a real social participation in support of common efforts to achieve sustainable development:

(1) advancing the role of youth and actively involving them in the protection of the environment and the promotion of economic and social development; (2) children in sustainable development.

► The Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emanated from the United Nations Millennium Declaration which was adopted by 189 countries in September 2000. Those goals and targets constitute a series of interrelated commitments to be achieved by 2015. They form a blueprint agreed upon by the world countries and the world leading development institutions and also a partnership between developed and developing countries, as stated in the Declaration, "to create an environment at both national and international levels favorable for development and poverty eradication". The following goals address the youth group:

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education. It includes an indicator for monitoring progress achieved in literacy rates of the population aged between 15 and 24 years;

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women.

their social, political, developmental and environmental participation; (3) encouraging and promoting youth associations through financial, educational and technical support; (4) taking into account the contribution of youth in designing, implementing and evaluating national policies and plans affecting their concerns; (5) encouraging increased national, regional and international cooperation and exchange between youth organizations; (6) strengthening the involvement of young people in international forums.

■ Information and communications technologies:

(1) making information and communications technology available to all youth; (2) providing training to facilitate use of information and communications technology; (3) protecting youth from the harmful aspects of information and communications technology; (4) promoting the use of information and communications technology by persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups; (5) empowering young people as key contributors to building an inclusive information society.

■ Intergenerational relations:

(1) strengthening families; (2) empowering young women; (3) strengthening inter-generational solidarity.

► Third cluster: youth at risk

■ Health:

(1) provision of basic health services; (2) development of health education; (3) promotion of health services, including sexual and reproductive health and development of relevant education programmes in those fields; (4) provision of primary health care services for the containment of HIV infection and AIDS among young people; (5) promotion of good sanitation and hygiene practices; (6) prevention of disease and illness among youth resulting from poor health practices; (7) elimination of sexual abuse of young people; (8) combating malnutrition among young people.

■ Juvenile delinquency:

(1) priority to preventive measures; (2) prevention of violence; (3) rehabilitation services and programmes.

■ Drug abuse:

(1) participation of youth organizations and youth in demand-reduction programmes for young people; (2) training medical and paramedical students in the rational use of pharmaceuticals containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances; (3) treatment and rehabilitation of young people who are drug abusers or drug-dependent and young alcoholics and tobacco users; (4) care for young drug abusers and drug-dependent suspects and offenders in the criminal justice and prison system.

■ Girls and young women:

(1) take action to eliminate discrimination against girls and young women in the areas of education, health, nutrition and employment, including their protection from economic and other forms of exploitation; (2) enact and enforce legislations that protect girls and young women from all forms of violence.

■ HIV/AIDS:

(1) raising awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment for youth; (2) supporting universal HIV/AIDS education, taking gender inequalities into account; (3) introducing legislation and legal instruments to protect vulnerable youth.

■ Armed conflict:

(1) protecting youth under age 18 from direct involvement in armed conflict; (2) providing for the reintegration of youth ex-combatants and protection of non-combatants; (3) promoting active involvement of youth in maintaining peace and security.

Under that broad framework, ESCWA calls upon member countries to stimulate streamlining a positive culture among new cohorts of youth based on establishing the principles of good citizenship, consolidating the rights of individuals to participate in building the society, through providing them with opportunities for the development of, and participation in building, a society in which peace and prosperity prevail, guaranteeing the rights of citizenship, consolidating the principles of equitable development based on the distribution of wealth, modernization of the society, empowerment of the individuals and improvement of the quality of life.

National Youth Strategy for Jordan

"It is a written national document to which national institutions and the State are committed. It is presented in the form of a number of programme positions, goals, measures, actions, plans, mechanisms and interventions based on the potentials of Jordanian youth, their needs and aspirations. It aims at introducing positive qualitative and quantitative changes in the youth movement undertaken by Government institutions, voluntary bodies and civil society organizations. It is the first strategy for the youth in Jordan and covers a five year period from 2005 to 2009. It constitutes a wide umbrella under which all programmes, activities and events with direct impact on the youth movement and the achievement of a comprehensive development converge.

The vision of the National Youth Strategy for Jordan is based on consolidating the concept of citizenship drawn upon rights and obligations, whereby the citizens have the right to enjoy justice, equality, the rule of law, transparency and accountability guaranteed by the State, and the obligation to respect the State's laws and dignity, preserve its values and protect its national stability and security.

The vision can be summarized as follows: "raise and develop a Jordanian youth aware of themselves and their capacities, belonging to their country, participating genuinely and effectively in its development and advancement, capable of dealing with contemporary changes with awareness, confidence and strength within a supportive and secure environment."

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youth issues with a view to integrate young people in the development process.

Over the recent years, some Arab countries have started developing national strategies, policies or plans for youth, namely: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen. In other countries, Governments and/or youth organizations introduced development programmes and target activities aimed at raising awareness, encouraging participation and empowerment and building capacities. Some countries gave attention to youth health issues and directed the efforts towards future mothers and fathers in addition to caring for their actual health condition. In that context, reference should be made to the importance of health recognized by the World Health Organization in its Constitution when it states that "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Because young people constitute a relatively healthy segment of the population, their health has typically been given little attention. It is necessary to give more attention to the health of that segment of the population which may be vulnerable to diseases as result of poverty, malnutrition, accidents, injuries and the spread of such epidemics as HIV/AIDS.

National Youth Strategy in Bahrain

Youth development is a top priority in Bahrain. The efforts exerted in that context draw upon a strategy designed with great precision and based on supporting the enhancement of youth skills and improving present and future opportunities offered to them. That national youth strategy seeks to empower the youth in Bahrain, integrate them in the process of building the State and address the issues of most concern to them. Practical actions were taken to implement the strategy; the most important of them was the establishment of the Youth Parliament, which is considered as one of the steering actions of that strategy.

The future vision for youth must draw upon the framework of rights and obligations. Society must preserve the youth rights, and the youth must fulfill their obligations. The realization of that framework requires streamlining a positive culture within the new cohorts of youth based on establishing the principles of good citizenship, consolidating the rights of individuals to participate in building a society in which peace and prosperity prevail, securing the principles of equitable development based on the distribution of wealth, modernization of the society, empowerment of individuals and improvement of the quality of life. Translating that vision into reality and achievements requires the guidance path provided by the World Programme of Action for Youth, which helps decision makers in developing strategies and policies in the light of the 15 priority areas laid down in the World Programme of Action and its Supplement and grouped in three clusters with respective proposals for action as follows:

► First cluster: Youth in the global economy

■ **Hunger and poverty:**

(1) making farming more rewarding and life in agricultural areas more attractive; (2) skill-training for income-generation by young people; (3) land grants for young people; (4) cooperation between urban and rural youth in food production and distribution.

■ **Education:**

(1) improving the level of basic education, skill training and literacy among youth; (2) promoting cultural heritage and contemporary patterns of society; (3) promoting mutual respect and understanding and the ideals of peace, solidarity and tolerance among youth; (4) vocational and professional training; (5) promoting human rights education; (6) training for enterprise programmes; (7) developing infrastructure for training youth workers and youth leaders.

■ **Employment:**

(1) supporting and encouraging opportunities for self-employment; (2) providing employment opportunities for specific groups of young people; (3) establishing voluntary community services involving youth; (4) meeting the needs created by technological changes.

■ **Globalization:**

(1) managing the effects of globalization on youth; (2) promoting youth employment and skills development in the context of globalization; (3) establishing ways of monitoring systems to track the effects of globalization on youth.

► Second cluster: youth in civil society

■ **Environment:**

(1) integration of environmental education and training into education and training programmes; (2) facilitating the international dissemination of information on environmental issues to, and the use of environmentally sound technologies by, youth; (3) strengthening participation of youth in the protection, preservation and improvement of the environment; (4) enhancing the role of the media as a tool for widespread dissemination of environmental issues to youth.

■ **Leisure-time activities:**

(1) recognizing leisure-time activities as an integral part of youth policies and programmes; (2) recognizing and providing leisure-time activities as elements of educational programmes; (3) incorporating leisure-time activities in urban planning and rural development; (4) encouraging the media to promote youth understanding and awareness of all aspects of social integration, including tolerance and non-violent behaviour.

■ **Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making:**

(1) improving access of youth to information; (2) developing and/or strengthening opportunities for young people to learn their rights and responsibilities, and promoting

It includes an indicator for monitoring the progress achieved in the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education;

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases. It includes indicators for: (a) HIV prevalence among population aged between 15 and 24 years; (b) percentage of population aged 15-24 years with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS;

Youth in Contemporary Studies

Concepts related to the youth group evolved from stressing the importance of providing services to that group which is continuously growing in numbers and percentages in some Arab countries, including Iraq and Yemen, to a concept addressing the youth as a dynamic group associated, by a cause and effect relation, with the development process and the human life cycle changes affecting youth behaviour, which in turn are reflected in their performance and interaction at the individual and social levels. Those changes constitute a social, economic and security challenge that should be contained. Contemporary studies on youth are based on historical assumptions that the youth bulge phenomenon often has a negative contribution to societies already torn by unrests and political disarray. Those studies reflect the difficulties and problems of dealing with youth issues and related societal controversies.

In those studies, a qualitative concept associated youth, by a cause and effect relation, with unrest and political turmoil. The youth group is viewed in that concept as "youth bulge" causing instability, chaos and violence, and even terrorism, representing a threat to Governments and regimes. The concept is based on the idea that population stresses lead to scarce resources. The failure of Governments to meet the youth needs may prompt the youth to incite riots and violence. The studies based their interpretation of youth behaviour on mostly historical experiences associated with events that occurred in some European countries and some developing countries. Those studies examine arguments that correlate between the



following: (1) the increase in the youth bulge, and the presence of armed local conflicts; (2) the decline in economic growth, and the exacerbated unrests among youth which lead to conflicts; (3) the exacerbated unrests among youth in non-democratic countries which have a youth bulge, and the high risk of violence, for the youth are more open to action and change and to express their deprivation and grievance; (4) the inappropriate timing of the emergence and expansion of globalization, and the inability to assimilate the challenges posed and the opportunities bestowed by the youth bulge, in addition to the negative dimensions of globalization. Those factors together yielded deeper social, economic and political divides, the emergence of "anti-globalization", gender inequality and exclusion of such population groups as youth from contributing to and becoming involved in society. Therefore, those factors contributed to the spread and perpetuation of poverty in society.

Youth Demography, Life Cycle and Development Process

► Youth and life cycle

The demographic transition process, which is accompanied by the emergence of new age groups, is correlated with the various periods of human life, the implicated physiological and behavioural changes and the required care, services and development. In that context, the present bulletin addresses the correlation between youth, life cycle and development process and highlights the causes of that correlation.

The number of youth in the Arab countries was 38.8 million in 1985 and reached 59.1 million in 2000. It continued to rise in a way that may affect the economic and social development paths, reaching 65.7 million in 2005. The youth population is expected to rise up to 71.7 million in 2015 and

79.5 million in 2025. The increase in the number of young people aged 15 to 24 years which forms the phenomenon so called "youth bulge", is described as the highest growth in the youth population in the history of the region. The following table lists some demographic indicators of youth in ESCWA member countries in the period 1985-2025.

Life cycle comprises different periods with special characteristics: childhood when body and mind grow; adolescence when physiological developments cause behavioural dynamics dominated by the tendency to oppose and distinguish self from the habitual; and youth which is also characterized by behaviour dynamics and tendency to oppose. In addition to health requirements related to their physical development, youth have other needs related



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Demographic indicators for youth (15-24 years) in ESCWA member countries

Country	Youth population (thousands)			Youth as a percentage of total population			Youth as a percentage of working-age population		
	1985	2005	2025	1985	2005	2025	1985	2005	2025
Jordan	557	1 131	1 461	20.6	20.4	18.2	41.7	34.2	26.8
United Arab Emirates	206	669	865	14.6	16.3	13.8	21.2	20.6	17.3
Bahrain	67	117	134	16.2	16.1	13.8	24.5	22.8	19.1
Saudi Arabia	2 496	4 368	5 811	19.4	18.5	16.7	35.1	29.5	24.7
Syrian Arab Republic	2 109	4 383	5 063	19.5	23.2	18.4	40.6	38.5	27.5
Iraq	3 339	5 627	8 269	20.5	20.1	19.1	40.1	36.1	30.2
Oman	261	539	564	17.1	21.5	15.6	32.4	33.8	23.1
Palestine	358	726	1 356	20.1	19.3	20.7	40.4	37.8	34.7
Qatar	55	111	144	15.1	13.9	13.1	21.1	18.1	17.1
Kuwait	296	432	538	17.2	16.0	13.5	27.9	21.5	18.2
Lebanon	601	722	718	20.8	18.0	15.0	36.2	28.0	22.1
Egypt	9 198	15 153	17 043	18.7	20.8	17.3	34.3	33.6	26.5
Yemen	1 987	4 557	7 387	19.6	21.6	20.2	42.2	41.6	34.7
Total	21 530	38 535	49 354	19.2	20.4	17.9	36.2	33.9	27.5

to society. It is important to meet those needs taking into consideration behavioural factors characterizing that period, such as exaggerated audacity and inability to contain negative and rejective actions. It is not easy to draw a cut-off between the periods of physiological, mental, emotional and psychological developments in a person because they are intertwined. However, the changes occur in the early periods of life. Therefore, a positive attitude and productivity in adulthood is a result of the development process during childhood, adolescence and youth. This bulletin adopts the following definitions:

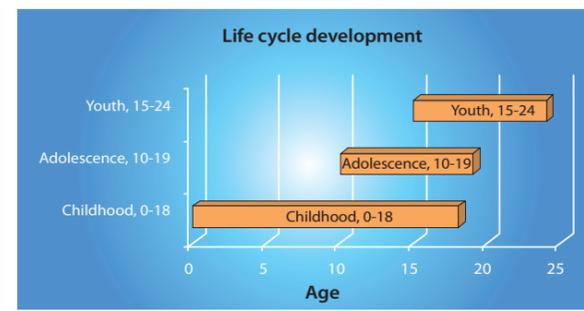
Childhood: the first years in human life characterized by fast physiological and mental developments. The United Nations defines childhood as the period when boys and girls are zero to 18 years old in the Arab countries, where the legal age for obtaining independence privileges is 18 years in most Arab countries.

Adolescents: the persons aged between 10 and 19 years. It is a sensitive period in which a person acquires the skills to become productive and capable of overcoming critical moments that life presents.

Youth: the persons aged between 15 and 24 years. It is described as being the transitional period from partial independence to the increased independence collateral to maturity. In that period a person faces facts of life, including

physiological changes, new expectations and aspirations, and new social relationships and experiences.

The youth cohort is characterized by four occupational and behavioural attributes, each of which has social, economic, political and cultural traits and requisites, which determine the future of development in the region. Those attributes are as follows: (1) being in the fertility age; (2) being economically active, thus increasing the number of new entrants to the labour market and exerting pressure on such social institutions as labour market and health and education systems; (3) being a potential for turmoil and instability in the context of social and economic disparity and deprivation; (4) being transitional since individuals shift from resource consumers to wealth producers.



Arab Youth and Development

The youth group in the Arab countries is central to human development, especially in the areas of participation as a right for every young male and female, social integration, education and training, and labour and economy. The development process attempts to organize the relationship between youth and society through strategic interventions taking into account the investment and the human aspects. It represents a mechanism for striking the required social balance between age groups. The United Nations specified interventions for striking balances, reducing social exclusion of youth and containing youth dynamics in a positive manner. Those interventions are listed under 15 priority areas in the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. "The World Programme of Action for Youth is significant because it provides a cross-sectoral standard relating to both policymaking and programme development and delivery. It serves as a model for integrated actions, at all levels, to address more effectively problems experienced by young people in various conditions and to enhance their participation in society." The following are some of the priority areas:

► **Education:** education is considered an important factor in development. The World Programme of Action for Youth, in addition to the concern for providing basic education for all, focuses on the concern for "the quality of education, its relevance to employment and its usefulness in assisting young people in the transition to full adulthood, active citizenship and productive and gainful employment". According to the World Youth Report 2007, "increased education is not necessarily leading to more or better jobs for young people" and "the quality of education in some countries of the region has been considerably affected by armed conflict".

► **Employment:** "The crisis of youth unemployment deprives young people of the opportunity to secure independent housing or the accommodations necessary for the establishment of families and participation in the life of society". Young people are among the most severely affected by new challenges as well as new opportunities for employment imposed by evolving economic trends, including globalization and advances in technology and communications. In that context and as an example, the World Youth Report 2007 has reached the following conclusions in regard to the status of youth in Middle Eastern and North African countries:

- Unemployment is a problem related basically to young people more than a problem under the overall populations

issues, for young people represent about half the total unemployed population;

- The transition of young people from education to employment is marked by limited available jobs, low wages, incompatibility of capacities with labour market and social and economic exclusion;
- Young women face several difficulties resulting from the intersection of age and gender factors, which limits the areas of their participation in the economic life;
- The countries of the region have the highest youth unemployment rates in the world and the lowest youth participation in the labour force at 40 per cent. Those rates mean that one of every three young people obtains employment;
- The Middle East and North Africa regions have recorded over the past decade an increase of the share of youth who are employed, compared to other regions;
- Youth internal and external migration in search of employment is increasing;
- Young women suffer from marginalization especially with respect to employment opportunities;
- Gender inequality in social security systems delays girls' economic independence and self sufficiency;
- Government intervention through social policies is essential and imperative to help young people enter the labour market.

► **Health:** the World Programme of Action for Youth is concerned with youth health and aims at improving health conditions and strengthening a secure and healthy living environment.

► **Participation** in development: under the priority entitled "Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making" the World Programme of Action for Youth stipulates that "the capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future" and that any efforts are "conditioned by enabling the economic, social and political participation of youth, as a matter of critical importance".

Future Vision and General Framework for Youth Policies

A special correlation exists between youth and development, one which requires due attention and adequate policies and strategies to organize the relation between youth and society and overcome the social exclusion of that group. At the international level, the World Programme of Action for Youth

to the Year 2000 and Beyond recognized the importance of developing national youth policies with long term goals and medium and short term programmes. It invited Governments which have not yet developed and adopted an integrated national policy for youth to do so as a means for addressing