



## **Don't Let Them Down**

The largest ever generation of adolescents is approaching adulthood in a world that is changing rapidly. Many of these young people are facing new opportunities and challenges as they grow and develop with the love and encouragement of those around them.

Unfortunately, far too many adolescents, especially in the developing world, are having to deal with the harsh realities of poverty, isolation and lack of support. Many have to focus on survival rather than education. At a time when their bodies and minds are changing and developing, they may be facing violence, sexual abuse or coping with sexually transmitted infections such as HIV. For young women, this time can be especially difficult as a result of discrimination, limited access to education, child marriage, early pregnancy and unsafe abortion.

Young people all over the world need to be able to make informed choices and have a right to responsible and fulfilling experiences when it comes to sex and relationships. Yet limited access to youth-friendly services and information, lack of comprehensive sex education and cultural taboos provide acute barriers to realising these rights and are putting lives at risk.

The world has recognised the right of all people to access appropriate information and services, yet sexual and reproductive health remains drastically under-funded. An extremely vulnerable group within this already marginalised sector, adolescents and their sexual health are shamefully far down the international agenda.

Young people need an enabling and encouraging environment in which their concerns are listened to, their needs provided for and their rights respected. Governments and international aid agencies must recognise that young people are active agents of their own lives and with the right support will be able to take positive action and empower themselves as well as their peers themselves and their peers. Programmes, projects and policies for young people in both the developed and developing world have proven to be more effective if young people are actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation processes. The time has come to provide that support. No society can afford to lose such a resource.