

SECURING THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Our world is home to nearly 2.2 billion children and 1.8 billion youth, nearly half of the world's population. Among them, more than 90 percent live in the developing world. While great strides have been made to ensure that children and youth are provided with the right care, education and protection, millions still face obstacles that hinder them from becoming active and productive members of their societies.

November 20, 2014 was the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC is strong and unambiguous: all children have the right to survive and develop to their full potential, free from violence, exploitation, abuse and discrimination. In 2014–2015, Canada made numerous investments in the well-being and empowerment of children, including renewing commitments to maternal, newborn and child health; increasing support for the Global Partnership for Education; and joining the Together for Girls partnership to end violence against children, especially sexual violence against girls.

Canada has worked throughout the year to uphold and safeguard the rights of children. This includes supporting girls and boys, and young men and women to reach their full potential and become healthy, educated and productive citizens.

In 2014–2015, Canada's children and youth programming focused on: improving child survival, including maternal, newborn and child health; improving equitable access to quality education and learning opportunities for children and youth, with a special focus on girls; and ensuring that children and youth live lives free from violence, exploitation



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and abuse, including the harmful practice of child, early and forced marriage.

Improving Child Survival, Including Maternal Health

Scaling up efforts on child survival is a vital necessity at a time when over 6 million children under the age of five are dying every year, mostly from preventable and treatable conditions. Many more become sick, sometimes with life-long consequences, or fail to thrive due to a lack of appropriate health care. Diarrhea, malaria and respiratory infections are some of the biggest killers of children under the age of five. In addition, every minute of every day, a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth, increasing further the risk of her child dying as well.

A woman's safe and healthy pregnancy and delivery can be ensured through antenatal care and assisted delivery by skilled and properly equipped health professionals (physician, nurse or midwife). Preventing and treating major childhood illnesses through high-impact interventions (e.g. immunization, malaria bed nets, micronutrient supplements, safe drinking water, basic sanitation and hygiene programs, prevention of parent-to-child transmission of HIV) are crucial to ensuring children survive beyond the age of five. As a prerequisite to child and maternal health, national health systems must be strengthened with sufficient human and financial resources. This will make it possible to provide reliable and safe basic health programming that meets the needs of mothers and their children.

STOPPING CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Canada has advanced efforts to end child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and in building international momentum to end this practice. CEFM is a widespread and harmful practice that threatens the lives and futures of girls around the world. CEFM denies girls their right to childhood, disrupts their access to education and jeopardizes their health. Moreover, it hinders development. When girls are not able to reach their full potential, everyone suffers—girls, their families, communities and countries.

Globally, between 2004 and 2014, an estimated 100 million girls were forced to marry before their 18th birthday. One in every three girls in the developing world is married by the age of 18. One in nine marries before the age of 15. There are many factors that contribute to CEFM, including poverty, gender inequality, traditional or religious pressures, girls' lack of access to education, limited economic empowerment for women and humanitarian crises.

On December 18, 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution led by Canada and Zambia, with 116 co-sponsors, on child, early and forced marriage, reaffirming the need to protect young girls, and secure their futures.