

Tanzanian youths see improved nutrition, fighting disease as smart post-2015 targets

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In September, 193 governments will announce a set of targets to improve the world between now and 2030. Now young people from Tanzania -- at youth forums in various locations discussing the post-2015 development agenda -- have decided what they think should be at the top of the global priority list.

At two of a worldwide series of post-2015 youth forums, 214 Tanzanian youth read and discussed research from 82 of the world's top economists and 44 sector experts. Organized by the Copenhagen Consensus Centre and with the help of the Lotus Consultants and Kampala International University Dar es Salaam College, they prioritized which targets attain the most value for money.

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Many major global challenges are particularly acute in sub-Saharan Africa, and so it is not surprising that the Tanzanian youth focused on some regional realities. In total, the youths of Tanzania chose not 169 targets but said a much smaller set of 14 were the most important ones for the world.

Their assessments are really needed, because the United Nations (UN) ambassadors still have an implausibly long list of 169 targets, and not all of these targets are great. Some targets generate high economic, social and environmental benefits for their costs, while others cost a fortune and do little good. It is appropriate that young people should help guide the final choice of priority targets, because it is their future.

Issues involving health and gender equality featured several times in the Tanzanian youth's list of top priorities, especially ones with the greatest impact.

Globally, millions of children are deprived of proper nutrition. In Tanzania, about 42 per cent of children under five years are stunted. Spending a small amount on a child's nutrition on providing supplements, improving the balance of the diet and de-worming pays back handsomely: the average benefit is 35 times more than the cost. So it's obvious that feeding people properly and starting early is not just a moral imperative; it also makes a lot of economic sense and is why the Tanzanian youth chose this as their top priority.

The students supported other health priorities like "halve malaria infections", featuring second on their list. Malaria like many quick-spreading diseases requires resources and factors like money, persistence and awareness. In low-income countries, where the world's one billion poorest live, a measly Sh32,700 per person is spent on public health care. Clearly not enough to ensure the well-being of everyone, it's essential to focus on priorities that give the most bang-for-your-buck, and the students understand this knowing that the benefit of halving malaria infections would be 36 times higher than the cost.

Tuberculosis (TB) is another high-profile disease with a large global impact.

In Tanzania, some 6,000 people die from TB every year but the risk has decreased by three-quarters in the last 25 years. Investing in reducing TB would have a significant impact and would do Sh43,000 worth of good for every 1,000 shil-

ling spent, so it's not surprising that the youths included the priority "cut TB deaths by 95 per cent" in their list.

Yet another health target, "reducing infant mortality" also features prominently in the minds of the Tanzanian students. With 52 under-five deaths per a thousand live births in Tanzania, this target was a smart one that students added to their highest priorities. Tanzania's under-five mortality rate is still higher than the world average of 46 per thousand, so ensuring that young children stop dying would not only save lives, but would be financially impactful with a benefit-to-cost ratio of 9:1.

Knowing that providing accessible healthcare, proper nutrition, and many other beneficial factors to infants would prevent these deaths, the Tanzanian youth are prioritizing the directly impactful targets highest. They also voiced a need for "universal access to contraception", which in an indirect way can contribute to healthier children and a better quality of life.

The UN expects 2.4 billion more people by 2050. Supporting this rapidly growing population are the people of Tanzania with a current population of 49 million that is growing at an annual rate of 2.8 per cent. Women who on average give birth to five children in a lifetime are facing a social crisis which contributes to other issues.

If families have fewer children they can invest more in their future giving them much greater earning potential and overall health. Another positive impact of "universal access to contraception" would be one answer to establishing social equality by allowing mothers more time to devote to bring-

MORE INFO: PRIORITY LIST OF TANZANIAN YOUTHS FOR POST-2015

- Reduce child malnutrition
- Halve malaria infections
- Eliminate violence against women and girls
- Triple pre-school in sub-Saharan Africa
- Cut tuberculosis deaths by 95 per cent
- Reduce infant mortality
- Reduce corruption and bribery
- Enhance female education
- High blood pressure medication
- Mobile broadband in developing countries
- Increase women's economic opportunities
- More male circumcision against HIV
- Universal access to contraception
- Better access to water for 2.3 billion people

ing up their family and earning an income. Taking the societal benefits into account, spending Sh1,000 on contraception would do about Sh120,000 worth of good.

Reaching social equality is easier said than done, of course, but one good approach is to keep girls in school for longer and to make sure that well-paid jobs are available for them when they finish education. Improving female education is also a good target, but one that is notoriously difficult to achieve. In studies, it is shown that for each Sh1,000 spent, the benefits are likely to amount to about Sh5,000 of social good.

Making such a prioritization is brave of these young men and women, both because it is hard, but also because it is necessary to show what is most important. It is, after all, their future. I look forward to taking their list, along with those from other youth forums from Africa, Asia and Latin America to the UN in New York, to help the ambassadors make better choices.

Dr Lomborg heads the Copenhagen Consensus Centre, which works with more than 100 of the world's leading economists and seven Nobel Laureates to identify the smartest global solutions.

Mr David Leonard displays a placard showing the target that is of high priority in the Post-2015 development agenda. PHOTO | YOUTH FORUM



Ms Martha Shaka displays a placard to show targets of high priority in the Post-2015 development agenda. PHOTO | YOUTH FORUM