

# IPAS'S YOUTH PROGRAM

Empowering youth to decide their own futures  
by ensuring access to information and options

## For more than 40 years, the Ipas mission has never wavered:

To ensure that no woman or girl dies or is injured from an unsafe abortion

Every girl and young woman deserves to fulfill her dreams—whether she wants to get a good education or job, or to start a family when she is ready. Unfortunately, around the world, young people are disproportionately impacted by the deaths and injuries that result from unsafe abortion.

Ipas's investment in youth is a strategic investment in the future. Engaging with young people has a lasting impact, influencing their health and wellbeing into adulthood, which leads to healthier families and communities. We see this investment as the smartest way for us to decrease unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion. That is, if young people learn early about their reproductive choices and where to find resources, there's less stigma surrounding their decisions and less need for last-resort options.

Ipas is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1973 with a mission to increase access to safe abortion care and reproductive rights for women in developing countries. We work for a world in which all women and girls are empowered to make decisions about their bodies and about when and whether to have a child. We believe that girls and young women have the same right to safe abortion services as older women. We know that families and communities benefit when girls and women exercise that choice. Anything less is a social injustice.

Supportive policies, services, social norms, and communities are vital for girls and young women to be able to act on their reproductive health decisions and access youth-friendly abortion and contraceptive services. Ipas supports policymakers, health providers, community leaders, family, friends, and young people as positive agents of change to decrease barriers that prevent youth from accessing the services they deserve. This includes, for example, removing parental consent laws; ensuring non-judg-

mental, confidential youth-friendly health services; and supporting young leaders and community members to address the stigma surrounding abortion and young people's sexuality.

## Ipas's multi-faceted youth approach

Ipas uses a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that incorporates work in the medical, social, and legal sectors. We build the skills of health-care providers and health systems to meet the reproductive health needs of girls and young women. We work in communities to reduce the stigma of abortion and young people's sexuality. We partner with local and international groups to advocate for less restrictive laws. In each of these areas, we stress a focus on young people and initiate meaningful youth-adult partnerships.



Create youth-friendly safe abortion services by training providers and partnering with youth to identify needed improvements

Ensure youth have the information they need and are able to fulfill their sexual and reproductive rights and access safe services

Empower young leaders to advocate for youth sexual and reproductive rights in their communities and at the national and regional levels

## THE BAD NEWS

In our more than 40 years of working to end unsafe abortion, we've seen that unwanted pregnancies most negatively impact *young people*. Young women are at higher risk for unsafe abortion due to many factors, including taking longer to recognize that they are pregnant, lack of information, lack of transportation and financial resources, age discrimination by health-care providers, lack of privacy and confidentiality at health clinics, stigma related to youth sexuality and abortion, and laws and policies that require adult or spousal consent to access services.

The numbers are staggering:

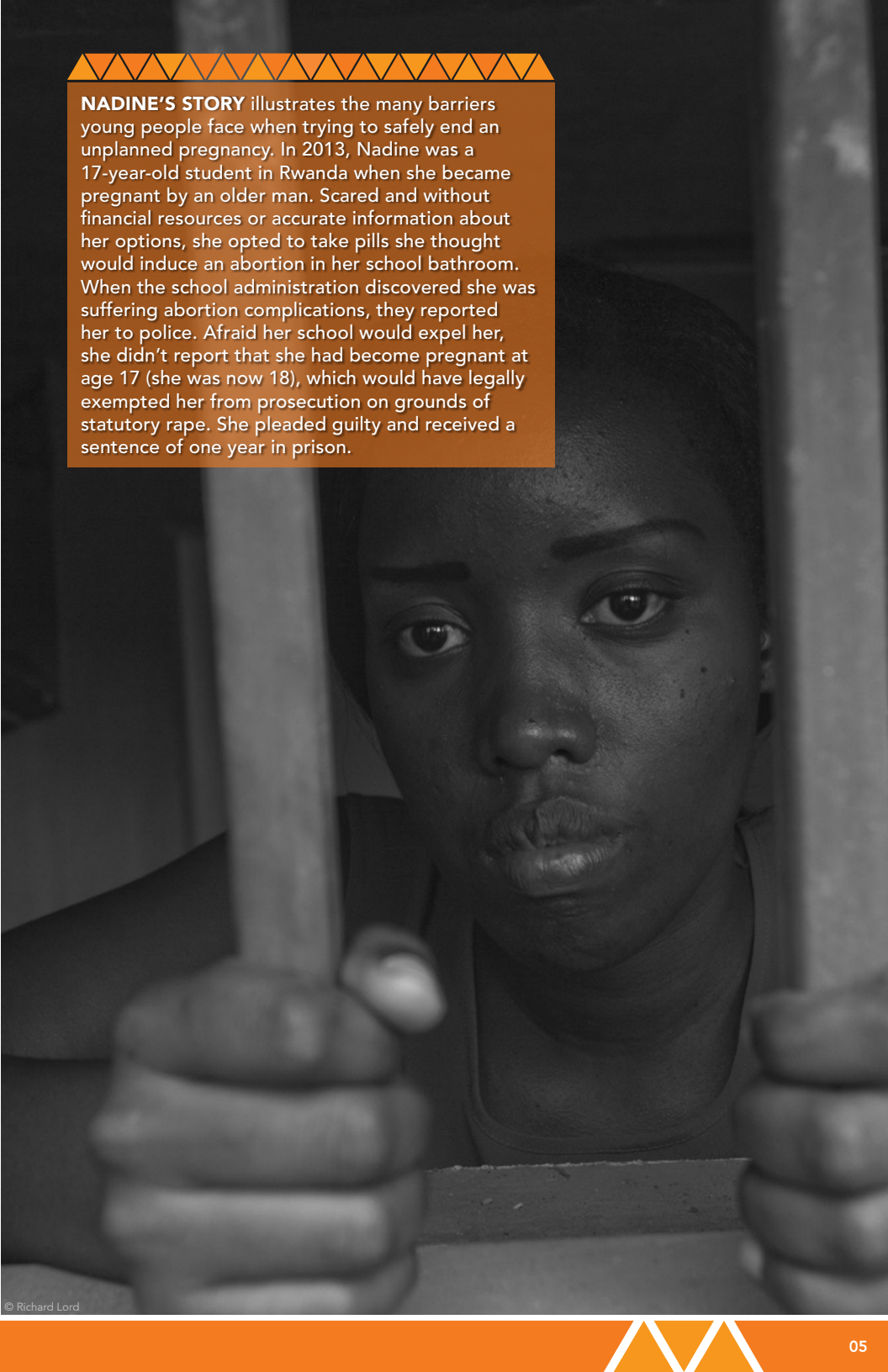
- 22 million women worldwide have unsafe abortions each year (nearly all in developing countries), and almost 50 percent are young women ages 10–24.
- Young women ages 10–19 comprise up to 70 percent of all hospitalizations due to complications from unsafe abortion.
- That same age group accounts for approximately 46 percent of unsafe abortion-related deaths each year.
- Adolescents are disproportionately affected by sexual violence.
- Four of every 10 women receiving abortion care services in Ipas-supported facilities are under age 25.



Eric Kasomo  
Program Officer for  
Africa Directions

“There’s a lot of stigma around abortion in this country; we are losing a lot of young people.

— Eric Kasomo, Program Officer for Africa Directions,  
one of Ipas’s youth-led partners in Zambia



**NADINE'S STORY** illustrates the many barriers young people face when trying to safely end an unplanned pregnancy. In 2013, Nadine was a 17-year-old student in Rwanda when she became pregnant by an older man. Scared and without financial resources or accurate information about her options, she opted to take pills she thought would induce an abortion in her school bathroom. When the school administration discovered she was suffering abortion complications, they reported her to police. Afraid her school would expel her, she didn't report that she had become pregnant at age 17 (she was now 18), which would have legally exempted her from prosecution on grounds of statutory rape. She pleaded guilty and received a sentence of one year in prison.





## THE GOOD NEWS

At Ipas, we know that the best way to decrease unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion is to talk to young people before the fact, in a comfortable setting, with their friends. After all, it is a universal truth that people—especially young people—trust their peers above all others.

That's why Ipas partners with like-minded, locally based organizations across the globe to reach out to the youth in their own communities, train them as peer educators, provide them with information and answers for every question, and send them back to their villages, markets and neighborhoods to share what they learned. These peer educators are not shy about their business. In fact, in Ghana, their crisp, white *Ipas Ghana* shirts invite people to ask them questions.

Still, when a young woman finds herself with an unwanted pregnancy, it should not mean that she must give up on her dreams or resort to desperate, often life-threatening measures to end the pregnancy. She should have access to safe, legal, comprehensive abortion care, and the information to make her own decisions—without the burden of stigma. **The good news is that Ipas's global work is ensuring that women in more and more countries have that right and access to a safe abortion.**

When women and girls exercise their right to decide when and whether to have a child, families and communities benefit. A young woman who can make decisions about her sexual and reproductive options to use contraception or have a safe abortion will be a woman who can determine her own future.

## Experience, capacity and impact

Ipas brings unique expertise in youth-centered abortion care and rights. We lead the field in analyzing and sharing the latest clinical and programmatic guidance on providing youth-centered abortion care. We partner with youth-led and youth-focused community organizations across Africa, Asia and Latin America, and place young leaders at the center of this work—because it affects them and their peers the most. With our partners, we educate people on sexual and reproductive health, train health-care providers on youth-friendly safe abortion and contraceptive services, and nurture the next generation of advocates for young people's sexual and reproductive rights. This way, the people who need accurate information the most are hearing it from trusted peers and in a timely manner.

Every year our work serves more than half a million women—including young women—in countries with high rates of death and injury from unsafe abortion. Approximately one in four women we serve is age 24 or younger. We stand committed to working with and for young people in our programs and research. In 2015, for example, Ipas-supported community education programs reached 300,000 young people.

In countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America, we do the following:

- Partner with and empower youth groups, medical students' associations, and community organizations to raise awareness of and advocate for safe abortion

### IPAS COUNTRY PROGRAMS

MEXICO

CENTRAL AMERICA

EL SALVADOR  
GUATEMALA  
NICARAGUA


BOLIVIA



- Support partners that provide community-level education and health care for youth
- Work with health professionals to build their skills and commitment to providing quality abortion care for young women
- Advocate at international, regional, national and local levels for policies that promote girls' and young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Conduct research on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and young women, with a particular focus on abortion
- Help young people and adults create meaningful youth-adult partnerships that focus on long-term solutions to support young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights

Through partnership with youth-serving organizations, young leaders, and government institutions, we support sustained solutions to ensuring youth-friendly services, outreach efforts, and policy reforms that break down barriers to young people accessing high-quality abortion care and contraceptive services. Our partnership approach, especially with young people themselves, ensures that young people are not just beneficiaries of services but also key stakeholders in their own health care.





**MARY'S STORY** shows the amazing impact our programs can have. Mary, a 19-year-old student in Ghana, became pregnant under difficult circumstances and wished to terminate the pregnancy so she could continue preparing for her school exams. A friend told her about an Ipas-trained peer educator named Beatrice who could teach her about how to get a safe abortion. After confirming that Mary was indeed pregnant, Beatrice told her about her options, and then accompanied her to the hospital where Mary chose to have a safe abortion procedure. Since Mary knew she didn't want to face another unwanted pregnancy, Beatrice then taught her about contraception methods she could use to protect herself in the future. Mary continued her education.

## Case for support

Oftentimes, when a government's ministry of health focuses on women's health and supports efforts to legalize abortion and train safe abortion providers, they neglect the population of young people who need education, care and options even more than adults do.

This is where Ipas steps in.

Ipas Ghana, for example, has created a Youth Advisory Board, comprised of 15 young people from across the country. This diverse board—which includes young doctors, journalists, activists, and members representing religious groups—is charged with infusing a youth perspective into everything our Ghana team does, from ensuring that abortion and contraceptive services are safe and youth-centered, to advocating for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all Ghanaians in national policy debates. Not only does this help us meet the reproductive health needs of young people in Ghana, but we have created a cohort of life-long safe abortion advocates and leaders who will continue to work for access to safe, legal and accessible abortion care.

In addition to the Youth Advisory Board, Ipas Ghana conducts a number of projects to support young people in accessing safe abortion services and learning about sexual and reproductive health. These projects include radio shows, peer-to-peer learning programs, and work with the government to ensure youth-friendly services. Ipas Ghana also conducts research on youth sexual and reproductive health needs, with a specific focus on abortion.

Our goal is to replicate and tailor Ipas Ghana's multi-faceted youth-led and youth-centered program in other countries to have a long-term impact on efforts to decrease unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion.

All of the work Ipas undertakes requires financial partnership.

# HEALTH

“Who better to tell you how to improve services than young people themselves?”

—Nana Zulu, Ipas youth advisor

In Nepal, Zambia and Sierra Leone, Ipas has facilitated youth-adult partnerships at health centers that allow young people to take the lead in defining the specific sexual and reproductive health needs of youth in their community. Young people work as equal partners with health-care providers and health center staff to determine the best ways to inform the community about available youth-friendly health services, to ensure young people's privacy and confidentiality (this often means



Nana Zulu  
Ipas youth advisor

a separate registration area or counseling room for youth), and to guarantee all health center staff are trained on the importance of nonjudgmental, respectful care for youth.

“It's really helping,” says long-time volunteer peer counselor Martha Liswaniso, age 25, of Zambia. “I'm seeing change. Those young people who never used to have time are now coming to the clinic, have information and are using the services.”

# ACCESS

“If you give them the right information, it's lifesaving.”

—Moses Nicholas Moyo, youth-friendly corner volunteer, Zambia

A simple lack of information about sexual and reproductive health—and how to access needed services—is often the biggest barrier young women face. While Ipas provides technical guidance and resources, our youth-led and youth-focused partner organizations are experts at delivering the information in a way that makes sense to young people: through street dramas about the dangers of unsafe abortion in Nepal



Moses Nicholas Moyo  
youth volunteer

and Zambia, through education programs for teachers and students on preventing sexual violence in Nicaragua, and through reproductive health clubs on university campuses across Africa.

Working with Ipas “has been an experience in which both sides have benefited,” explains Juan Ramón González with the Nicaraguan youth-led group J×J Collective.

# RIGHTS

“I am more useful in the community. Ipas empowered me a lot...improved my knowledge and skills, and increased my level of confidence.

—Community youth volunteer, Sierra Leone

Ipas trains young leaders to advocate for youth sexual and reproductive health and rights in their local communities and at the national and international levels. We've provided technical expertise and resources to support youth-led advocacy campaigns for national law change in Sierra Leone and Nigeria. We've connected youth advocates directly with policymakers in Bolivia and Zambia to discuss the changes young people want to see. And we partner with the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) to train future health-care providers on the importance of safe, legal abortion and how to advocate for better laws and policies in the countries where they will work.

“A training like this is valuable and important for medical students quite simply because women around the world either die or are harmed by unsafe abortion, so promoting access to safe abortions is a very easy solution to prevent that,” says IFMSA student trainer Emily Stewart of the University of Toronto.



Emily Stewart  
IFMSA student trainer





PLEASE GIVE IF YOU AGREE WITH IPAS THAT:

- All young people deserve the right to make their own informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health
- Young people are the most powerful and effective advocates for their own health and rights
- No young woman should have to watch her dreams for a bright future fade away due to an unwanted pregnancy
- Training the next generation of advocates for young people's sexual and reproductive rights is a smart investment that builds future leaders and has lasting impact
- Everyone has a role to play in promoting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people

**Together we can develop an informed and empowered generation. Thank you!**





P.O. Box 9990 • Chapel Hill, NC 27515 USA  
1.919.967.7052 • [www.ipas.org](http://www.ipas.org)