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UN report outlines benefits of empowering women and youth in poor countries



UNFPA Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin

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Women and youth have the capacity to spur economic growth and reduce poverty in the world's least development country if given access to education, employment and health, including family planning services, the United Nations Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) says in a report [unveiled](#) today.

Girls are often overlooked when investments in social services, including education and health, are made, according to the report, entitled [Population Dynamics and Poverty in the LDCs: Challenges and Opportunities for Development and Poverty Reduction](#), made public at the ongoing Fourth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in Istanbul, Turkey.

“Empowering women and girls starts with improved access to reproductive health care and family planning,” said Babatunde Osotimehin, UNFPA’s Executive Director. “Too many teenage girls become mothers, too many die giving birth, too many drop out of school, too many are abused and discriminated against in their daily lives.”

“When girls are educated, healthy and can avoid child marriage, unintended pregnancy and HIV, they can contribute fully to their societies’ battles against poverty,” said Dr. Osotimehin. “In a world of 7 billion, every person, especially women and girls, should enjoy human rights and human dignity, and have the opportunity to make the most of their potential.”

He stressed that investing in reproductive health services empowers women to make decisions on the spacing and number of their children, and increases their opportunities for employment.

“The investments would also reduce maternal death and lead to smaller families with more resources to pour into the health and education of each child. This virtuous cycle helps families, communities and nations escape poverty,” said Dr. Osotimehin.

In an interview with [UN Radio](#), Dr. Osotimehin stressed that a link can be made between high population growth and poverty.

“What we at the UNFPA advocate with governments is that they should empower women, ensure that girls get good education so they are enlightened to make choices about their lives, and can also ensure that they can have the number of children they can look after,” he said.

He also pointed that governments can take advantage of youthful populations to accelerate economic growth by creating job opportunities and supporting their entrepreneurial skills. “Going forward that is my advice and advocacy to governments [in] these kinds of situations,” he added.

The world’s population is projected to reach 7 billion on 31 October, of which 855 million will be living in the LDCs, many of which continue to face major challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)).

The LDCs have high infant mortality rates, child and maternal death and high HIV prevalence as a result of lack of reproductive health care, including family planning.

High fertility rates means that the number of people living in LDCs will double to 1.7 billion by 2050, making it more difficult for those countries to increase or maintain per capita spending on essential services, such as health and education.

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