

# “Let Girls be Girls not Mothers”

## UNFPA SUPPORT TO THE REDUCTION OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY IN SIERRA LEONE

### The Context

In Sierra Leone, teenage pregnancy is one of the more pervasive problems affecting the health, social and economic progress of women and girls. The issue to address is reflected in the following national statistics:

- 34% of all pregnancies occur amongst teenage girls (SLDHS 2008),
- 40% of maternal death occur as a result of teenage pregnancy (MICS 2010) and
- The untimely pregnancy of young girls is ranked as one of the main reasons for them dropping out of school (UNICEF 2008).

Adolescent pregnancy is dangerous, with serious long-term health consequences for the young mother and the baby. But the impacts of adolescent pregnancy are felt far beyond the walls of the family home. It also has a demonstrable impact on the social and economic development of communities and countries.

UNFPA's contribution to the advancement of adolescents and youth is anchored in five strategic pillars:

- Enable evidence-based advocacy for programme development and implementation
- Promote comprehensive sexuality education
- Build capacity for SRH service delivery
- Take initiatives to reach marginalized adolescents and youth, especially Girls
- Promote youth leadership and participation

### National Strategy

To address this problem, a multi-sectoral committee was set up under the leadership of H.E. the President, involving five Ministries as well as all concerned stakeholders (UN-Agencies, NGOs, civil society), to develop a comprehensive strategy. This initiative presents a holistic approach to teenage pregnancy, covering sectors as various as

- Health,
- Education,
- Social Protection, Gender or
- Youth Employment and Empowerment.



The high table at the Launching of the National Strategy, including H.E. the President, the First Lady of Nigeria, Ministers, Development Partners and key national figures

On 13 May 2013, the President of Sierra Leone officially launched the National Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy. This document presents a multisectoral response to early childbearing by mobilizing all concerned actors (Government, National Services, Development partners and civil society) according to a coordinated and innovative approach. Through integrated interventions of all partners, the strategy intends to have reduced the adolescent fertility rate to 110/1000 by 2015. This document has been identified as a national priority and is a Flagship Program in the Agenda for Prosperity (2013-2014).



Teenage pregnancy, one of the most pervasive problems affecting the future of girls in Sierra Leone

## UNFPA's Involvement and support

Since the Government mobilized partners to work on the formulation of a strategy, UNFPA has been providing technical and operational support to ensure that the National Strategy responds to the expectations of the Government and of the Stakeholders. After the launching of the Strategy, UNFPA has provided direct support to its implementation and coordination and is now one of the most important contributors. In particular, UNFPA provided support to establishing the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy and recently seconded an international consultant to the Secretariat to assist in the coordination of the Strategy. UNFPA is also directly involved in the development of the M&E plan and Behavior Change Communication Strategy, which will be instrumental to the success of national efforts against Teenage Pregnancy.

## UNFPA's Commitment: Realizing the Full Potential of Adolescents and Youth

Today's adolescents and youth are shaping social and economic development, challenging social norms and values, and building the foundation of the world's future. While notable progress has been made, many adolescents — especially girls — are denied the investments and opportunities that they need to realize their full potential.

For many young people in Sierra Leone, puberty brings not only changes to their bodies but also new vulnerabilities to human rights abuses, particularly in the arenas of sexuality, marriage and childbearing.

### **Facts on Teenage Pregnancy**

- ✎ *1 in every 3 teenage girls in Sierra Leone is pregnant.*
- ✎ *Child bearing starts at very young ages, a few as young as 9 years.*
- ✎ *40% of maternal deaths occur as a result of TP.*
- ✎ *Teenage pregnancy is one of the most common reasons for them dropping out of school*
- ✎ *71% of teenage mothers are reported to be illiterate*
- ✎ *94.7% of married girls (15 to 19) are not using contraception.*
- ✎ *Complication from pregnancy is the leading cause of death among adolescent girls.*



UNFPA supported activities: Community sensitization on Youth-friendly SRH services