

Momentum

MAY 2012



IMPROVING EDUCATION

In Burkina Faso, the Population Council works to improve the educational progress of girls.

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PROFILES: RANIA ROUSHDY, COUNCIL ECONOMIST, AND SARAH FRIEDMAN, COUNCIL DONOR

CONSIDER THESE NUMBERS*:

OVER 40%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 10-14 IN BURKINA FASO, ETHIOPIA, MALI, AND SENEGAL ARE NOT IN SCHOOL.

3 OUT OF 4

OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 10-14 IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES HAVE NO EDUCATION.

12% OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN LIVE IN EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA, AND CENTRAL ASIA, WHERE **5.5%** OF THE WORLD'S OUT-OF-SCHOOL PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN RESIDE.

45% OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN LIVE IN SOUTH ASIA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, WHERE **70%** OF THE WORLD'S OUT-OF-SCHOOL PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN RESIDE.

23 → 9.5 MILLION

THE DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL GIRLS IN SOUTH ASIA BETWEEN 1999 AND 2008.

25 → 17 MILLION

THE DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL GIRLS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA BETWEEN 1999 AND 2008.

95 vs. 9

NUMBER OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS PER STUDENT IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC VS. NUMBER OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS PER STUDENT IN SWEDEN.

8% vs. 90%

PERCENT OF GIRLS AGED 10-14 WHO HAVE COMPLETED PRIMARY SCHOOL IN NIGER VS. GIRLS AGED 10-14 WHO HAVE COMPLETED PRIMARY SCHOOL IN SOUTH AFRICA.



*Sources: UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics: "Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children"; USAID Produced by Education Development Center: "Out-of-School Youth in Developing Countries"; The World Bank: "Edstats—Education Statistics."

IMPROVING EDUCATION SO CHILDREN AND SOCIETIES CAN PROSPER



by Peter J. Donaldson

Outside of the family, schools are the main place where young people learn the skills they will need to succeed as adults. Education acts as a “social vaccine,” protecting individuals from child marriage and unintended pregnancy, improving their health and later their children’s health. It gives them skills to earn a living when they reach adulthood. Education plays a major role in national economic development.

Progress has been made toward meeting Millennium Development Goal number 2—Achieve Universal Primary Education—but the quality of that education is often inadequate. This issue of *Momentum* describes our efforts to improve the quality of schooling and to keep more children, especially girls, in school.

The Population Council generates data that governments and school administrators need to guide decisions about where to invest scarce resources. In Malawi, the Population Council



PHOTO BY ZELEMAY PRODUCTIONS

is conducting a longitudinal study examining aspects of school quality (page 8). In Bangladesh, we are studying whether school-to-work transition programs can improve girls’ opportunities and reduce child marriage (page 10). In South Africa, we are evaluating a school program that aims to reduce HIV risk by strengthening peer support networks, increasing knowledge about HIV and reproductive health, and building skills in managing their limited funds (page 4). In Egypt, we recently disseminated our findings from a large-scale survey of young people’s views on education, labor force participation, health, and other economic and political issues (page 6).

And in rural Pakistan, we are exploring the effect of school quality on parents’ decisions to enroll their girls, so that we can generate ideas that increase the number of girls who attend and graduate from school (page 12).

Also in this issue, Population Council donor Sarah Friedman shares how a recent “eye-opening and inspiring” trip to visit Council projects in Ethiopia—including one that works with priests from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to prevent female genital mutilation—motivated her to support our work. You will also meet Rania Roushdy, an economist in the Council’s Cairo office, who describes her hopes for Egypt’s future after the revolution and her pride in Council projects like *Ishraq*, which is giving

adolescent girls a chance to return to formal school.

Your help allows us to conduct research that analyzes factors affecting enrollment and retention decisions, and thus changes the way people think about key elements of school access and quality.

Our findings help us deliver solutions that get kids back into schools where they can build support networks, knowledge, and skills to stay healthy and prosper as adults. Thank you for your support.

TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTH AFRICA TO MANAGE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND HEALTH CHALLENGES

“ It’s just that when you learn about goals, it becomes clear what you need to do, how to shape your life, so you can achieve something in the end.”
— female student in *Siyakha Nentsha*

Almost 90 percent of households in KwaZulu-Natal receive some kind of social assistance.

THE PROBLEM In KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), the province with the highest HIV prevalence in South Africa, young people face overwhelming challenges. Many have no access to health care, are at high risk for early pregnancy, and face limited employment prospects. More than one-third of students have lost at least one parent, and nearly one-fourth say that their households do not have enough money for food and other basics. *Siyakha Nentsha* (“Building with Young People”) works with disadvantaged adolescents who are poor and face the likely prospect of losing parents and teachers to AIDS.

THE PROGRESS The Population Council is conducting research with the KZN


Department of Education and the Isihlangu Health and Development Agency to design, implement, and evaluate a program that serves young people in need of HIV education, social support and financial education. The facilitator-led sessions included modules on self-awareness, human rights, HIV and AIDS, reproductive health, planning for the future, saving money, and basic principles for starting a business. The program is brought to boys and girls in grades 10 and 11 by teams of trained facilitators from the local community. Seven schools and 39 classrooms participated in the evaluation. After one year of *Siyakha Nentsha*, boys were more likely to have remained sexually abstinent than those not in the program, and those who did have sex

reported having fewer sexual partners, while girls reported feeling higher self-esteem and greater confidence in their ability to obtain a condom. Both sexes showed an increase in access to public assistance programs and financial and health services. Many guardians reported that their children were doing better in school and were starting to prepare for their livelihoods or advanced education.

THE IMPACT Programs such as *Siyakha Nentsha* can provide young people with valuable skills that enhance their ability to cope with the stresses of growing up in challenging environments. There are few comprehensive and interactive interventions like this one and even fewer that reach

adolescent boys and girls together. The research findings have been shared through community forums with students, teachers, parents, and community leaders in KZN, at conferences in South Africa and internationally, and are also being submitted to peer-reviewed academic journals. The Department of Education in KZN and the Population Council are discussing ways to scale up the program in more schools.

DONORS AND PARTNERS Accudata, Department for International Development of the UK via the ABBA Research Programme Consortium (ABBA RPC), Economic and Social Research Council of the UK, HEARD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Isihlangu Health and Development Agency



IMPROVING EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF EGYPT'S YOUNG PEOPLE

“ The Egyptian government needs to invest more in education to improve access to school for all children. ”

— Nahla Abdel-Tawab,
Egypt Country Director

In Egypt, more than two million young people are out of school and the unemployment rate among people age 15–29 is 15.8 percent.

THE PROBLEM The population of Egypt has a marked “youth bulge,” meaning that the proportion of young people is significantly larger than older age groups. If the right investments are made in the health, education, and well-being of young people, this population structure is a “demographic window” that can yield a bonus of high economic growth. According to the World Bank, a mismatch between what Egyptian students learn in school and what the labor market needs is a major contributor to high unemployment and sluggish national growth. Without investing in and improving education in Egypt, including making school equally available to boys and girls, Egypt could miss this historic opportunity for a “demographic dividend.”

THE PROGRESS To provide solid data to guide effective policies, the Population Council conducted a nationally-representative survey of 15,000 Egyptian young people age 10–29 on a variety of topics, including education. Twenty-seven percent of the poorest females and 7 percent of the poorest males have never entered school. The highest proportions of children who never entered school were found in rural Upper Egypt, where 22 percent of all girls, more than 800,000 individuals, have never entered. More than half of young people who never went to school said it was because their parents disapproved or that customs and traditions prevented it. The survey also found that young people believe that Egyptian schools deliver low-quality education that is irrelevant to the labor market.

More than half of vocational secondary graduates believe that their education did not adequately prepare them for their job.

THE IMPACT Nahla Abdel-Tawab, Population Council country director in Egypt, believes the Egyptian government should adopt more student-centered approaches to teaching, which encourage students to be active, responsible learners. In other countries, such approaches have produced better school outcomes, suggesting a path for Egypt to follow. Instability in the Egyptian government makes catalyzing policy change a challenge. However, Council researchers have been using survey findings to design several interventions for marginalized girls. Researchers from local universities and

institutions are using the survey for their own analyses, “because it provides the latest information on youth,” says Population Council researcher Rania Roushdy. In late 2012, the Council will be fielding a follow-up survey to gather crucial information about the lives of young people in Egypt following the dramatic political changes in the country.

DONORS AND PARTNERS Canadian International Development Agency, Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, The Ford Foundation, Information and Decision Support Center, National Center for Exams and Educational Evaluation, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations Development Fund for Women, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, The World Bank

CONFRONTING HIGH RATES OF ABSENTEEISM IN MALAWI'S SCHOOLS

The Council's research is changing the way donors and opinion leaders think about keeping students in school in Malawi.



PHOTO BY PAUL HEWETT

There is little evidence that increased enrollment has had a positive impact on important schooling outcomes—school retention, grade attainment and competencies, and skills acquisition.

THE PROBLEM School enrollment in Malawi increased enormously following the elimination of primary school fees in 1994. As more girls remain in school past menarche, concern has arisen that the lack of access to sanitary supplies and toilet facilities at school may hinder attendance. As a result, provision of toilets and menstrual supplies to schools is seen to be a promising area for reduction of absenteeism in developing countries.

THE PROGRESS Since 2007, the Population Council has been conducting a longitudinal study of adolescents in rural Malawi. Data collected include information on students' educational status,

performance, and schooling experiences as well as individual, family, and community resources that affect school quality and experience. Using survey data from interviews with teachers and over 1700 students, Council researchers came to several conclusions about absenteeism.

First, absenteeism is very high; approximately 20 percent of all students reported having been absent on a given school day. Second, despite the assumption that absenteeism among female students is greater than among males, girls are no more likely to miss school than boys. Also, neither toilet availability nor access to water is associated with an absence

during a girl's last menstrual period, which indicates that access to sanitary supplies is unlikely to markedly increase female attendance. Among those who were absent, approximately one-third of boys and girls indicated that the reason was sickness. An additional one-quarter of boys and one-fifth of girls were absent because they had to do chores, watch siblings, or run errands.

THE IMPACT Previously, many drew the conclusion that providing sanitary pads and more latrines would help solve the problem of girls' absenteeism. Now that the causes have been better defined, governments, communities, and school administrators can address the actual

barriers to students' attendance, such as illness or work burdens. While this project will follow adolescents through 2013, the Council is sharing available results with the government, communities, schools, and parents to strengthen girls' and boys' school performance in Malawi.

DONORS AND PARTNERS Centre for Educational Research and Training—University of Malawi/Zomba, College of Medicine—University of Malawi/Blantyre, Department for International Development of the UK, Department of Sociology—University of Wisconsin, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Invest in Knowledge, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, The Spencer Foundation

IMPROVING SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITIONS FOR GIRLS IN BANGLADESH



The Population Council's research has sparked a change in strategy at the national level for school-to-work transitions for girls.

According to Population Council research, 68 percent of Bangladeshi women age 20–24 were married before the legal minimum age of 18.

THE PROBLEM Girls and women in Bangladesh have benefited from rapid social change over the past two decades. Today, more girls are completing primary school than boys, birth rates have dropped by half, and one-third of women belong to self-help or credit groups. Despite this progress, girls consistently leave school once they have a marriage contract. The Council has evaluated initiatives that offer girls incentives to stay in school and to delay marriage. Examples include stipends for attending and maintaining a passing grade point average for girls and/or their families; female mentorships to teach personal finance; creating safe spaces where girls meet with mentors to receive life skills, education, and support;

and financial literacy training. However, these initiatives have not led to delayed early marriage.

THE PROGRESS Population Council researchers are working with policymakers in Bangladesh to provide the evidence to understand what interventions might successfully delay marriage, since education incentives had limited success. Shifting the focus from education, the Council is collaborating with local NGOs to implement improved skills training and school-to-work programs. Women now represent the majority of the garment industry labor force. By organizing safe spaces where young women can learn marketable skills—such as computer

literacy, a foreign language, and hand-craft skills—these women are able to find remunerative work. This changes how their contributions to the family and home are viewed, improving girls' opportunities and their control over decisions such as marriage.

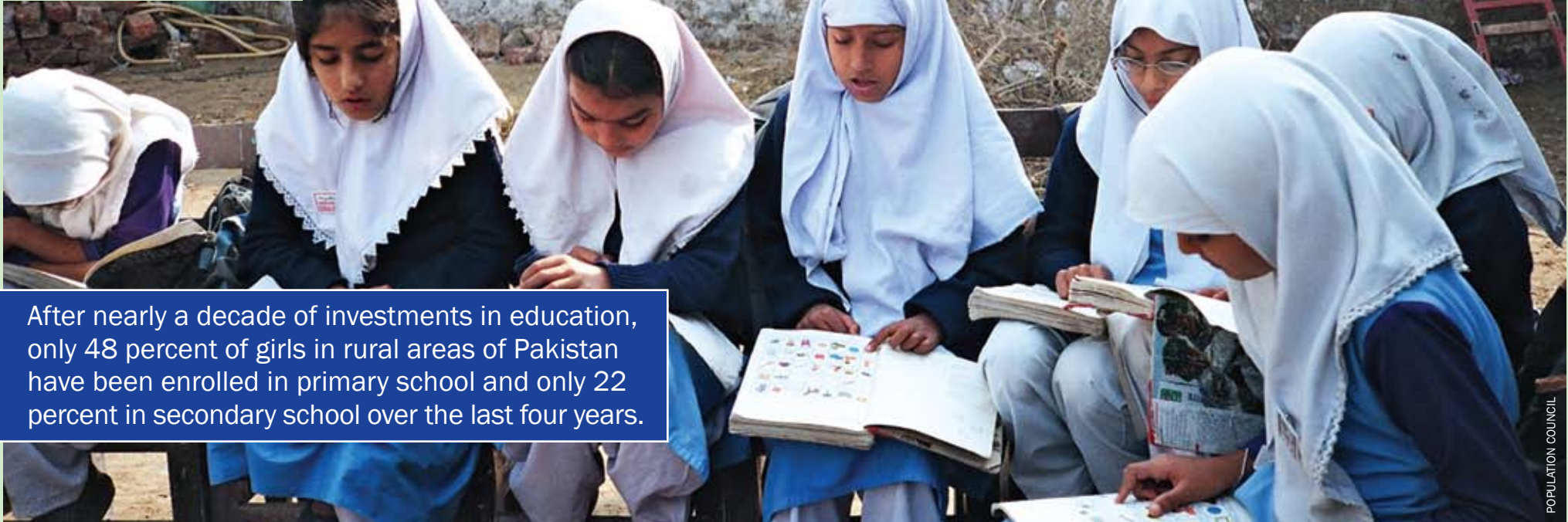
THE IMPACT The Population Council's research has demonstrated the impact that providing livelihoods skills and financial literacy training can have on school-to-work transitions for girls. Sajeda Amin, a Council researcher and expert in girls' schooling and social development, will write the Youth Strategy Paper for BRAC, one of the most influential organizations in the country, emphasizing how school-to-work skills training can play a major role in delaying marriage.

The Council's Bangladesh country director, Ubaidur Rob, has begun workshops with members of the Bangladeshi Parliament to change policies for delaying marriage. By promoting these new interventions to delay marriage for young girls, the Council is having a national impact.

DONORS AND PARTNERS Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), BRAC, Department for International Development of the UK, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B), The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Marie Stopes–Bangladesh, Nari Maitree and We Can Campaign, Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands, Levi Strauss Foundation, Underprivileged Children's Education Program, UNICEF Dhaka

SOLUTIONS TO INCREASE GIRLS' EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Different strategies are required to increase enrollment in primary compared with secondary schools.



After nearly a decade of investments in education, only 48 percent of girls in rural areas of Pakistan have been enrolled in primary school and only 22 percent in secondary school over the last four years.

THE PROBLEM While free and compulsory education for children 5-16 years old is ensured through Pakistan's Constitution, it is up to provincial governments to enact their own legislation to determine how the constitutional right to education is put into action. Stark provincial and economic differentials underscore the need to identify local solutions to increase girls' school participation. Provincial governments need sound evidence about interventions that work so that they can efficiently allocate resources to the most effective programs

that will boost girls' schooling, particularly in rural areas.

THE PROGRESS In 2009, the Population Council launched a study aimed at identifying strategies for increasing girls' enrollment. The study found that different approaches were required to increase enrollment in primary compared with secondary schools. The most important factor to increase primary school enrollment was proximity of the school and the choice of schools available to communities. For secondary school, proximity alone was not

sufficient; schools must be of good quality to justify the loss of support at home that girls would otherwise provide. Flexible class schedules, stipends for poorer families, and community influence over teacher selection and school operations resulted in increased recruitment of girls in school. Moreover, to increase the demand for schooling, non-farm employment training for young women in rural areas was needed.

THE IMPACT The Council has presented these findings to policymakers and program implementers, and our final

report, *The Power of Girls' Schooling for Young Women's Empowerment and Reproductive Health*, draws attention to specific programs that successfully increased girls' enrollment in both primary and secondary schools. Council staff members in Pakistan shared evidence with policymakers about specific areas where they need to invest to increase access to girls' education.

DONORS AND PARTNERS David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Society for the Advancement of Education

A CONVERSATION WITH

RANIA ROUSHDY

ECONOMIST IN THE POPULATION COUNCIL'S
CAIRO OFFICE



Egypt is in a moment of great possibility. What are your hopes for the future?

Right after the revolution, my views would have been much more optimistic regarding the future of Egypt than they are today with so much instability. However, the fact that Egyptians, particularly young people, have regained their political voice is a great achievement. Before the revolution, no one would have been able to go to Tahrir Square and demand their rights. I am hopeful that young people will continue to demand their rights, and use their voice to shape their own future.

What has been your most rewarding experience since working at the Population Council?

The times when I feel that we are really making a difference in someone's life. The *Ishraq* project, a second-chance program for out-of-school girls in rural Upper Egypt, certainly changes the lives of many adolescent girls, providing them with literacy, life skills, financial education, and the chance to rejoin formal schooling. Also, many young researchers in the region benefited from our research capacity-building projects. We invited young researchers to develop a proposal and mentored them to develop research papers on gender and work-related issues. We provided training on data management and analysis of large surveys using advanced statistical packages and techniques unfamiliar to many researchers in the region. Many submitted their papers to international conferences and some got published in peer-reviewed journals.

What do you consider to be the greatest challenge in the work ahead?

It's the uncertain political environment, which is affecting both the implementation of our projects and funding opportunities for future projects. For instance, we collaborate with local NGOs and the regulations governing local NGOs are currently getting more complicated, so it takes longer for local NGOs to start working on new projects and implementing our interventions.

What do you wish other people knew about the Population Council?

I hope our work becomes more visible in the new Egypt and that the new government uses our research results when designing policies. I hope we are not compared with and get mixed up with international NGOs that have been recently accused of working illegally in Egypt. We have had an office and legal status in Egypt for over 30 years. We all work toward improving the lives of Egyptian people.

If you could change just one policy in Egypt, what would it be?

I wish I could change many policies, since all policies are linked. I would start with policies that directly affect the poor. I want to change our targeting system to reach the real poor. The whole system of social protection, including subsidies, transfers, and employment and non-employment benefits, needs to be redesigned.

PROFILE

SARAH FRIEDMAN

Sarah graduated from Kenyon College in 2010, and is an executive assistant/writer at the UJA Federation, a Jewish philanthropy.



WHY I GIVE TO THE POPULATION COUNCIL

A Population Council trustee invited my family to hear *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof speak at the Council. I had always been drawn to international development, and while studying abroad in Morocco, became particularly interested in women's health and empowerment. The way Mr. Kristof discussed these matters was close to my heart, and helped me to better appreciate the research on critical health and development issues that the Council does all over the world. I followed the Council's work over the following months, and my parents, brother, and I joined the Council trustees and supporters on a trip to Ethiopia in January 2012 to meet the Council's country staff and visit some of the project sites.

Seeing the Council's work in Ethiopia made clear how a research organization delivers ideas that generate solutions and improve lives. While the Council conducts research, publishes articles in academic journals, and presents its findings at major international conferences, it also partners with local institutions. It respects and understands local traditions and values. In Ethiopia, the Population Council decided that the most effective way to prevent female genital mutilation was by working with priests from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Together, they created the "Developmental Bible," a guide with messages about positive sexual and reproductive health behaviors. This project started out with a baseline survey to measure knowledge of HIV prevention methods, attitudes toward stigma and discrimination, gender-based violence, gender roles, early

marriage, and female genital mutilation/cutting. Over 3,000 priests, deacons, Sunday school, and women Church association members in over 100 churches in four regions were interviewed to get an understanding of the dynamics in rural Ethiopian society and strategies to work with the Church. The Council research helped the Church recommend a practical and influential path to address female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices. On our visit, we met a priest who now refuses to baptize a girl who has been cut, calling the practice "barbaric."

Hard data combined with a historical and cultural understanding make the Council effective in addressing issues that compromise the health and well-being of communities in developing countries. The Council brings the best biomedical, social science, and public health research to the table and engages local experts in formulating and implementing the solutions that lead to better policies that improve lives.

I went on a fabulous trip to Ethiopia thanks to the Council. Having been deeply impressed with and inspired by the Council's work, the least I can do is give what I can. I look forward to following the Population Council's work and supporting it for years to come.

Lindiwe is a 15-year-old student in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. She is the eldest of three siblings. Her mother died from AIDS in 2004, and she does not know if her father is dead or alive. One day, Lindiwe wrote in her journal that she wanted to die. Alarmed by Lindiwe's journal entry, a mentor leading a program at Lindiwe's school called *Siyakha Nentsha* ("building with young people") approached her. Lindiwe had just learned that her caregivers could no longer take care of her and her siblings. Unable to find after-school work, she feared what would happen. Through her participation in *Siyakha Nentsha*, Lindiwe was able to obtain government benefits. She is one of the thousands of students who have participated in *Siyakha Nentsha* at their school to develop the skills and knowledge to make the transition to a healthy and productive adulthood. The Population Council is evaluating this program to determine its effectiveness at building the practical skills that young people in an area heavily affected by HIV and AIDS need to succeed as adults.



WORLDWIDE, THERE ARE COUNTLESS VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE LINDIWE WHO NEED THE SKILLS TO BOOST THEMSELVES OUT OF POVERTY, AND BE BETTER PREPARED TO PREVENT HIV, EARLY MARRIAGE, OR UNPLANNED PREGNANCY.

School is the most important institution outside the family where young people get the knowledge and skills they need to be healthy and succeed in the workforce. Governments, international organizations, and NGOs need to address barriers to quality education and retention, and find solutions to improve access to schools for the poorest and most disadvantaged populations, especially girls.

With your help, the Population Council works with governments and NGOs worldwide to think in new ways about keeping young people in school and giving them the tools they need to overcome the challenges they face. The Council helps identify and carry out targeted policies and practices that improve the quality of learning and the educational experience in schools, increase learning outcomes, and keep girls in school. These

school-based solutions are a powerful driver of development and strong instruments for reducing poverty, improving health, and bringing about gender equality.

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Population Council

One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza
New York, New York 10017
www.popcouncil.org

The Population Council confronts critical health and development issues—from stopping the spread of HIV to improving reproductive health and ensuring that young people lead full and productive lives. Through biomedical, social science, and public health research in 50 countries, we work with our partners to deliver solutions that lead to more effective policies, programs, and technologies that improve lives around the world. Established in 1952 and headquartered in New York, the Council is a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization governed by an international board of trustees.

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development@popcouncil.org
877-339-0500

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