

TODAY'S YOUTH

Are Preparing for Tomorrow's Challenges

The size of the world's youth population is now an urgent matter. Or perhaps it's a great opportunity.

ChildFund can see it only as *both* — as an urgent opportunity, because we believe in the potential of children and youth to change the world.

Young people between ages 15 and 24 now account for 18 percent of the world's population, and 87 percent of them are in developing countries, where 85 percent of working people are self-employed. With an unemployment rate nearly double that of adults, youth are hardest hit by the ongoing global economic crisis as they struggle to break into the job market and start a productive life.

VOICES

"I could see the difference in my parents' attitude before and after I was active in the ChildFund Indonesia organization. They used to underestimate me because I was only a child to them, but now they respect my opinions and even seek them. I'm also changed because I now understand that my voice needs to be heard, and if they don't want to hear it, I should speak louder."

— Desi, age 16, ChildFund Indonesia

ChildFund has long worked to provide vocational training for young people living in poverty. But in recent years, it has become clear that skills acquisition, the traditional measure of success, is not enough to carry youths from dependence to employment.

We owe this wisdom — and even our ways of working — to children and youth themselves.

WHEN WE ASKED CHILDREN HOW

they experience poverty, our long-held, widely accepted perception of poverty — as material deprivation — expanded to include two additional strands: exclusion from opportunity and vulnerability to circumstance. The three are intertwined, and their effects vary according to where children are developmentally and geographically.

The disproportionate youth population presents a potentially devastating example of how these three strands function. Most of these young people live in developing countries. With few jobs available, the sheer numbers of youth exclude them from opportunity, which compounds deprivation. Thus, at loose ends, youth are vulnerable to drug use, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, recruitment as child soldiers and more.

This group of Ecuadorean youth is acquiring skills in news reporting, while at the same time gaining leadership abilities — all part of an initiative to provide viable methods of earning a living.

Throughout our 72-year history of working to lift children out of poverty, we have seen again and again how what happens in the first years of life is the cornerstone of healthy development. We also know that development is multifaceted — physical, cognitive and social — and that our programs must address all three. For youth in particular, our interventions are geared toward supporting reproductive health knowledge and HIV/AIDS prevention, helping them prepare for employment and fostering the skills necessary for engagement and leadership in their communities. While each of the three interventions is valuable in itself, the value multiplies when all three are integrated.

IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, NEARLY

60 percent of girls will be mothers by age 25. Their ability to make educated choices and avail themselves of youth-friendly health services can only increase their chances of becoming contributing members of society — in a sense, closing the door on reproductive risk-taking in order to open doors to opportunity.

Youth association and civic engagement programs can go a long way toward



steering youth away from risky behaviors. In Dominica, for example, a youth association collaborated to create an Internet café that provides not only a safe hub for community gathering and socializing, but also income that is funneled into activities such as hiking and field trips. "I really appreciate the fact that ChildFund is helping us channel our efforts and energy into something positive to help our community," says Srey, 17, the group's treasurer and a college student. "My parents are very proud and amazed at the fact that at a young age we can manage all this."

When youth work together, it's good for them *and* for their communities. One ChildFund-supported committee of children and youth in India went door to door in their village, reaching out to parents and talking up the importance

of school attendance — this increased school enrollment dramatically. In Zambia, a children's committee took its concerns about underage drinking in their community all the way to the area's Member of Parliament. Laws were changed.

WE SET A PRECEDENT FOR

ourselves by going to children to learn about poverty. Since then, we have continued asking young people about their experience — of poverty, of our programs, of their own successes. Sometimes what we learn surprises us, and not

always in the way we hope.

Lloyd McCormick, ChildFund's Regional Technical Adviser–Youth Development for Africa, found one example of this in a recent large-scale youth survey ChildFund performed in 10 countries in Africa, eight in the Americas and six in Asia. "Youth's maturity level on civic engagement and other issues is surprising, but *not* about the economy and their expectations for the future," he says. "Employers we talk to say youth don't have a realistic expectation — they don't realize that they have to work their way up."

Because most unemployed youth in



Today, youth constitute **25%** of the world's working population and **47%** of the world's unemployed. Their numbers are not expected to peak before 2035.

developing countries reside in rural areas, where there is little if any formal employment structure, they must become entrepreneurs. But the ability to produce something does not a business person make. McCormick recalls visiting some graduates of vocational

training in Uganda. "We found six young women sitting in the village with their sewing machines, waiting for people to come to them," he says. "Nobody had worked with them on how to promote their business and provide good customer service."

Once again, an integrated approach is key. McCormick cites one of ChildFund's programs in The Gambia, in which we have partnered with Junior Achievement Worldwide to implement a youth entrepreneurship and economics education program using JA's educational materials and technical support, a strong complement to the youth association work already established there. Youth also meet successful people in their communities and hear about the hard work that got them there. To date, 406 youth have completed JA training in The Gambia.

One of them, 24-year-old Tida, now has a business selling clothing, cosmetics, shoes and other items. "I have learned and experienced the banking system, business management skills, negotiation and conflict resolution and record keeping," she says.

Friends thought she was a little crazy when they saw her walking through rain to go to training. Now, she says, "Others are asking when will be the next training, because they want to be part of the program."

ChildFund Senegal has piloted a JA program as well. In Ecuador, Kenya and The Gambia, ChildFund partners with the non-profit organization Aflatoun, using its curriculum to teach social skills and financial literacy to children ages 6 to 14. A Youth Agriculture Marketing Project in Zambia sought to increase youth income levels by using a multifaceted approach that taught crop, goat, poultry and pig production; agribusiness; organizational development; and contract negotiation. As early as the midterm project evaluation, the youths involved were already earning enough income to visibly improve the overall quality of life in their village.

WITH OUR LONG EXPERIENCE AND our many ongoing programs worldwide, ChildFund is uniquely positioned at the forefront of the new field of study that is youth employment. Drawing on learning from youth and adult livelihood projects as well as best practices in the industry, ChildFund has recently crafted a Youth Employment Model that gathers into one package perhaps the most deliberately comprehensive approach to youth livelihood to date. Its standard of success: long-term, non-exploitative employment at a decent wage.

The plan, which can be applied in any type of trade, is built upon five key components that ChildFund has already applied in various combinations in many effective programs: a market analysis

Youth in ChildFund programs are learning skills that are viable in their particular communities. This Sri Lankan youth is practicing on a lathe.

VOICES

"Most in the [ChildFund Village Savings and Loan] group have small businesses such as selling charcoal, food stuff, clothes. Some have established retail stores. They use the funds to increase their stock. Some use the funds for school fees. We charge 10 percent interest. After one month, borrowers have to repay with interest. We divide the profit from interest among the group.

"Only one person hasn't been able to pay her loan back in time. She had a death in the family, so we allowed her to pay the following month instead. She paid it back with interest.

"I borrowed money because I have a bodaboda business [motor-cycle taxi]. I used the loan to repair my bike. I also once borrowed money for rent."

— George, age 26,
member of a ChildFund
Village Savings and
Loan group in
Kenya



conducted by youth but guided by mentors, technical skills training and production support, basic business skills training, life skills training and extended mentoring and follow-up. A unique factor is that the young people are placed in producer groups in which individuals all produce the same item. In short, they develop microenterprises that generate an aggregate volume of a size and quality to attract a bulk buyer, which gives them a point of entry into the local value chain. Group members are paid individually according to the proportion of the total that they produce.

Dev Miller, ChildFund's senior specialist in microenterprise development, who crafted the program model with McCormick, describes how this could play out once the market analysis has helped the group settle on an activity likely to produce income, such as honey. "You might train youth to build honey hives, and then bring in an expert to show them how to render the honey and



Sending youth into the world with a viable skill is critical. These youth are learning business skills in selling charcoal, a product much in demand in Senegal.

package it," she says. "By having all of the group produce, it makes it profitable to have the buyer — maybe it's an exporter in the capital city — send a truck to the region and pick up a volume shipment of quality honey."

The group mentor facilitates market linkages, identifies potential buyers and helps the youth negotiate price. Group members maintain the relationship with the buyer and get a far better price than they would if they were to go individually to the local market.

"If you can help an 18- or 19-year-old develop the skills they need to become economically active," says Miller, "you have influenced some 40 years of a productive work life. So it's a good investment, and it's also the right thing to do."

Now look back at the numbers cited at the beginning of this report, and multiply by 40. The potential is enormous, and ChildFund is working to actualize it at every opportunity. ■

SCORING PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

The Youth Employment and Well-Being Scorecard

If the worldwide emphasis on youth livelihoods is comparatively new, then the area of monitoring and evaluation of youth enterprise programs is even more nascent. Knowing how critical it is to measure the effectiveness of our programming, ChildFund has developed the Youth Employment and Well-Being Scorecard.

Created with funding from the Brinson Foundation, the 14-question survey is a simple, cost-effective monitoring tool for ChildFund's youth employment and livelihood enhancement interventions. Its simplicity renders it flexible enough to apply across diverse types of programming. At the 2008 Global Youth Enterprise Conference, the high level of interest among the 350 participants gave early validation to the effort.

The survey is designed to assess change not just in income but in overall welfare. This encompasses preparedness for the workforce and parenthood, health, physical well-being and

capacities for leadership and social engagement. As a holistic measure of well-being, the Scorecard echoes ChildFund's integrated approach to programming.

At press time, staff training on the Scorecard has been conducted in four countries, and baseline surveys have been completed in Senegal and Ethiopia. In Senegal, a follow-up survey performed a year after the baseline showed a 13 percent increase in the average overall score of the participants, youth clients of our microfinance partner IMCEC (Institution Mutualiste Communautaire d'Epargne et de Credit). The improvement is significant in light of current economic conditions.

The Scorecard, which provides immediate feedback that can be quickly applied on the ground, will be an invaluable resource in ChildFund's continuing efforts to offer the programs most likely to improve the lives of children and youth.