

INVESTING IN  
**YOUNG LEADERS**  
*in sexual and  
reproductive health*



A young woman who can make her own decisions about using contraception or having a safe abortion is a woman who can determine her own future—and her family and community will benefit too.

In our more than 40 years of work to end unsafe abortion, we've seen that unwanted pregnancy most negatively impacts young women, who are at higher risk for unsafe abortion and its associated stigma. That's why Ipas partners with young people to ensure they are not just beneficiaries of services, but also key stakeholders in their own sexual and reproductive health care. Plus, advancing young women's right to safe, legal abortion is crucial for nations to achieve the new Sustainable Development Goals.

Ipas Ghana's Youth Advisory Board



Curious Minds



## Lasting impact

By empowering young leaders in sexual and reproductive health today, we are creating a cohort of lifelong advocates for safe, legal abortion.

To infuse a youth perspective into everything Ipas Ghana does, we created a **Youth Advisory Board** of 15 young people from across the country. This diverse board—including young doctors, journalists, activists, and representatives of religious groups—is charged with integrating a youth-centered approach into all our work.

These young leaders help ensure that Ipas-supported abortion and contraceptive services are safe and youth-centered. They also advocate for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all Ghanaians, including youth, in national policy debates. They are building skills and a commitment to women's health and rights that will inspire a lifetime of positive impact on society.

## Future health providers as advocates

Young people studying to be health professionals will become the leaders who shape women's reproductive health policies and services in the years to come. The problem: Abortion is a critical but often neglected topic in health science education.

Ipas Ghana partners with the **Federation of Ghana Medical Students' Associations**, the umbrella association of all medical and dental students in Ghana, to provide trainings on the importance of safe abortion access for women's health. These trainings prepare students to confront the stigma surrounding contraception and abortion, and to navigate the professional and personal obstacles to providing such care.

"A training on safe abortion for medical students is really important because we don't tackle that issue in our normal curriculum—and we ourselves as health-care providers come face to face with the consequences of unsafe abortion,"



Cephas Avoka, a student trainer on safe abortion while in medical school and a member of Ipas Ghana's Youth Advisory Board.

## Informing youth, inspiring society

Issues affecting young people rarely gain coverage in Ghana's mainstream media—and young people are especially in need of education and information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including how to access safe abortion.

That's why Ipas Ghana partners with the youth-led organization **Curious Minds**, which promotes all young people's rights, including their right to quality health care and information. The group uses media to inform young people on important and controversial topics—such as contraception and unsafe abortion—from a youth perspective. The group's youth-run radio programs challenge and inspire Ghanaian society to see young people as capable of offering solutions, not causing problems.

"It's our future; we will live in it," says Richard Dzikunu, explaining why he's an advocate for youth abortion rights. Richard works with Curious Minds and also sits on Ipas Ghana's Youth Advisory Board.



## Campus leaders advance young women's rights

On the campuses of higher learning institutions, Ipas Ghana supports "**women commissioners**" who serve on student leadership boards and advocate for women's issues. Armed with training in sexual and reproductive health and rights, these young women leaders are making improvements to women's wellbeing on campus and sharing much-needed information with their peers on topics like contraception, unwanted pregnancy and safe abortion.

In everything we do, we stress a focus on young people and build meaningful youth-adult partnerships.

The youth-led and youth-focused organizations we support are experts at finding sustained solutions that break down barriers young people face when trying to access contraception and safe abortion. Together with our partners, we use a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that incorporates work in the medical, social and legal sectors:

- We build the skills of health-care providers so they can provide youth-friendly reproductive health services.
- We partner with local and international groups to advocate for less restrictive laws and policies.
- We work in communities to reduce the stigma surrounding abortion and young people's sexuality.
- We educate young people on sexual and reproductive health and nurture the next generation of advocates for young people's right to safe, legal abortion.

In all our work with youth, our goal remains simple: to have a long-term impact on efforts to decrease unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion.



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