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## **When the Global Downturn hits the Youth Bulge: Challenges and Opportunities for (Female) Youth Employment and Social Advancement**

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# **When the Global Downturn hits the Youth Bulge: Challenges and Opportunities for (Female) Youth Employment and Social Advancement**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Developing countries are presently experiencing or are shortly expected to see a “youth bulge” (a large number of young people in the national population)—some 71 in total and 11 in Asia alone—will face relatively greater employment and human capital investment challenges as a result of the global economic crisis and its medium term ramifications. Additionally, gender inequalities could also be exacerbated by the global crisis, increasing the risks particularly for female youth. To help address these issues and as a contribution to the policy discussions toward a more inclusive social and economic recovery from the crisis, this paper examines the extent to which countries with imminent or anticipated youth bulges, combined with historically persistent gender inequality, are likely to be impacted by the crisis. As a second contribution this paper develops a framework for understanding the risks faced by girls throughout the lifecycle, with an additional focus on intergenerational transmission of poverty.

\*This paper builds on Engilbertsdottir and Mendoza (2009), and it is part of a broader policy research program at UNICEF to analyze the impact of economic crises on children and women and assess and design policy responses to help protect the vulnerable and preserve investments in the social sectors. The views expressed herein are the authors’ and do not represent those of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Ronald Mendoza co-authored this study while he was a senior economist with UNICEF.

## Introduction

The global crisis has struck many countries at a critical point in time—a “youth bulge” is emerging in many parts of the developing world. Youth, defined as those aged 15-24 and expressed as a share of the total national population, is presently peaking in numerous low income and lower middle income countries, including Maldives, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Iran, Grenada and Cambodia. If one defines a youth bulge as a peak in the share of youth in the total national population, then about 71, mostly low income developing countries are undergoing or are anticipating a youth bulge.

Turning to a global lens, the total number of young people in the world is expected to reach about 1.21 billion in 2010, representing about 17.6 percent of the total global population.<sup>1</sup> If one defines a global youth bulge as a peak in the share of youth in the total global population, then globally, a youth bulge occurred during the period 1985-1990. Nevertheless, if one tries to identify where the largest number of young people are, and once again using 2010 as a reference point, an entirely different set of countries emerge: Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Africa, are among those countries that not only account for some of the largest numbers of young people, these are also some of the countries that are expected to see their numbers of young people peaking during the 2010-2015 period. Across all these developing countries, challenges as well as opportunities related to a large cohort of young people entering the labor force are imminent.

Asia, in particular, needs to face this challenge of youth unemployment, which remains a central issue despite the impressive economic performance prior to the 2008-2009 crises. Globally, the youth labor force in Asia is the largest, making up 58 percent of the total global youth labor force, compared to Sub-Saharan Africa at 14 percent and Middle East and North Africa at 5 percent. Specifically, India, China, Indonesia and Pakistan are among the Asian countries that account for the largest share of the global youth population. Historically, youth comprised only 20.8 percent of the labor market in Asia in 2004, but the unemployed youth constituted 49.1 percent of unemployed in the region.<sup>2</sup> While South Asia has the largest number of unemployed youth in the world at 10.7 million, South East Asia ranked the highest with youth share of total unemployment at 54.1% (ILO, 2010). In 2010 as well, the youth populations in India and China alone constitute about 40 percent of the global youth population.

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<sup>1</sup> From here on, as is the convention, we refer to the 15-24 age cohort when we speak of youth. Unless otherwise stated, all figures for the youth population are based on the authors' calculations using data from the UN World Population Prospects (2008 Revision) Database.

<sup>2</sup> ILO, *Labor and Social Trends in Asia and the Pacific 2005*. (Bangkok, ILO, 2005).

While recent unemployment numbers are unknown, the emerging demographic patterns with falling fertility promises to offer an opportunity for countries in Asia to boost growth by raising the share of the working population and increase household savings. There exists a window of opportunity to tap the potential of the youth as they are tomorrow's workers, entrepreneurs, parents, active citizens and leaders. It is therefore imperative that countries in the Asia leverage the large populations of the youth to try and spur a dramatic take off in economic and human development. A relatively young, educated, and healthy workforce not only represents strong human capital assets for a country, this could also foster an environment conducive to supporting dramatic policy reforms.<sup>3</sup> Decisions made about the education and work of the youth should be dealt with urgency as this in turn will determine in large measure, whether the small window of opportunity for growth is realized (World Bank, 2007b).

The private sector could play a stronger role in addressing this issue. They can contribute to the identification (and subsequent design and implementation) of the appropriate education, training and general skills requirements which in turn will create the skilled labour force that will be in demand in the future. For example: In Indonesia employers' organizations support teachers by advising them on technology and industry standards, and provide opportunities for work experience programmes that help students bridge learning and work, develop new attitudes and gain confidence. Also Japan has a "Youth Trial Employment" scheme, which provides financial incentives to companies that offer short-term training and jobs to unemployed youth with the aim of assisting the trainee in the school-to-work in transition. Businesses could contribute to informing policy and practice across a variety of related issues. Their involvement is especially important in the fields of training, internships, and mentorship for entrepreneurs, in addition to their main role in creating jobs.<sup>4</sup>

On the flipside, there is a growing concern about the challenges related to lack of employment and the possible links between having a young population and conflict vulnerability.<sup>5</sup> Burgeoning unemployment rates across the industrialized and developing

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<sup>3</sup> See World Bank (2006, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> See A/60/156. Making Commitment Matter: Young People's input to the 10-year review of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond. Report of the Secretary General.

<sup>5</sup> The term "youth bulge" itself can be traced to recent thinking that the rapid growth of the working age population could be associated with more acute unemployment challenges and higher risk of more disaffected youth. This in turn is seen to increase the risk that youth—particularly young men—may be more prone to pursuing social and economic advancement through extralegal means, or may be more predisposed to recruitment into armed groups and possibly terrorism (see Beehner, 2007 and Goldstone, 2002).

worlds are expected to persist in the medium term, raising the risk that a large cohort of global youth (and a large cohort of youth in some of the poorest countries) will face challenging months and perhaps years ahead.

For those countries whose youth bulges are imminent, pursuing job-intensive policies will be a critical component of a more inclusive social and economic recovery from the crisis. For the rest of the countries in the developing world whose youth bulges are further down the road, there is an equally critical policy challenge to ensure that adequate human capital investments are preserved—if not boosted—during the crisis and recovery period in order to equip future young people with the requisite education, health and other investments. These investments will prove critical in boosting future economic and human development prospects for these countries. They will also help to ensure that infants and children today do not suffer from permanent crisis costs, perhaps pushing them into a life of poverty and disadvantage. The majority of the young people in the world, some 20-30 years from now are presently infants and children in some of the poorest countries in the world today. It is therefore critical that social sector spending and investments in these countries are adequately supported.

For some countries and regions, overlaying these challenges is an additional issue related to gender inequalities which could also be exacerbated by the global crisis. Female youth unemployment and discouraged work is particularly high in some parts of the world, suggesting that the present situation might make things worse for young women there. In addition, girls and women also typically bear the brunt of household adjustments to a shock in some parts of the world, in turn suggesting that they face high risk that the crisis will cause permanent harm.

As a contribution to the policy discussions toward a more inclusive social and economic recovery from the crisis, with a particular focus on female youth, this paper contributes in two ways. First, it examines the youth population data covering historical and projected figures spanning the period 1950-2050; and identifies where and when the youth bulge will occur across a sample of 190 industrial and developing countries in the UN World Population Prospects (2008 Revision) Database. The objective is to identify the broad sets of countries, including: a) Countries that have been hit by the crisis as their youth bulges are unfolding; b) Countries that are anticipating their youth bulges in the near future; and an overlap of countries which c) have historically high gender inequality indicators.

The paper then turns to a discussion of policies which could help address two broad sets of risks for female youth: a) inadequacy of employment and social advancement

opportunities brought about by the global economic crisis; and b) lifecycle risks to girls which could also threaten future employment and social advancement prospects. The paper develops a framework for analyzing the risks faced by children, with a particular focus on girls, throughout the lifecycle, in order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the risks and policy challenges related to female youth. This framework will also consider risks related to girls and women in the intergenerational transmission of poverty as a result of aggregate shocks.

In order to ensure that the global crisis does not lead to permanent harm and that the ensuing recovery is broadly inclusive—notably for girls and women—this paper underscores the need for two main sets of policies: a) policies promoting employment and opportunities for social and economic advancement especially for countries whose youth bulges are imminent during the crisis and the immediate recovery period; and b) policies preserving if not scaling up social sector and human capital investments in order to ensure that the crisis does not turn the future youth bulge into a lost opportunity.

## **I. The Youth Bulge, Unemployment and the Crisis**

As noted earlier, there are several ways to characterize a youth bulge, and there appears to be no clear convention. Here we turn to an analysis of two possible indicators: the share of youth in national as well as the global population. We find it useful to try and view the youth bulge from two possible perspectives, using: a) the lens of the domestic policymaker; and b) the lens of the international community.

Essentially, there are three main sets of countries in the world—a first set that has experienced a youth bulge in the past (prior to 2008), a second set in which the youth bulge is imminent(2008-2010), and a third set which expects to see the youth bulge emerge in the near future(2011 onwards). Within the context of the global economic crisis, youth and particularly female youth unemployment will likely emerge as a particularly acute challenge for many countries.

### *Where is the Youth Bulge?*

Using a national lens, one could try to identify which countries have an imminent youth bulge when juxtaposed against the crisis and its immediate recovery period: 2008-2012.<sup>6</sup> Examining data for 190 industrial and developing countries during the period from 1950-

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<sup>6</sup> Here, we set the crisis years 2008 and 2009, as well as the three years following as the point of reference. Adjusting this assumption does not materially change the analysis.



2050, 119 countries have seen their youth bulge prior to the 2008-2012 period, while 52 countries have an imminent youth bulge during the 2008-2012 period. An additional 19 countries will see their youth bulge beyond 2012. The countries in each category are identified in table 1.

**Table 1. Countries with Youth Populations (Expressed as a Share of Total Population) that Peaked before 2008, is Peaking in 2008-2012, or is set to Peak After 2012**

<i>Peaked before 2008</i>		<i>Peaking in the period 2008-2012</i>	<i>Peak expected beyond 2012</i>
Albania	Fiji	Afghanistan*	Benin
Algeria	Finland	Angola*	Burkina Faso
Argentina	France	Bhutan	Central African Republic
Armenia	French Polynesia	Bolivia	Chad
Aruba	Germany	Botswana	Cote D'Ivoire
Australia	Greece	Burundi	Gambia
Austria	Guam	Cambodia	Guinea
Azerbaijan	Guinea Bissau	Cameroon*	DRC
Bahamas	Guyana	Cape Verde	Liberia
Bahrain	Hungary	Congo	Malawi
Bangladesh	Iceland	Djibouti	Mozambique
Barbados	India	Egypt	Niger
Belarus	Indonesia	El Salvador	Nigeria
Belgium	Iraq	Estonia	Samoa
Belize	Ireland	Ethiopia	Senegal
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Israel	Gabon	Sierra Leone
Brazil	Italy	Georgia	Tanzania
Brunei Darussalam	Jamaica	Ghana	Uganda
Bulgaria	Japan	Grenada	Zambia
Canada	Jordan	Guatemala	
Channel Islands	Kazakhstan	Haiti	
Chile	Kuwait	Honduras	
China	Latvia	Iran	
China(H.K)	Lebanon	Kenya	
China( Macao)	Libya	Kyrgyzstan	
Colombia	Lithuania	Lao PDR	
Comoros	Luxembourg	Lesotho	
Costa Rica	Macedonia	Madagascar	
Croatia	Malaysia	Maldives	
Cuba	Malta	Mali*	
Cyprus	Mauritania	Mayotte	

Czech republic	Mauritius	Micronesia	
Denmark	Mexico	Moldova	
Dominican Republic	Montenegro	Mongolia	
Ecuador	Morocco	Morocco	
Equatorial Guinea	Myanmar	Namibia	
Eritrea	Netherlands	Nepal	
Philippines		Nicaragua	Netherlands Antilles
Poland		Oman	New Caledonia
Portugal		Pakistan	New Zealand
Puerto Rico		Paraguay	Norway
Qatar		Rwanda	Panama
Republic of Korea		South Africa	Papua New Guinea
Romania		Sudan	Peru
Russian Federation		Swaziland	
Saint Lucia		Tajikistan	
Sao Tome and Principe		Tunisia	
Saudi Arabia		Turkmenistan	
Serbia		Uzbekistan	
Singapore		Vanuatu	
Slovakia		Yemen	
Slovenia		Zimbabwe	
Solomon islands			
Somalia			
Spain			
Sri Lanka			
St. Vincent & Grenadines			
Suriname			
Sweden			
Switzerland			
Syrian Arab (republic)			
Thailand			
Timor-Leste			
Tonga			
Trinidad & Tobago			
Turkey			
U.A.E			
U.K			
U.S.A			
Ukraine			
Uruguay			
Venezuela			
Vietnam			
Virgin island (U.S)			

Western Sahara		
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Notes: Countries are demarcated into three categories based on when they experience a peak in their youth population (youth share is calculated as a percent of national population). Column 1 consists of countries that have experienced a peak in the past (before 2008), Column 2 are countries that experience it during the period 2008-2012 and Column 3 are countries that expect a peak in the future. Countries that are starred are countries that experience a peak in their youth population between 2008 -2012 and also expect a peak in future as well.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from UN (2009).

Focusing on the year 2010, the top 20 countries with the largest youth share in their respective populations are listed in table 2. As noted earlier, the top 20 countries include Maldives, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Iran, Grenada and Cambodia. With the exception of Namibia, an upper middle income country, all of these top 20 countries are either in the low or lower middle income category. A historical analysis in these 20 countries also reveals that at or about the year 2010, many of them expect to see the youth share of the population peak (see compilation figure 1). For these countries, a national consideration of the youth bulge is critical, given that it represents a potential opportunity to fuel an economic and human development take-off—alternatively it could also represent a severe challenge of finding employment and other opportunities for social and economic advancement for a large cohort in the population. As argued by some analysts, such a challenge, if unaddressed, could quickly turn into a severe risk of conflict and political instability (Goldstone, 2002).

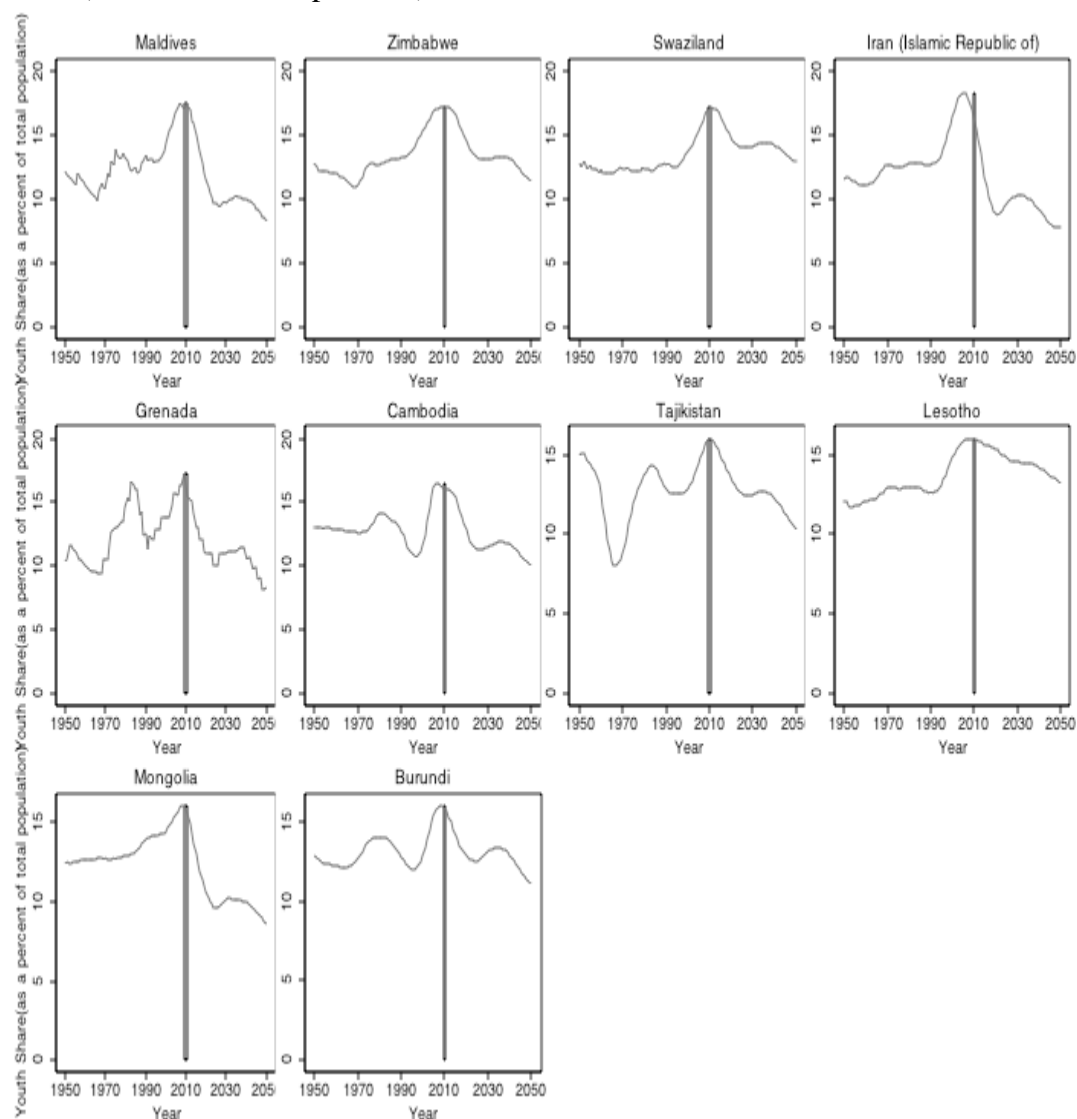
**Table 2. Top 20 Countries with the Largest Share of Youth in Total National Population in 2010**

Country	Youth population (as a percent of Total population)	Income Status	Gender Inequality Value (Rank out of 102 countries)	Percent point difference in GDP growth
Maldives	17.57	Lower Middle Income	Not available	-6.86
Zimbabwe	17.26	Low Income	0.186 (72)	15.32
Swaziland	17.15	Lower Middle Income	0.156 (62)	-1.43
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	16.39	Lower Middle Income	0.304 (95)	-3.35
Grenada	16.35	Upper Middle Income	Not available	-5.55
Cambodia	16.08	Low Income	0.022 (27)	-7.64
Tajikistan	16.03	Low Income	0.032 (35)	-5.35
Lesotho	15.98	Lower Middle Income	Not available	-3.23
Mongolia	15.88	Lower Middle Income	0.039 (39)	-7.79
Burundi	15.86	Low Income	0.106 (50)	-0.65
Uzbekistan	15.59	Low Income	Not available	-2.26
Cape Verde	15.43	Lower Middle Income	Not available	-3.12
Botswana	15.43	Upper Middle Income	0.081 (48)	-6.80
Rwanda	15.34	Low Income	0.168 (66)	-4.33
Micronesia (Fed. States of)	15.32	Lower Middle Income	Not available	n/a
Bhutan	15.25	Lower Middle Income	0.162 (64)	-7.58
Turkmenistan	15.17	Lower Middle Income	Not available	-1.42
Lao PDR	14.85	Low income	0.035 (38)	-2.33
Yemen	14.75	Low Income	0.327 (98)	2.26
Namibia	14.74	Upper Middle Income	0.075 (47)	-3.70

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from UN (2009) and IMF (2009). The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) for gender inequality indicator.

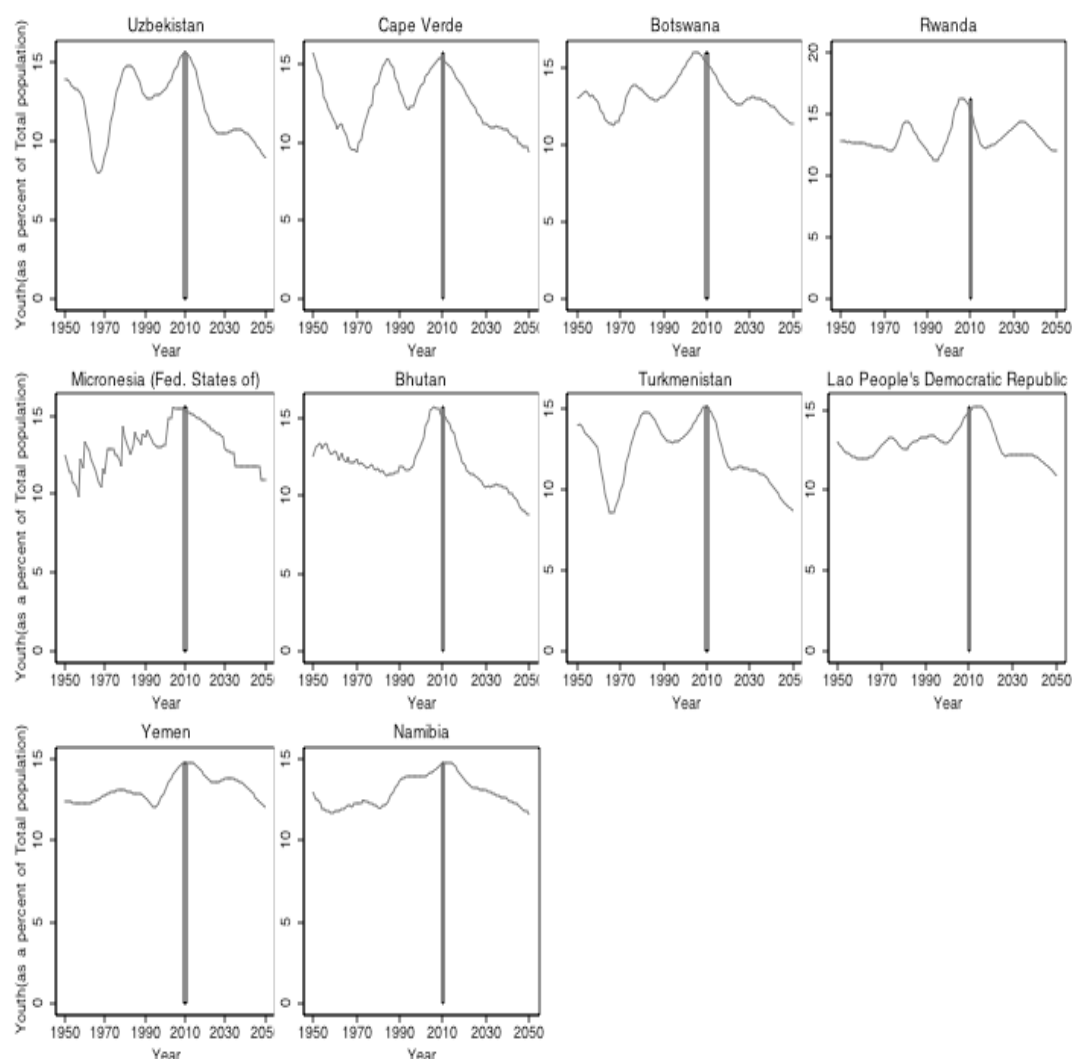
**Compilation Figure 1. Top 20 Countries with the Largest share of Youth Population as a Percent of Total National Population in 2010**

Youth (% of National Population), 1950-2050



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from UN (2009).

## Compilation Figure 1 Continued...



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from UN (2009).

A global lens could also shed useful insights, notably if we focus on countries with some of the largest numbers of young people in the world. Broad global production, investment and economic trends are possibly influenced by the dynamism, innovativeness as well as potential challenges related to very large numbers of young people. As noted earlier, in 2010 it is estimated that there will be about 1.21 billion young people globally, with most of them living in developing countries with some of the largest populations. Table 3 lists the top 20 countries accounting for the largest shares of world youth. Perhaps unsurprisingly, China and India alone account for about 40 percent of this global total; and ten countries—the U.S, Russia and eight developing countries—account for about 60 percent of the global total. A closer examination of the top 20 reveals that in countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, Turkey and Vietnam, the share of youth in their respective national

populations will peak at or around 2010. Once again, the opportunity and challenge related to these countries' youth bulge is imminent (see compilation figure 2).

Nevertheless, some countries in this list of top 20 countries with the largest number of youth are still anticipating their youth bulges in the coming years, including Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, and USA. For these countries, key challenges include preserving human capital investments, and protecting particularly vulnerable segments of the population (Mendoza, 2010).

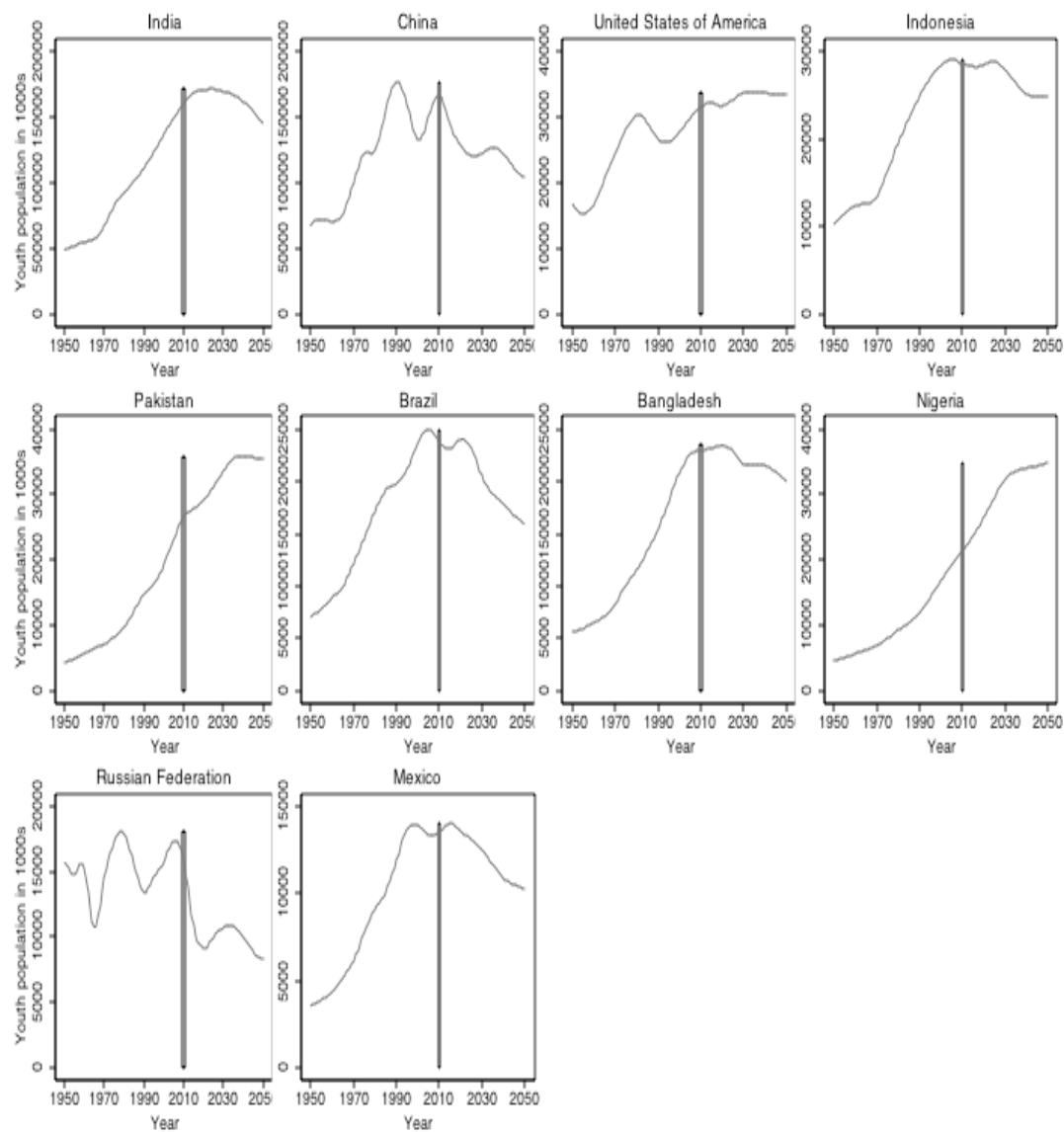
**Table 3. Top 20 Countries with the Largest Share of Youth in Total World Population in 2010**

Countries	Percent of World youth	Of the top 20, countries who have imminent or forthcoming youth bulge peak years (Peak in parenthesis)	Income Status	Gender Inequality Value Rank out of 102 countries)	Percent point difference in GDP growth
China	19.59		Lower Middle Income	0.217 (83)	-2.24
India	18.80		Lower Middle Income	0.318 (96)	-2.47
United States of America	3.69		High Income	Not available	-1.89
Indonesia	3.35		Lower Middle Income	0.127 (55)	-1.79
Pakistan	3.11	√ (2009-2010)	Lower Middle income	0.283 (94)	-1.35
Brazil	2.79		Upper middle Income	0.018 (24)	-3.97
Bangladesh	2.69		Low Income	0.244 (90)	-0.77
Nigeria	2.49	√ (2028)	Lower Middle Income	0.219 (86)	-2.53
Russian Federation	1.85		Upper Middle Income	0.007 (5)	-9.85
Mexico	1.58		Upper Middle Income	Not available	-4.38
Philippines	1.49		Low Middle income	0.007 (7)	-3.35
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	1.44	√ (2008-2009)	Lower Middle Income	0.304 (95)	-3.35
Egypt	1.43	√ (2008)	Lower middle income	0.217 (82)	-2.35
Viet Nam	1.39		Low Income	0.030 (31)	-2.35
Ethiopia	1.35	√ (2014)	Low Income	0.233 (89)	-4.33
Turkey	1.07		Upper Middle Income	Not available	-4.18
Dem. Rep. of the Congo	1.06	√ (2020-2023)	Low Income	0.204 (79)	-2.29
Japan	1.06		High income	Not available	-2.66
Thailand	0.87		Lower middle income	0.010 (16)	-3.63
South Africa	0.83	√ (2008)	Upper middle income	0.086 (49)	-4.29
Germany	0.78		High Income	Not available	-4.36

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from UN (2009) and IMF (2009). The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) for gender inequality indicator.

**Compilation Figure 2. Top 20 Countries with the Largest Share of Youth as a Percent of World Youth Population in 2010**

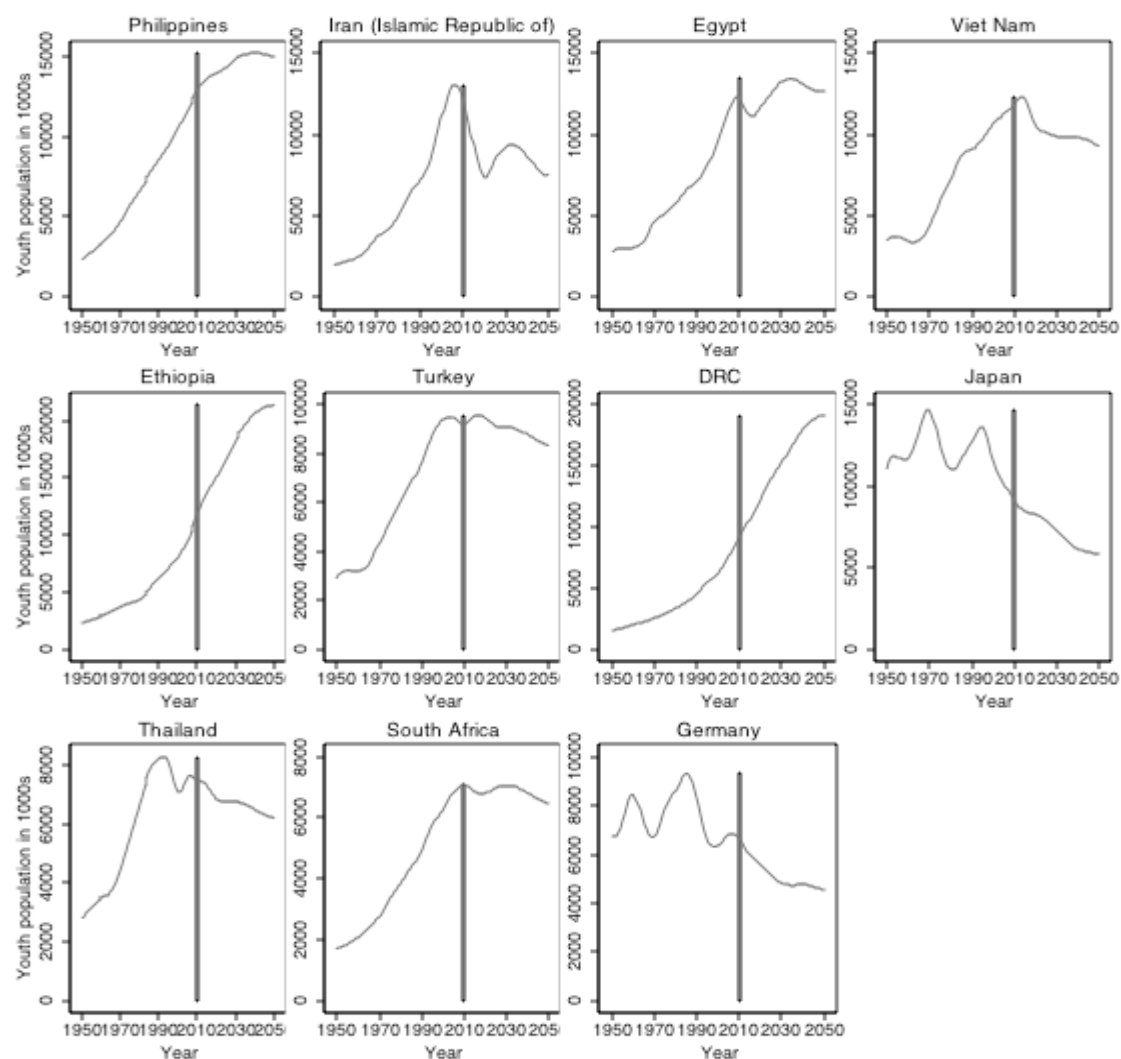
Youth (in 1000s), 1950-2050



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from UN (2009).



## Compilation Figure 2 Continued...



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from UN (2009).

In 2010, it is estimated that about 87 percent of the world's youth are in the developing world, with the rest located in industrial countries.<sup>7</sup> The share of developing countries in the world's youth population is projected to rise further to about 90 percent of the total global youth population by 2030. Stated differently, the 1.26 billion young people in 2030 are infants and children during the period from 2005-2015. Human capital investments and other social services provided to mothers, infants and children in the developing world during the 2005-2015 period are therefore even more critical these investments and policies will determine the capabilities of a large future cohort of young people some 20 years from now.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the source for the population figures are drawn from the author's calculations, using the UN World Population Prospects (2008 Revision) Database.

The foregoing argument helps underscore the importance of social spending and investments not just because the crisis has exacerbated the need, but also due to the relatively large number of children under consideration. Countries thinking strategically about turning challenges into opportunities should consider the social and economic opportunity cost of under-investing in the social sectors in the medium term. The forthcoming youth bulge in many countries could be a well educated and healthy cohort, or if policies fail to protect them, they could suffer from permanent implications of the global crises of 2008-2009. Their sheer numbers in the developing world and in some key countries also suggest that inadequate human capital investments could not only transmit poverty from one generation to the next (and possibly even larger cohort of poor people), it could also undermine countries' economic and human development prospects.

#### *Youth Unemployment Challenges Even Before the Crisis*

Young people suffer disproportionately from the lack of decent work opportunities. On average, about 2.5 million youth entered the labor force every year during the period 1997-2007.<sup>8</sup> The youth unemployment rate stood at 12.1 per cent in 2008 compared to 5.8 per cent for the overall global unemployment rate and 4.3 per cent for the adult unemployment rate. Compared to adults, the youth of today are about three times more likely to be unemployed.<sup>9</sup> Research on labor market conditions in developed countries has shown that an increase in total unemployment by one percentage point reduces the employment rate of youth by 1.1 to 1.8 percentage points (Blanchflower and Freeman, 2000). The differential impact in developing countries might be even greater, given the large youth populations and labor market rigidities. ILO figures also indicate that youth population constitute about 24.7 percent of the global working-age population, but account for as much as 40.2 percent of the unemployed (ILO, 2008:3). This translates to the staggering assertion that almost every second person between ages 15 and 24 is unemployed. Trends in youth unemployment show that youth are generally predisposed to much higher unemployment rates than adults, for various reasons such as lack of experience. Youth also tend to have a higher degree of job changes, and they are far more likely to enter and exit the labor force; and analysts point out that youth unemployment also tends to be much more sensitive to the business cycle.<sup>10</sup> The challenge of youth joblessness is also much deeper than what the unemployment statistics

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<sup>8</sup> Calculations based on an increase in the youth labor force from 577 million in 1997 to 602 million in 2007 (ILO, 2008:3).

<sup>9</sup> ILO (2010)

<sup>10</sup> See among others Freeman and Wise (1982) and Garcia and Fares (2008).

might suggest—some studies have shown that over half of youth unemployment spells eventually lead to withdrawal from the labor force (Clark and Summers, 1982).

During the period prior to the crisis, which was characterized by exceptionally high growth in many parts of the industrialized and developing world, youth unemployment indicators surprisingly, worsened. Between 1997 and 2007, the number of unemployed youth increased by 13.6 percent, from 63 million to 71 million (ILO, 2008:2).<sup>11</sup> The unemployment rate among youth was about 12 percent in 2007—about double the over-all global unemployment rate of 5.7 percent and about three times the adult unemployment rate of 4 percent (ILO, 2008:3). The number of employed young people reached 531 million in 2007—an increase of about 3 percent (17 million) compared to the 1997 figure. Because the youth population grew at a quicker pace compared to youth employment, the share of employed youth has gone down from about 49 percent in 1997 to about 45 percent by 2007 (ILO, 2008:3).<sup>12</sup>

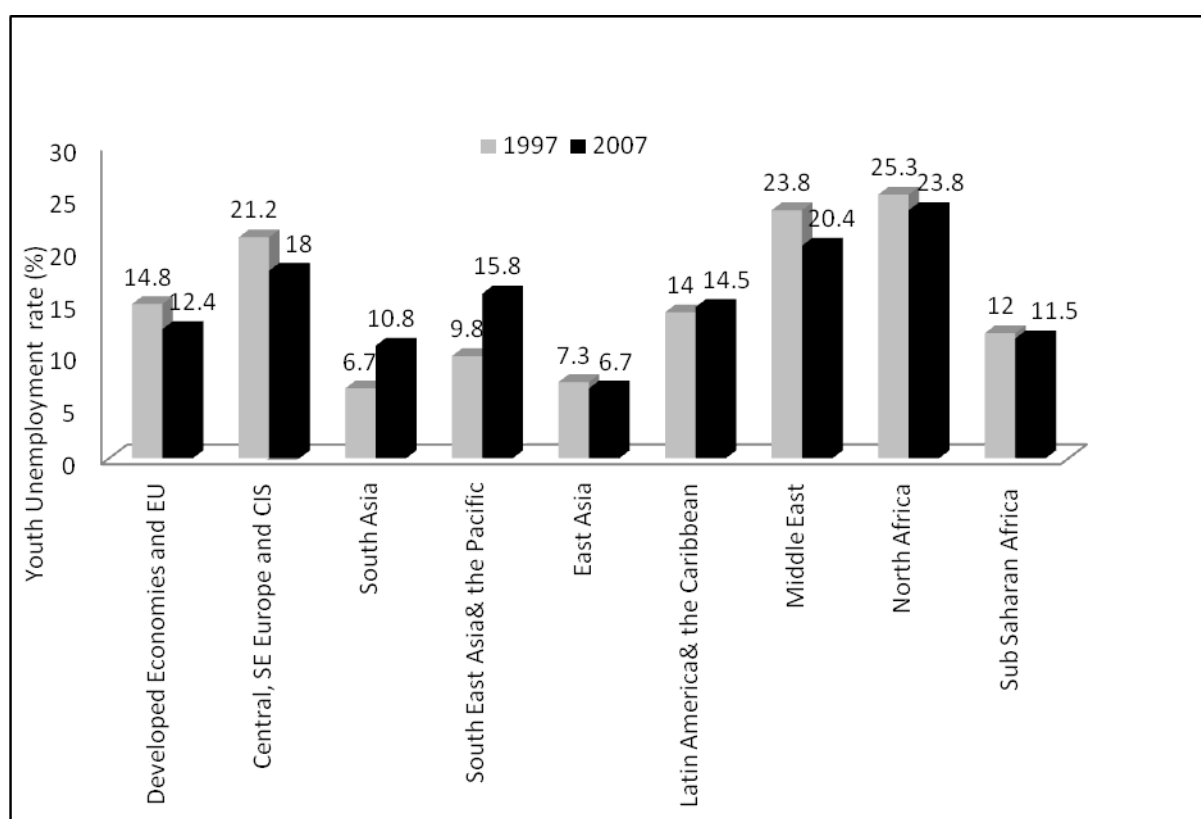
These over-all figures mask even deeper youth employment challenges and disparities when one looks at regions and within countries. Compared to other regions, youth unemployment is particularly high in the Middle East and in North Africa, where the youth unemployment rate is well above 20 percent. In fact in the Middle East, while countries vary in their relative positions in coping with the crisis, for many of them the downturn coincides with a peaking youth bulge (Dhillon et al, 2009). In South Asia and South East Asia and the Pacific, youth unemployment has also increased during this period (see figure 3).

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<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the youth data described in this note refer to persons aged 15 to 24 years.

<sup>12</sup> The young population has increased by about 14 percent between 1997 and 2007.

**Figure 3. Youth Unemployment Rates by Region, 1997 and 2007**



Source: ILO (2008:5).

### *Unemployment Exacerbated by the Crisis*

Essentially, the global economic crisis compounded the erosion of poor families' purchasing power due to the food price shocks in 2008. The subsequent collapse in commodity prices as well as weaker global aggregate demand has affected many developing countries' export sectors. The ILO reported in early 2010 that global unemployment started to increase in 2008, followed by a much sharper increase in the year of the crisis itself—in 2009, the ILO estimates that the number of unemployed was about 212 million people, some 34 million more unemployed compared to 2007. In 2009, there were 80.7 million young people struggling to find work. The youth unemployment rate rose from 11.9 to 13.0 per cent between 2007 and 2009.<sup>13</sup> Comparing 2008 and 2009, region-wise the largest increases in unemployment were observed in the European Union (2.3 percentage points), in Central and South-Eastern Europe and CIS (2.0 percentage points) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (1.2 percentage points). In 2009, these three regions alone accounted for two-thirds of the increase in global unemployment.<sup>14</sup> The Developed Economies & European

<sup>13</sup> ILO (2010)

<sup>14</sup> ILO (2010:9).

Union experienced a 4.6 percentage point and Central and South Eastern Europe experienced a 3.5 percentage point increase in youth unemployment rates. These are some of the largest increases in youth unemployment rates ever recorded in the regions (ILO: 2010).

Additionally, specific information from countries also confirms the scale of the unemployment challenge. In Sri Lanka, for example, its tea exports have taken a hit due to the sharp slowdown in demand from its major export market, Russia. Over 60 percent of tea in Sri Lanka is produced by small holder farmers, suggesting that a large impact will be on the countries' poor.<sup>15</sup> In Zambia, the country's copper mining industry shed an estimated 6,000 employees since November 2008. The Mine Workers Union of Zambia estimated that 10,000 out of a total of 23,000 registered miners would be retrenched by end March 2009.<sup>16</sup>

Focus groups composed of cash crop farmers in rural Ghana describe being a situation whereby they are squeezed by lower prices of some cash crops, while farm input costs remain high. In most of these severely affected sectors, progress in job creation and poverty reduction is now in danger of being reversed, as these very same jobs are now retrenched.

Reports of job losses among migrant export workers are also increasing. For instance, in the peri-urban community of Gandasari in Jakarta an estimated 10 percent of permanent workers and 40 percent of contract workers had already lost their jobs. Unofficial reports suggest that over 200,000 Indonesian nationals previously working in Malaysia returned home in 2008 as a result of the recession, with most of them women and from the country's rural areas.<sup>17</sup> In China, well over 20 million domestic migrant workers are reported to have been retrenched in early 2009, while in Ghana, the Ministry of Finance estimated that remittances were down by over \$50 million in January 2009 compared to its level the year before and attributed this to job losses among migrants.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, a quick assessment of Vietnam's migrant workers' situation based on focus group discussions and interviews suggests that labor migrants in the informal sector have not been spared by the crisis and that younger and more recent migrants are typically more affected by the recent economic retrenchment in major labor importing countries.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, "Sri Lanka: Global crisis likely to hit poor hard," December 8, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Hossain (2009:31).

<sup>17</sup> IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, "Indonesia: Tough times for returning labor migrants," Mar 14, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, "Ghana: People have a message for G20," April 2, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Longer term migrants tend to have more savings and options for consumption smoothing, while more recent migrants do not necessarily have these, and they also tend to shoulder large debt burdens associated with being a new migrant. This study also revealed that the children of migrants have begun to suffer from the aftershocks, through the delay in payments of school fees, school dropouts and lesser health care visits. For further details on the study and the data collection methodology, see UNICEF, Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and Vietnam Institute of Sociology (2009).

Similarly, focus group discussions with female garment workers in Cambodia in early 2009 revealed that they were able to send home about US\$30 to 40 each month before mid-2008. Since then, they have reported to have only enough to cover their own living expenses, with very little if any left for sending to relatives. The garments sector in Cambodia shed about 60,000 workers, with about 16 percent of garment factories closing. Of those workers who kept their jobs, many reported fewer hours worked and diminished overtime pay.<sup>20</sup> All of these developments will clearly have a severe impact on migrants' home communities, which not only suffer from declining remittances but also need to absorb returning migrants in the local economy.<sup>21</sup>

A recent study examining the transmission effects of the crisis in South Africa, finds that, while employment in the labor market fell by 3.8 percent, not all individuals were hit with the same intensity and that human capital provided a buffer against the shock. After controlling for observable characteristics, education and experience showed the potential to entirely offset the effects of the recession on the likelihood of employment. The paper thus highlighted the need for strategic investments in human capital. The case is made especially for unskilled workers as the informal market does not seem to offer protection, necessitating the need for social safety net interventions during a recession (Leung et al, 2010).

Many of these workers that lost jobs in the export sectors are young people, notably young women. Recent analysis by the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggests that youth unemployment is higher than for adults, for various reasons including lack of experience, a higher degree of job changes, greater likelihood of entering and exiting the workforce. Historically, young people are also among the hardest hit in terms of job losses (and recovery) following from a financial or economic crisis (Verick, 2009). During the present crisis, young people also appear to be among the first to be retrenched in many of the industries hit hard by the global slowdown. An early 2010 report by the ILO noted that the number of unemployed youth increased by 8.5 million people between 2008 and 2009—a year-on-year increase that trumped any of the past increases in the last decade.<sup>22</sup> The ILO similarly found that youth employment was most affected in the same three regions for which total employment was most severely affected, globally. For the developed economies and the European Union, Central and South-Eastern Europe and CIS, and in Latin America and the Caribbean, youth unemployment increased by 4.6, 4.5 and 2.2 percentage points respectively.

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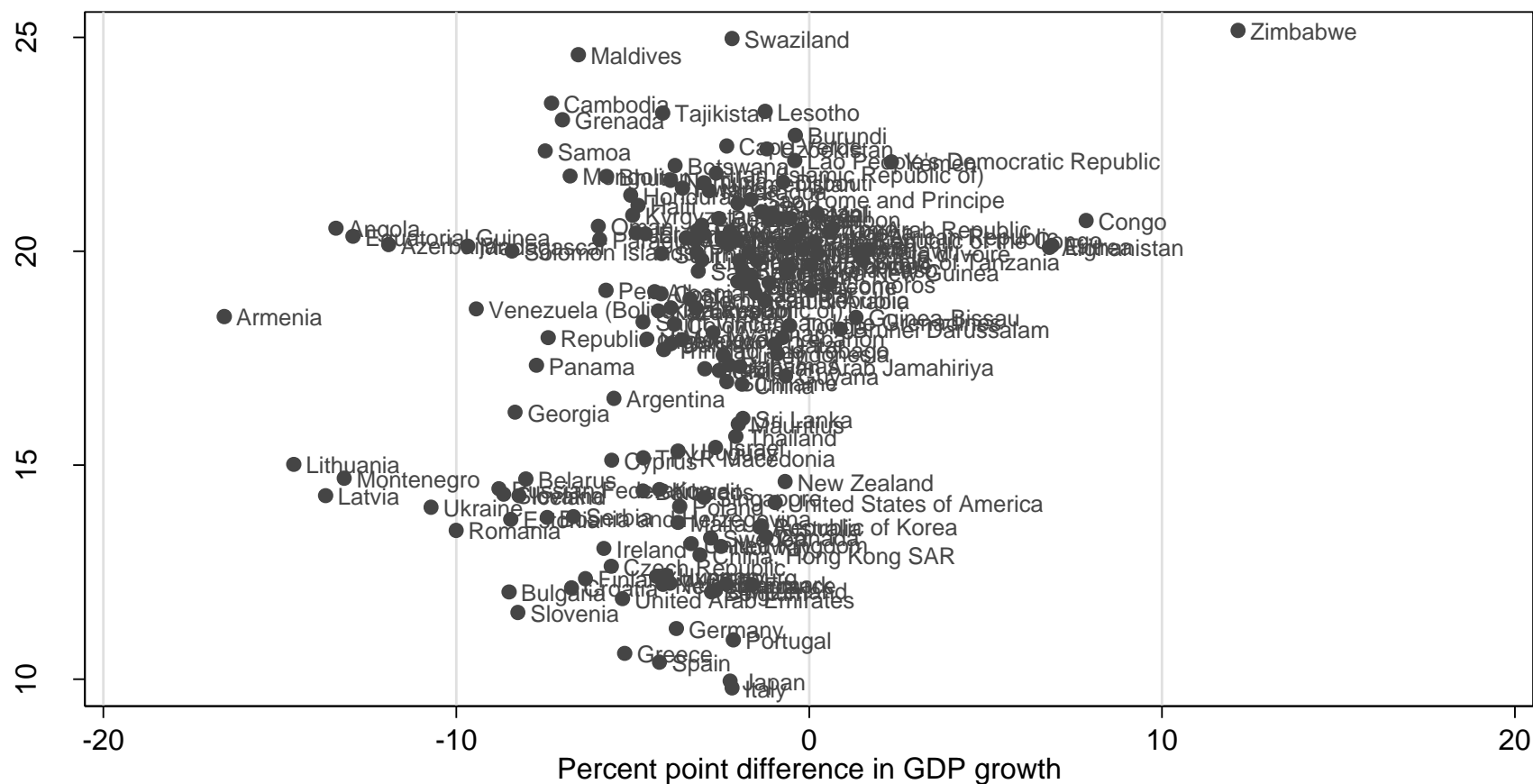
<sup>20</sup> ILO (2009b:1).

<sup>21</sup> Hossain (2009:9).

<sup>22</sup> ILO (2010:16).

A protracted period of sluggish employment creation will likely exacerbate this already difficult situation of youth unemployment in many parts of the developing world.

**Figure 4. Cross Plot of Youth (% Total National Population) in 2010 vs. Percentage Point Difference in GDP Growth Between 2007/8 and 2009/10**

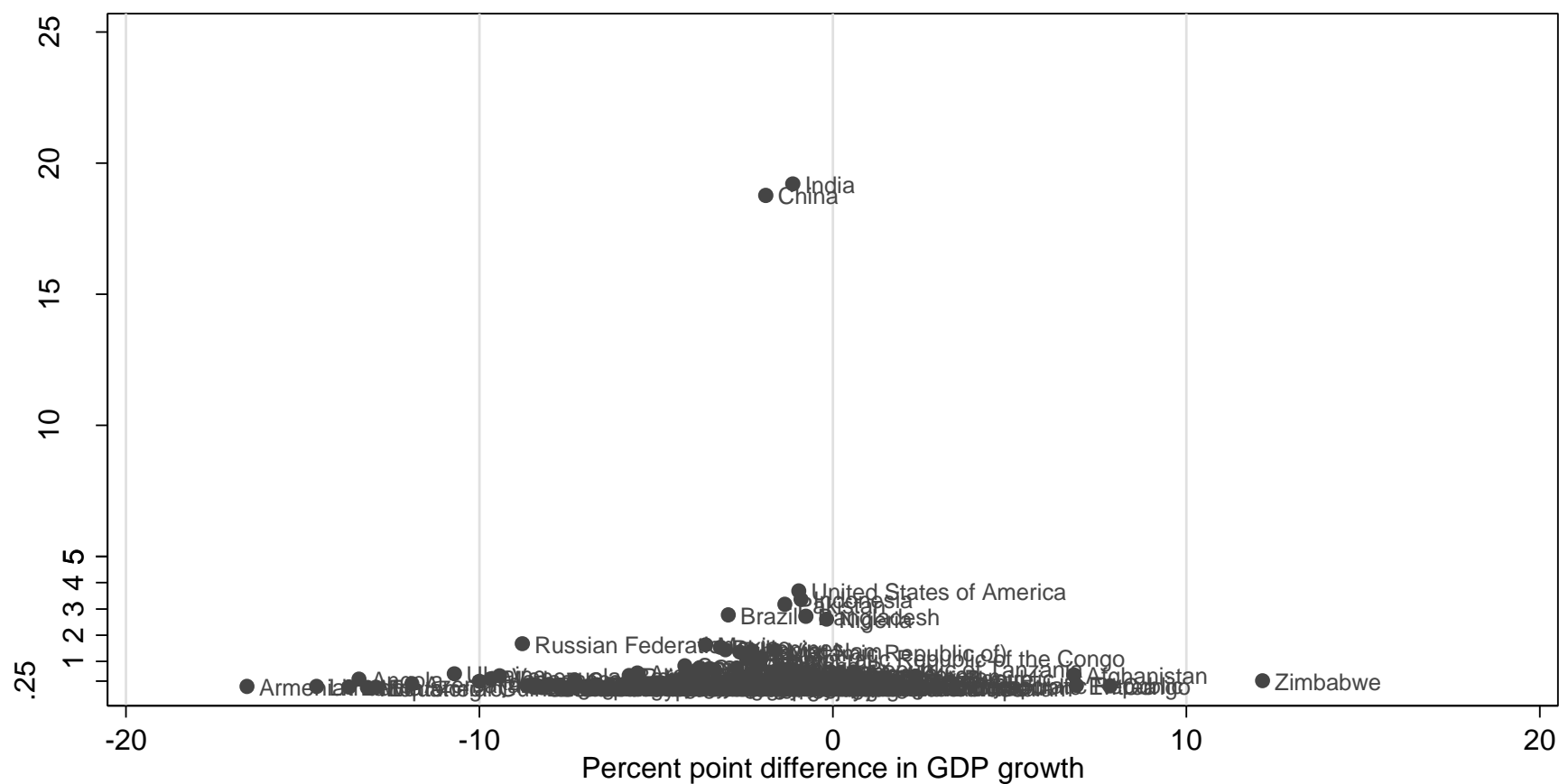


Source: Authors' calculations using UN (2009) for the youth data and IMF World Economic Outlook Database for the GDP data.

\*This paper builds on Engilbertsdottir and Mendoza (2009), and it is part of a broader policy research program at UNICEF to analyze the impact of economic crises on children and women and assess and design policy responses to help protect the vulnerable and preserve investments in the social sectors. The views expressed herein are the authors' and do not represent those of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Ronald Mendoza co-authored this study while he was a senior economist with UNICEF.



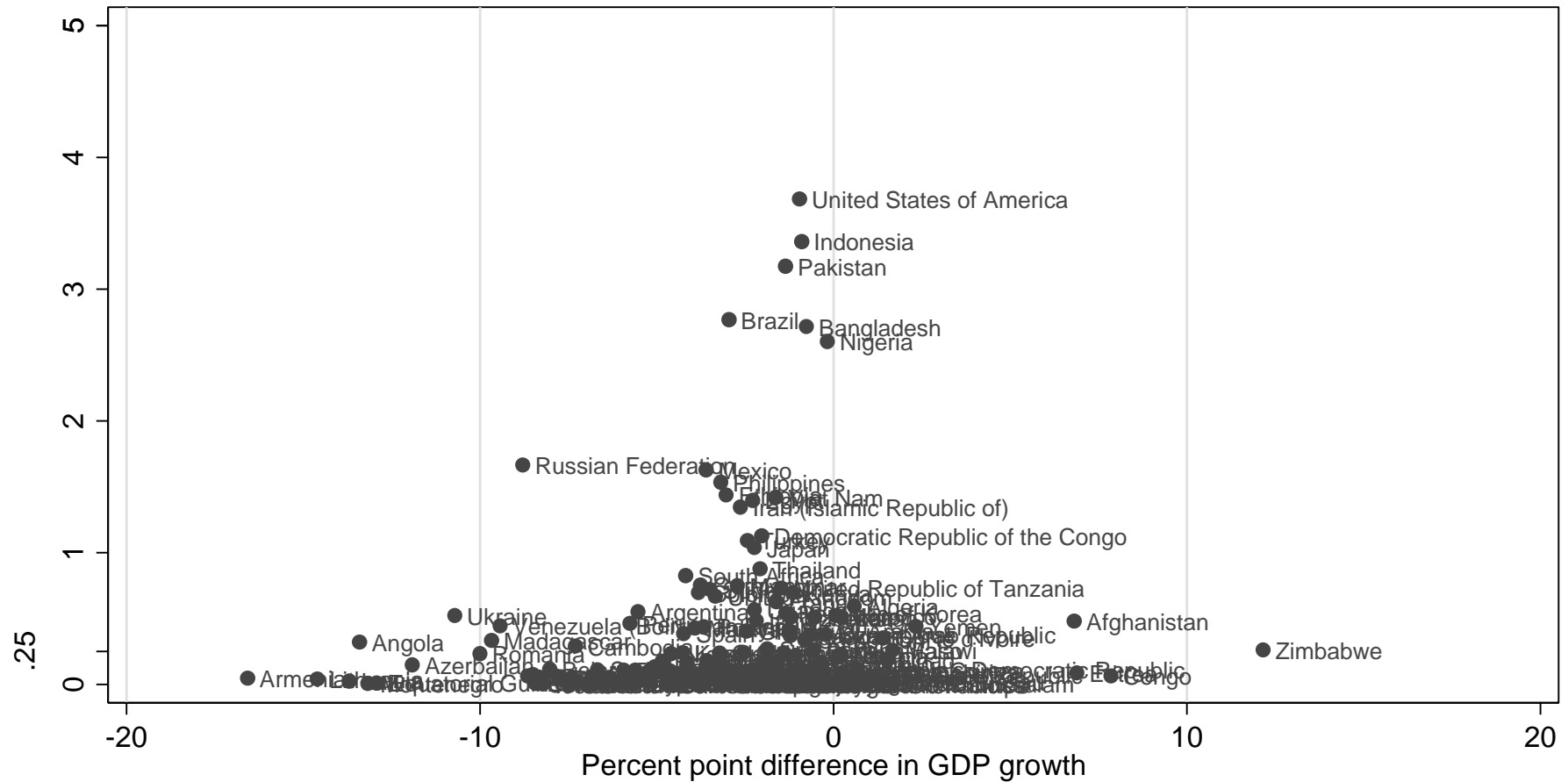
**Figure 5a. Cross Plot of Youth (% Global Population) in 2010 vs. Percentage Point Difference in GDP Growth Between 2007/8 and 2009/10**



Source: Authors' calculations using UN (2009) for the youth data and IMF World Economic Outlook Database for the GDP data.

\*This paper builds on Engilbertsdottir and Mendoza (2009), and it is part of a broader policy research program at UNICEF to analyze the impact of economic crises on children and women and assess and design policy responses to help protect the vulnerable and preserve investments in the social sectors. The views expressed herein are the authors' and do not represent those of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Ronald Mendoza co-authored this study while he was a senior economist with UNICEF.

**Figure 5b. Cross Plot of Youth (% Global Population) in 2010 vs. Percentage Point Difference in GDP Growth Between 2007/8 and 2009/10  
Sans China and India**



Source: Authors' calculations using UN (2009) for the youth data and IMF World Economic Outlook Database for the GDP data.

Figure 4 helps to juxtapose information on countries' youth populations (expressed as a share of total national population) against the implied depth of their economic downturn during the period 2008-2010. The difference between the average real growth rates of 2007 and 2008 vs. 2009 and 2010 is used as an indicator for the latter. Figures 5a and 5b illustrate a similar juxtaposition, but this time using youth as a share of total global population as an indicator (Figure 5b drops China and India, which are outliers). These figures convey that most countries observed a dramatic decline in growth during the period—of the 175 countries for which data are available, only 14 countries exhibited an increase in the average real growth when comparing 2007-2008 and 2009-2010.<sup>23</sup> Countries like Cambodia, Mongolia and Maldives which have particularly high youth indicators (at or above 15 percent as a share of total national population) and have also experienced a dramatic economic contraction are among the countries that are likely facing these youth employment challenges.

The labor force participation rate (the sum of employed and unemployed over the total working age population) will be unaffected by shifts from employed to unemployed status. However this rate may be changed by the net impact of two effects: a) the “discouraged worker effect” which could result from workers stopping to look for jobs due to the bleak employment outlook; and b) the “added worker effect” which could result from the fact that more household workers seek jobs in order to supplement declining purchasing power due to higher food and other prices as well as due to the loss of a job by working family members or decline in profits from a household enterprise. Because these two effects work in opposite directions in terms of labor force participation, the net impact of the crisis is an empirical question.

While these broader trends are only beginning to be understood as the crisis continues to unfold, it is critical to note that youth participation is particularly vulnerable. Analysis by the ILO for a sample of 17 European countries for which complete data are available has revealed that youth participation even before the crisis was on the decline. During the crisis, among youth, prime-age and elderly workers in these 17 countries, the youth cohort suffered the highest decline in participation rates. Latvia, for example, was particularly hit hard by the crisis and its change in the youth participation rate decreased from 0.3 percentage points to 4.2 percentage

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<sup>23</sup> These countries include Congo, D.R. and Zimbabwe, for example, which are countries that are recovering from deep economic contractions even prior to the crisis. The 14 countries are: Afghanistan, Brunei Darussalam, Chad, Comoros, Congo, D.R., Cote d'Ivoire, Fiji, Haiti, Mauritania, Nepal, Togo, Tonga, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

points.<sup>24</sup> As noted earlier, the decline in youth participation then tends to mask the deeper joblessness problem, since the unemployment rate will not fully reflect this.

### *Specific Risks Faced by Female Youth*

As of 2010, the female youth population in the age group 15-24 is expected to be close to 600 million people.<sup>25</sup> Figures 6a and 6b show the female youth population trends in different country groups for the period 1950-2050. In figure 6a, the trends clearly reveal that female youth population, already the largest in the period covered by data, is expected to increase even further and peak in the next decade. If we look at the disaggregated female youth population trends, the peak can be mostly attributed to less developed and least developed countries. A further look at figure 6b shows that the female youth in developing countries represents around 30% of the world's youth population. While we do observe a decline in this trend in the future, the proportion of female youth from least developed countries is expected to steadily increase.

How will female youth be affected by the crisis? In some regions with historically high gender inequities, the global economic crisis may further harden pre-existing forms of gender-based exclusion in the labor market. The ILO reported in early 2010 that in East Asia, South-East Asia and in Sub Saharan Africa, there was little or no gender difference in the unemployment impact of the crisis. However, in regions with historically high gender inequities, such as South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Middle East and North Africa, all exhibited much higher unemployment increases among women when compared to men. The situation in the Middle East and North Africa is particularly grim as in 2008 the labor force participation rates for young women were a mere 21.5 and 22.9 respectively. These two regions together present a situation where unemployment is also an outcome of strong cultural, social and economic gender divisions in addition to economic constraints. While educated women seek employment in the shrinking public sector, entrepreneurship rates are very low amongst women and they also face a lot of hostility in business environments. The economic crisis, therefore, can be expected to add to the already dire situation for women as policies necessary to combat discrimination and promote female employment will now not be a priority and may even fall off the radar. In

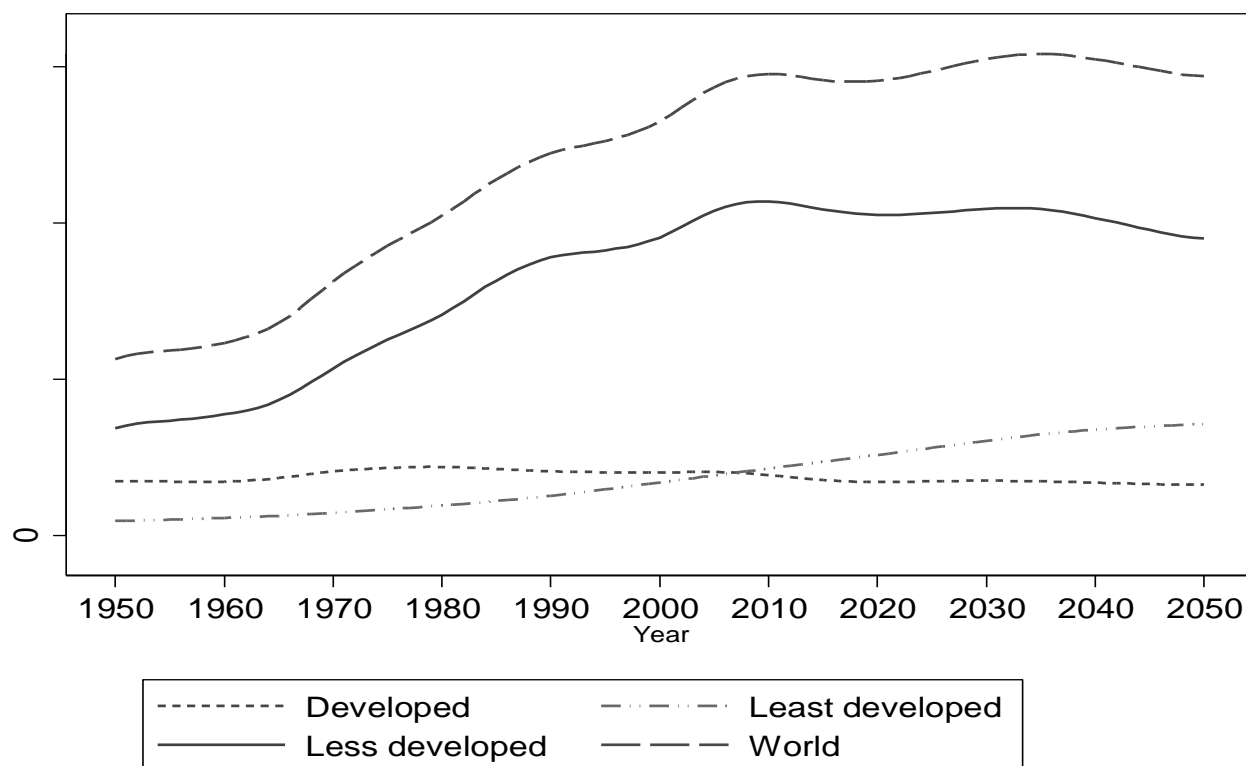
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<sup>24</sup> See ILO (2010:14) for a full elaboration of the data. First, there is a high risk that female youth who are still in school may drop out in order to help augment household income.

<sup>25</sup> Based on authors' calculations.

contrast, in the Developed Economies and the European Union, were the only regions where the unemployment impact was much less worse for women compared to men.<sup>26</sup>

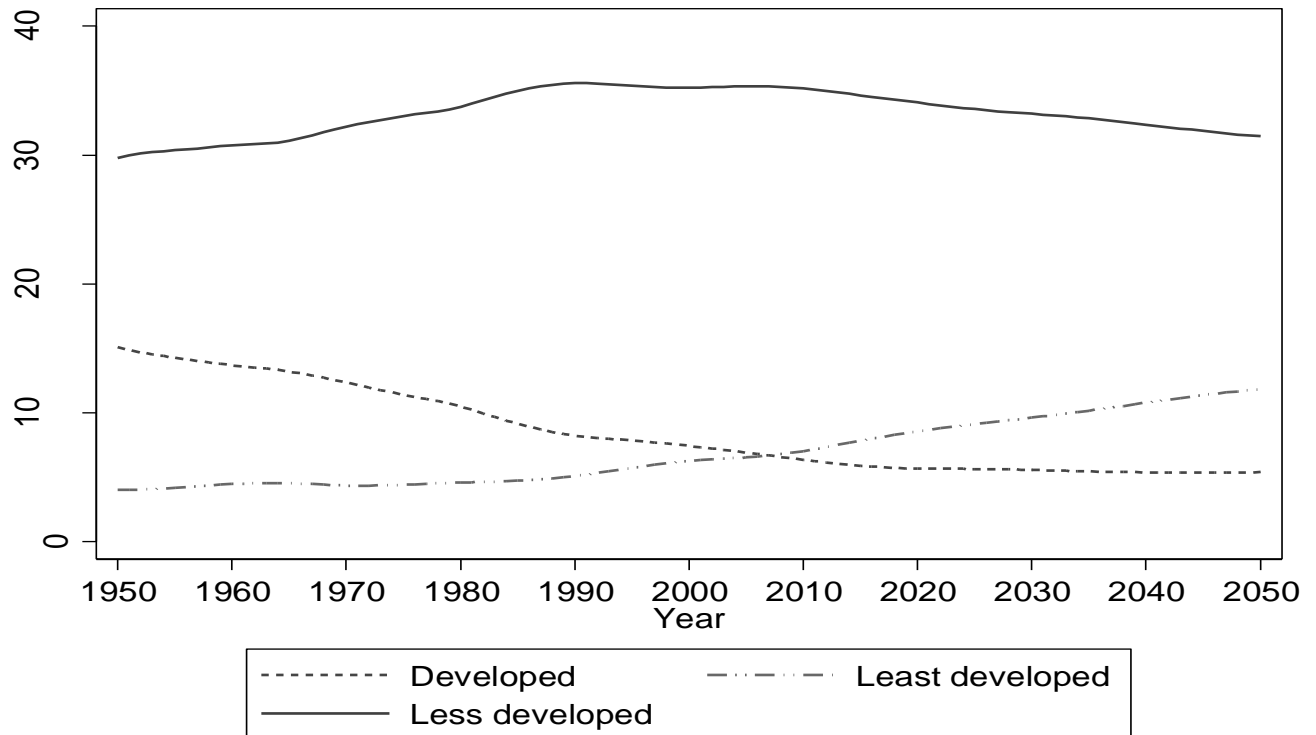
**Figure 6a. Female Youth Population aged 15-24 (Number of people), 1950-2050**



Source: Authors' calculations using UN (2009) for the youth data.

<sup>26</sup> ILO (2010).

**Figure 6b. Female Youth Population aged 15-24 (In Percent Share by Country Group), 1950-2050**



Source: Authors' calculations using UN (2009) youth data.

Based on the now extensive literature on crises as well as a review of the recent evidence on the global crisis, the main risks faced by female youth include at least two main types. In Brazil, for example, one study showed wives participation in the labor market increased by 35 percent when their husbands became unemployed (Fernandes et al, 2005). During the 1994-95 Peso crisis in Mexico, the magnitude of the added worker effect for women was found to be twice as large as that observed during the period of economic prosperity (Parker and Skoufias, 2002). A similar trend was also reflected in increase of female labor force participation in Argentina during structural adjustment (Cerruti, 2000), and more recently during 2001-2002 crisis (McKenzie, 2004). Furthermore, evidence shows that in Indonesia, during the 1997-8 crisis, women aged 15-24 were less likely to sink into poverty as young women entered the labor force and compensated for retrenched workers (Frankenberg et al, 1999). The emerging evidence of the current crisis indicates an increase in the female labor force in some developing countries, and demonstrates the rapid transition of women to new livelihoods. For example, in Bangladesh, rural Muslim women are reported to be working publicly in restaurant kitchens, while the urban

areas saw an increase of female labor in new forms of retail such as the gathering and sale of rejected vegetables (IDS, 2009). In Kenya and Zambia women supplemented income by opening small food kiosks, selling second hand clothing, and opening stalls with vegetables and other food stuffs by the road (ibid).

A second main risk has to do with female youth unemployment which may tend to be more acute during a crisis, particularly in countries with high pre-existing gender inequality characteristics. One could turn back to Table 2 and 3, which provide gender inequality values and the depth of the economic contraction for countries that have a high proportion of youth in their national population and account for the largest number of young people in the world, respectively. Countries in South Asia account for about 25 percent of world's youth and are amongst the lowest ranked countries with high gender inequalities.<sup>27</sup> We find that most low income and lower middle income countries have high gender inequality values and experience an economic contraction in the range of -1 and -3 percentage points.<sup>28</sup> While the depth of the contraction is smaller in magnitude than most high income and upper middle income countries, a high gender inequality incidence, signals that the potential challenges regarding female youth employment and social advancement opportunities may be most acute in low income countries even if the economic shock is not large. Furthermore, for countries with large numbers of extremely poor people, even a relatively less pronounced economic contraction may have profound implications on household incomes.

With the right policies and institutions, a rising share of those working in the total population can help boost economic growth. One study attributes more than 40 percent of higher growth in the East Asian tigers versus in Latin America during 1960-90, to the faster growth of working age population, combined with better policies on trade and human capital development (Bloom and Canning, 2004). The foregoing discussion therefore underscores a potentially wasted opportunity for many countries that fail to invest in their children and youth, with particularly deleterious impact on female youth. In what follows, we turn to specific policy options that provide more nuanced responses not just for youth employment and social advancement challenges more broadly, but also those focused on female youth more specifically.

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<sup>27</sup> The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) is a new composite measure of gender discrimination based on social institutions. It measures gender inequality in five areas: [Family Code](#), [Physical Integrity](#), [Son Preference](#), [Civil Liberties](#) and [Ownership Rights](#) in 102 non-OECD countries.

<sup>28</sup> The contraction is calculated as a percentage point difference in GDP growth between 2007/8 and 2009/10.

## **II. Nuanced Policies for a More Youth- and Gender Inclusive Recovery**

In order to address the challenges outlined in the previous section, nuanced policy innovations are required to help address the specific risks faced by youth, particularly female youth. The lack of gender responsive budgets and policies may raise risks that the recovery will leave out women. Recent studies of the fiscal stimulus packages of Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Vietnam by UNIFEM and UNICEF's East Asia and Pacific Regional Office raised some concern that large components of fiscal stimulus packages also tend to favour men over women. In many countries, men tend to be better integrated into the formal economy either as entrepreneurs or labourers, so fiscal stimulus focused on infrastructure and enterprise support may benefit men more than women.<sup>29</sup> Policies that are not nuanced and fail to address persistent gender inequities may end up exacerbating these inequities—such as by creating disproportionately more opportunities that benefit mostly men, while failing to boost sectors (including the social sectors) that tend to benefit women by providing jobs or easing their time poverty and burden.

In some parts of the developing world, women appear to be much more severely affected by the crisis. Many young women lost jobs in various export sectors that are now struggling (e.g. textiles, garments, electronics, etc).<sup>30</sup> In addition, mothers with high time poverty to begin with will now face even greater stress to try to cope with the crisis by taking additional jobs (and/or working longer hours), adjusting their households' expenditures, and undertaking other coping strategies. Budgets and other policies also need to be gender responsive in order to address imbalances in the way crisis vulnerability will evolve.

Many studies have gone on to show that the significant concern that exists over gender differences in health and education in low income countries, are because cultural barriers prevent investment in girls and therefore a change will not be possible without a social or cultural change. However Munshi and Rosenzweig (2006) find that enrolment in English language schools increased for girls (but not for boys) in response to increases in the returns to English language education in Bombay and this was driven primarily by the expansion of the financial sector and other white collar industries.<sup>31</sup> In addition, Jensen (2010) examines a randomized intervention which included providing three years of Business Process Outsourcing

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<sup>29</sup> McCarty, Corner and Guy (2009) and Corner (2009).

<sup>30</sup> See footnote 29.

<sup>31</sup> More papers are cited with similar conclusions are cited in Jensen(2010)



(BPO) recruiting services to women in randomly selected villages, to analyze whether increases in employment opportunities for women leads to greater human capital investments in girls. This intervention acts as a medium of providing information on the returns to schooling. The results show that girls aged 5-15, in the villages randomly selected to receive recruiting services for women, were 3 to 5 percentage points more likely to be in school and also experienced greater nutrition. However for boys there was no change in any of these measures. These studies therefore indicate that the labor market also plays an important role and that efforts to expand the economic opportunities for women can have significant impacts implying as there exists a demand constraint and that a low demand, driven by low returns, may eventually contribute to low human capital attainment in poor countries (Oster and Millet, 2010 and Jensen, 2010).

There are at least two broad sets of policies which most countries will need to implement in combination but with possibly different emphasis: a) Policies that address immediate challenges likely to be exacerbated by the crisis related to unemployment and lack of social advancement among female youth; and b) Policies to address possible risks at different points in a girl's lifecycle, which, if unaddressed, could accumulate and undermine future youth employment prospects. The latter help to emphasize that not only present youth, but future youth need to receive policy attention, since the foundations and skills to be productive members of society and engage effectively in the labor market are built largely during childhood and youth.

#### *Addressing Immediate Female Youth Employment Challenges*

Measures which can alleviate the consequences of crisis, particularly for women, include unemployment insurance, retraining programs to respond to the new labor market, reduced working hours and in particular, public works programs under various government departments. Employment guarantee (EG) programs are among the policy interventions demonstrating the idea of government as an “employer of last resort” when a country is faced with structural constraints and insufficient demand for labor. In general, these programs can contribute to picking up the shortfall in the case of cyclical and/or structural unemployment, help to create a minimum floor for wage and income levels, as well as maintain wage and price stability. They can also act as pro-poor stabilizers for the local economy and the broader macro-economy (Miller et al, 2010). With the current economic crisis in mind, these programs aid in smoothing out the income shocks for groups of people who are disproportionately excluded from productive

remunerative employment. The evidence regarding programmes that specifically target the youth is mixed. An evaluation of the Temporary Employment Programme of the Government of Bulgaria showed a positive effect on the probability of employment for participants aged younger than 30.<sup>32</sup> While such programs have a number of advantages, such as the potential to cover a vast number of unemployed and underemployed workers regardless of their previous employment status, they often respond better to the demands of the male labor force, as they typically feature construction and technical jobs for which women have rarely been trained. The quality of these employment guarantee schemes should therefore be enhanced in order to promote more equal access. One avenue would be through introduction of social services and environmental protection components that would be more accessible to women; and another would be to complement these programs with more pro-active policies to empower women and female youth with the appropriate skills. Yet another aspect focuses on how women-friendly the work environment would be, to the extent that these programs include ancillary components such as childcare services.

In addition, employment guarantee programs also have the advantage of having a certain degree of flexibility when compared to other crisis responses. This is particularly the case for employment creation programs which relied on an element of self-selection of program beneficiaries.<sup>33</sup> This self-selection aspect, incidentally, is also now reflected in some of the employment guarantee schemes that have been put in place by countries in order to provide some minimum guarantee of income and employment for its citizens.

A brief review of several programs in selected countries helps to point out key program components that help to address key challenges in women's and female youth unemployment:

- ***India's Employment Guarantee Program.*** While the peak in India's youth population (as a share of national population) happened prior to 2008, it still represents about 18 percent of the world's youth, second only to China. Employment generation is a key challenge in India, and to help address this, that country has turned several schemes even prior to the global crisis of 2008-2009. As such, these may have helped cushion the impact of the crisis on employment and livelihoods. India's major schemes for creating wage employment are the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in rural

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<sup>32</sup> ILO (2010)

<sup>33</sup> This was found to be the case as far as Indonesia's employment creation programs during the Asian crisis. See Pritchett et al. (2003) and Sumarto et al. (2003).

areas and Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) in urban areas. While both programs mandate at least one third of the beneficiaries to be women, the SJSRY is being comprehensively revamped with a view to addressing the drawbacks observed in its initial implementation. NREGA is designed to enhance the livelihood security of households in rural areas of India by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The Act came into force on February 2, 2006 and was implemented in a phased manner. Gender provisions have been included, mandating, for example, at least one third of its beneficiaries to be women. In Phase one it was introduced in 200 most backward districts of the country and was subsequently was implemented in an additional 130 districts in Phase two (2007-2008). As per the initial target, NREGA was to be expanded countrywide in five years. However, in order to bring the whole nation under its safety net and keeping in view the demand, the Scheme was extended to the remaining 274 rural districts of India from April 1, 2008 in Phase III.<sup>34</sup> Participation rates in the first two years of NREGA's implementation, point to an increase in the participation of women (from 40 percent in 2006-07 to 44 percent in 2007-08) (Drèze and Oldiges, 2009). However large interstate variations have also been observed: women constitute more than two-thirds of NREGA workers in Kerala (71 percent), Rajasthan (69 percent) and Tamil Nadu (82 percent) and less than the stipulated one-third in Assam (31 percent), Bihar (27 percent), West Bengal (17 percent), Uttar Pradesh (15 percent), Himachal Pradesh (30 percent) and Jharkhand (27 percent). A recent survey of NREGA women participants, revealed that local employment (thereby reducing male rural-urban migration and lessening women's workload), maternity leave, and allowing for spaces to feed and take care of children, were some of the social benefits that made the employment program particularly appealing (Khera and Nayak, 2009). Some anecdotal evidence also suggests that the program provided employment for some of those migrating from urban to rural areas as a result of job losses in export industries (ILO, 2010).

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<sup>34</sup> For further information on NREGP, see [http://india.gov.in/sectors/rural/national\\_rural.php](http://india.gov.in/sectors/rural/national_rural.php).

- ***South Africa's Expanded Public Works Program.*** South Africa is currently experiencing a youth bulge (as a percent of national population) and also features amongst the top 20 countries with a large share of youth as a percent of world youth. In 2009, an economic contraction of 4.29 percentage points,<sup>35</sup> coupled with an unemployment rate of 31.2 percent (an increase by 3.6 percentage points from the previous year) necessitated an outline for a recovery program by the government. This included a public investment program of approximately R787 billion, a portion of which was directed to South Africa's Expanded Public Works Program (EPWP) (ILO, 2010). There have been several employment generating initiatives in South Africa and the lessons learned from the previous efforts contributed to the design of the Expanded Public Works Program. Launched in April 2004, the program's aim is to provide poverty and income relief through temporary work for the unemployed while carrying out socially useful activities. The immediate goal in phase 1 of the program was to help alleviate unemployment by creating at least 1 million work opportunities, with specific quotas for women (40 percent), youth (30 percent) and people with disabilities (2 percent). By 2008 EPWP created 1.65 million work opportunities and of these, it exceeded the targets of employing youth (41 percent versus 30 percent target) and women (43 percent versus 40 percent target).<sup>36</sup> The social sector had the largest representation of women. Although the first generation EPWP was successful in exceeding its job creation target, many of these jobs were short term and thus had limited positive impact on the lives of the beneficiaries. In the light of the economic crisis the second phase of the program (EPWP II) aims to increase the number of job days and benefit 4.5 million unemployed over the five-year period between 2009 and 2014, which is expected to reduce unemployment by half (ILO, 2010). Ensuring the provision of childcare services and women-specific basic facilities at construction sites would make these programmes more accessible to women. Apart from India and South Africa, other countries that have also created public works in which women represent more than 70 percent of the labor force include Peru (PAIT), Chile (PEM), and most recently Argentina (Heads of Household Programme) (Bulimic, 2009). While most EG programs are geared to generate temporary and short-term labor, a key

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<sup>35</sup> Authors calculations based on percent point difference in GDP growth between 2007/2008 and 2009/2010

<sup>36</sup> Government of South Africa: Expanded Public Works Programme 5 year report.

component of such programs is in the training and development of skills which aid in making a transition to full time employment after the guarantee period.

- ***Liberia's Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls & Young Women Program.*** Job training programs are more likely to succeed if they are designed as a comprehensive package including education, employment services and social services and if they are accompanied by national labor policies that take into account both youth and gender perspectives (Garcia and Fares, 2008). Liberia's Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls & Young Women Program represents an interesting example on this front. In the past, similar to other conflict affected countries, emergency skills training and public works programs in Liberia have targeted mostly male youth ex-combatants and a few skill training program targeting adolescent girls and young women have focused primarily on the development of skills such as soap-making, pastry-making or sewing for which there is insufficient market demand. The private sector has also noted the difficulty in finding young employees with the appropriate job skills.<sup>37</sup> If we turn to Table 1, Liberia features in column 3, as a country that expects a youth bulge post 2010. Recognizing the youth as a large resource pool, specifically young women and adolescent girls, the Ministry of Gender & Development's introduced the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls & Young Women Program (EPAG). The program represents collaboration across the Government of Liberia, the World Bank, Denmark, and Nike Foundation. It seeks to smooth the path of adolescent girls to productive employment through job skills training and business development services. The program aims at: 1) Providing skills training for wage employment, combined with job placement assistance; 2) Facilitating business development services and links to microcredit for young women entrepreneurs; and 3) Contributing to institutional strengthening and capacity-building. Through these initiatives, EPAG plans to increase employment and income for 2,500 adolescent girls and young women in the age group of 16 and 27 in nine communities around Monrovia and Kakata. Approximately 1,250 of these girls will be trained in the first round of training, scheduled to have begun in February 2010.

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<sup>37</sup> Government of Liberia, Ministry of Gender and Development, EPAG Project Office [Available at: [http://www.supportliberia.com/assets/108/EPAG\\_one-pager\\_1\\_.pdf](http://www.supportliberia.com/assets/108/EPAG_one-pager_1_.pdf)].

### *Addressing Risks throughout a Girl's Lifecycle*

The preceding section touched upon policies that address the immediate challenges related to unemployment and lack of social advancement among female youth, underscoring the importance of targeted and nuanced policies to address risks that may be exacerbated by the global crisis. Additional risks that undermine future unemployment prospects emerge at different points in a girl's lifecycle. Addressing these risks require among other policies, adequate investments in children (who will become the future youth) and specifically once again introducing nuanced policy interventions that address gender inequalities.

There are several ways to understand a child's lifecycle. It could reflect a continuum of age-stages where the needs of an individual changes through their life, from conception to death. It could also point to the different stages and events of life which an individual or household passes through (Cain, 2008). There is an extensive literature on the different risks throughout a child's lifecycle.<sup>38</sup> Girls in particular face exceptionally high risks in places with acute gender disparities.

Girls are often at a significant disadvantage, particularly where social, economic and cultural factors undermine investing in girls and work against adequately equipping them for successful social and economic advancement. In many parts of the world, there are marked disparities in access to education, health and other key investments in human capital. Girls face shoulder a considerable burden in unpaid cared work, and along with mothers, often act as “shock-absorbers” during periods of crisis.<sup>39</sup> A life-cycle approach enables us to look at different stages of girls' development trajectory; and outline the key risks that girls face at these different stages of their lives (see table 4). Gender disparities could tend to grow over the life cycle as risks, and when unmitigated, are compounded. For instance, lack of nutrition as infants raise the risk of stunting and cognitive underdevelopment later on in life, in turn weakening school performance. Eventually, these result in a severe erosion of their chances for employment and social advancement as youth and women. The latter, in turn, could be transmitted to the next generation as girls that were disempowered both socially and economically throughout their lives

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<sup>38</sup> See the State of the World's Children (Various issues).

<sup>39</sup> See among others Plan International (2009) and Mendoza (2009).

could also face severe challenges as mothers, increasing the likelihood for disparities to be carried onto the next generation.<sup>40</sup>

**Table 4. Risks Throughout a Girl's Lifecycle**

AGE	RISKS	Facts
0-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of nutrition with knock-on effects on stature as well as cognitive development;</li> <li>• Infant/child mortality due to various factors such as poor sanitation, discrimination against girls, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 19 million infants in developing countries are born with low birth weight.</li> <li>• 148 million children under five in the developing world are underweight for their age.</li> <li>• 8.8 million children worldwide died before their fifth birthday in 2008.</li> <li>• 4 million newborns worldwide are dying in the first month of life.</li> </ul>
6-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of not attending school, school dropout, or low educational quality because of lack of income or pressure due to income-income earning responsibilities;</li> <li>• Insufficient food or poor diets increasing likelihood of illness with knock-on effects in education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 100 million children are not attending primary school, with more girls than boys missing out.</li> <li>• 150 million children aged 5-14 are engaged in child labor.</li> <li>• Youth literacy among young men is 1.2 times higher than among young women in the least developed countries.</li> </ul>
12-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerability of (especially girl) children to early withdrawal from school due to lack of parents/family income;</li> <li>• Risks from early marriage and child-bearing;</li> <li>• Lack of access to training/formal employment leading to entry into high risk employment categories;</li> <li>• Increased risk of HIV and AIDS infection as individuals become sexually active;</li> <li>• Increasing vulnerability of girls due to gender based violence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 64 million women aged 20-24 reported they were married before the age of 18.</li> <li>• 14 million young women in developing countries gave birth between the ages of 15 and 19 years old.</li> <li>• Over 500,000 women die each year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.</li> </ul>
18-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of employment/reduced income earning potential for women through pregnancy and childcare;</li> <li>• Under-employment and informal employment;</li> <li>• Reduced household income due to disease and earlier disparities and other illnesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Africa, among young women, main causes of high levels of unemployment and underemployment is early marriage. (Christiana E.E, 2003)</li> <li>• In China, half of all female youth surveyed cited housework and/or childcare responsibilities as the primary reason for not working for pay; in Kosovo, almost a third of young women were out of the labor force due to ill health or disability; while in Syria, one third were denied permission to work by their families (Katz, 2008).</li> <li>• In developing countries, 34% of young women are estimated to be "jobless" – unemployed, out of the labor force, and not in school (Katz, 2008)</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' elaboration based on UNICEF's State of the World's Children (Various issues).

<sup>a</sup>Figures derived from the State of the World's Children 2010.

- **0-5.** Proper access to basic health care, including immunisation and nutrition could help to ensure a newborn infant girl will survive the first five years of her life. Enrolment to an

<sup>40</sup> The literature on intergenerational transmission of poverty underscores the importance of the income of parents and mothers' education as predictive factors for various indicators of child wellbeing outcomes (e.g. school attendance, school performance, health, birth weight, income of children, etc.). See among others Black and Devereux (2010), Smith (2006), and Solon (1999). In addition, cultural and other factors that also influence social and economic standing and endowments could also harden disparities working against girls and women (see Quisumbing, 2008 and Plan International, 2009).

early learning programme will secure a better start at primary school. A now extensive body of literature provides evidence suggesting that investments in the early stages of life actually have the most returns (Heckman, 2006). Nevertheless, the risk during a crisis is that social services will be scaled back, as more families are likely switching to public services and service providers are struggling with a real erosion of resources (due to higher prices or lower budgets).<sup>41</sup>

- **6-11.** Girls between the ages of 6-11 will be busy learning literacy and numeracy skills. Their school attendance and performance will be linked to their health and well-being. Completion of five years of primary school education will enhance survival rate of her own children beyond age 5 by 40 percent. Each additional year in primary school could also boost girls' future wages on average by 10 to 20 percent (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2002: 22).<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, at this stage girls from poor families also face high risk of dropping out of school not just because of domestic factors like increasing need to supplement household labor or cultural and other factors that predispose less education and other investments in girls, but also due to income and other types of shocks such as those precipitated by a crisis (Plan International, 2009).
- **12-17.** The transition to secondary school at age 12 is a critical one, given that there is a high risk that many will discontinue their education. Yet, this is about the time when girls learn about financial literacy skills, and how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. The evidence suggests that girls receiving seven or more years of education will marry later and have fewer children, in turn raising the likelihood of education for the next generation (e.g. Ellis et al. 2006; Plan International, 2009). At the same time, dropping out of school is a factor that is likely to increase the risks of HIV infection which comes at a risk four times greater than that of boys this age (UNICEF, 2009).<sup>43</sup> A crisis may tend to exacerbate the risk of school dropout, due in part to lack of income for these types of investments, as well as the pressure to augment household income or help out with

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<sup>41</sup> See Mendoza (2010) and Lustig (1998).

<sup>42</sup> See also T. Paul Schultz (2002)

<sup>43</sup> In addition data from rural Uganda shows that young women with secondary education are three times less likely than those with no education to be HIV positive (Walque, 2007). A study about the impact of education on young Zambian women also concluded that AIDS spread twice as fast among those who were not educated (Vandemoortele and Delamonica, 2000).



household care activities due to mothers' labor adjustments (such as taking on more work).

- **18-24.** At age 18-24 adolescent girls' transition into adulthood, and they should be anticipating opportunities for higher education, business training, employment, as well as more extensive and independent participation in social and economic life. But a girl at this time could also face traps, due to early marriage and pregnancy, in turn raising the risk of childbirth complications or even death due to various factors, including poor nutrition, and lack of access to health care and medical facilities. Infant and child mortality is also a risk, notably for young mothers. Among 54 low- to middle-income countries, maternal stature was inversely associated with offspring mortality, underweight, and stunting in infancy and childhood. The groups that experienced the highest child mortality rate were young mothers in the age group of 20-24 (Özaltın et al, 2010).

To synthesize, this lifecycle framework emphasizes the build-up of risks throughout a girl's life, and notably in places wherein gender inequality is acute. If these risks remain unmitigated, the chain of investments in a girl's future wellbeing and capabilities could be broken, leaving her transitioning into adulthood with high vulnerabilities. Breaking this pattern requires a similarly holistic approach which emphasizes an entire continuum of investments and care. In much the same way that unmitigated risks lead to a spiral of disparities, adequate and timely investments and interventions may reinforce each other and lead to a dramatic improvement in wellbeing and capacities. While there are various ways to parse these interventions, one approach which is particularly cogent in the context of the global crisis, would be to view them under the lens of developing social protection systems that address risks to girls in a holistic manner.<sup>44</sup> Here, we briefly touch on a few examples without attempting to cover the vast landscape in this area.

For instance, cash and in-kind transfers could be designed to preserve education and health investments for children, and these are part of a much broader array of policy

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<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, it is possible to outline the "continuum of care" for adolescent girls, an approach elaborated by UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (2010).

interventions that underpin countries' social protection strategies. When designed to include educational, child and maternal health, child protection and food distribution among other critical components, social protection systems do not only provide temporary relief to the poor and new poor, but they could also have a potential to be an effective long-term policy for making periods of growth much more inclusive and possibly lifting households out of poverty (Ravallion, 2009). Many of these transfer schemes are deliberately targeted at mothers, based on evidence that they tend to spend more on child wellbeing and human capital.

Programs like Bolsa Familia in Brazil and Oportunidades in Mexico provide cash transfers conditioned on investments in children regardless of gender. To help address deep gender disparities, Oportunidades even includes higher subsidy rates for the education of girls in primary and secondary school levels. Evidence suggests that the program helped reduce the rate of attrition at the primary school level by 17 percent for girls, and 14 percent for boys. Moreover, failure rates to pass from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade were reduced by 8.4 and 3.8 percent for girls and boys respectively (Nigenda and Gonzales-Robledo, 2005). Similar positive effects of school stipends were observed in Bangladesh with its Female Secondary School Assistance Program. Designed to improve girls' access to secondary education in rural areas, this program is associated with an increase in girls' enrolment in secondary school from 33 percent (1.1. million) in 1991 to 58 percent (3.5 million) in 2005. Nevertheless, its impact on reducing early marriage is less clear (Raynor and Wesson, 2006).<sup>45</sup>

As girls grow up, programmes that allow them to widen their choice of activities, participate in empowering social and economic endeavours, and become agents of social change within their communities are of particular relevance. Such programs have been successfully piloted in Bangladesh, Egypt and Malawi. Evaluation of a joint initiative between UNICEF, UNFPA, Population Council and BRAC in Bangladesh has shown that girls' participation in the "Kishori Abhijan" program (Adolescent Girls' Adventure program) significantly increased their self-employment and part-time employment opportunities (Population Council, 2007a). Carried out over a period of three years in 14 rural districts, the intervention benefited 15,000 girls. One of the important findings of the evaluation was that income generating opportunities did not lead to school dropout. While the programme contributed to improved school enrolment rates it also lowered marriage rates, especially among young girls aged 12-14.

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<sup>45</sup> On positive impact of school stipends on girls in Cambodia see also Filmer and Schady (2006)

Similarly, in Malawi, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Foundation designed a program to address key areas that prevent girls from achieving equal status in a society (UNICEF, 2005). This included initiatives to tackle low participation, poor educational and reproductive health outcomes, as well as lack of vocational skills and low socioeconomic status of girls. For example, the programme provided girls with skills such as tailoring, knitting, computer programming, welding, carpentry, acting and playing musical instruments. The training was instrumental in securing girls' economic independence; increasing their access to and control over finances from 47.2 to 60 percent (80 percent of girls were in some form of employment). An important feature of this program was to increase visibility and participation of girls in youth clubs which have played a key role in mobilizing young people for HIV voluntary counselling and testing (ibid).

At the time of evaluation there were 96 active clubs in four districts, 40 percent which were led by girls. Supporting evidence shows that clubs helped girls become more articulate, assertive and eloquent in discussions about issues impacting their lives. In addition, the "Ishraq" (meaning "sunlight") program in rural provinces of Upper Egypt offers a curriculum to enhance literacy and life skills for girls, preparing them to better respond to the risks that often diminish their opportunities. As part of this initiative, girls also actively participate in sport activities in an effort to promote self-confidence and a sense of empowerment. The program which costs \$133 per year per girl, who completes the program, has shown to have an effect on delayed age of marriage, and opposing views to female genital mutilation/cutting and other harmful practices. There is evidence that program also fosters civic engagement. For example, many girls lacked official forms of identification and were therefore not eligible for government services. Working together with government officials, the Ishraq facilitated issuance of birth certificates and public identification cards, a first step in exercising active citizenry (Population Council 2007b). Ongoing since 2001, the program has been successfully scaled up in several other regions of the country.

Where the risks of contracting HIV are high such as in Sub Saharan Africa, preventive interventions are critical, notably for girls and young women who are 2 to 4.5 times more likely to be infected with HIV than males of the same age (UNICEF, 2009). In response UNICEF Malawi, Tanzania and Namibia, are currently working with their key partners on the design and testing of a life skills "plus" training package called Sisters to Sisters (S2S). This initiative builds

on a three-day training program, and its aim is to reach 80 percent of 15-17 year adolescent girls with age relevant risk avoidance and risk reduction information and skills. Furthermore, the World Bank also released a new study that shows how young women in Malawi who were given cash payments had significantly lower HIV and other sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates than other groups in their communities (Baird et al, 2010).

There is by now, an extensive literature on social protection, and our interest here is not to revisit this, but rather, point out the critical importance of introducing elements in the design of these systems that help address the specific gender-related risks and disparities. Like gender sensitive labor policy interventions discussed in the previous section, social protection interventions could be similarly nuanced, addressing key risks faced by girls and women.

### **III. Conclusion**

This paper examines the youth population forecasts and identifies a key challenge faced by developing countries: about half of the developing world are anticipating or imminently undergoing a youth bulge, suggesting greater employment and human capital investment challenges as a result of the global economic crisis and its medium term ramifications. This trend is very relevant to a number of developing economies in Asia, particularly given the large number of young people in the region (and in specific countries in the region). In addition, in countries with particularly high gender inequalities, these disparities could also be exacerbated by the global crisis, increasing the risks particularly for female youth. In order to ensure that the global crisis does not lead to permanent harm and that the ensuing recovery is broadly inclusive—notably for women and girls—this paper underscores the need for at least two main sets of policies: a) policies to address the immediate female youth unemployment challenges exacerbated by the crisis; and b) policies to address possible risks throughout a girl's lifecycle that undermine future employment and social advancement prospects.

Policy packages such as macroeconomic stimulus plans that target broad swaths of the economy, may not necessarily address, or may even exacerbate gender and other disparities. In fact, there is evidence from preliminary analyses of crisis response policies, that women and girls are more acutely affected by the crisis, yet the bulk of the resources for crisis response have been directed at sectors that are dominated by men (e.g. infrastructure).<sup>46</sup> There is a need for a clearer

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<sup>46</sup> For a selected review of crisis responses, see Buvinic (2009) and Mendoza (2010).

understanding of the types of risks faced by girls and women throughout the lifecycle, and this in turn can inform the design of more nuanced policies that mitigate these risks.

The costs of inaction are high. Recent empirical evidence, point to a potential drag on growth created by persistent gender disparities.<sup>47</sup> This is not surprising given the important role played by female youth in the growth success stories of certain regions (East Asia in particular), as well as the key role played by women in terms of ensuring adequate investment in the care, education, health and general wellbeing of children. When crises and other factors weaken their capacities and undermine their social and economic advancement, this creates channels for chronic poverty, including transmission to the next generation. It is critical to address these inequalities through nuanced policies that not only respond to the broader crisis impacts, but also specifically address the key gender disparities that these are likely to exacerbate.

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<sup>47</sup> See among others Baliaoune-Lutz and McGillivray (2007), Dollar and Gatti (1999) and Klasen (1999).

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