

Supportive Environments for Youth in sub-Saharan Africa

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Outline of Presentation

- Role of environment in youth lives
- Conceptual model
- Programmatic activities by level
- Limitations of approaches
- Recommendations for policy makers, managers, and community leaders

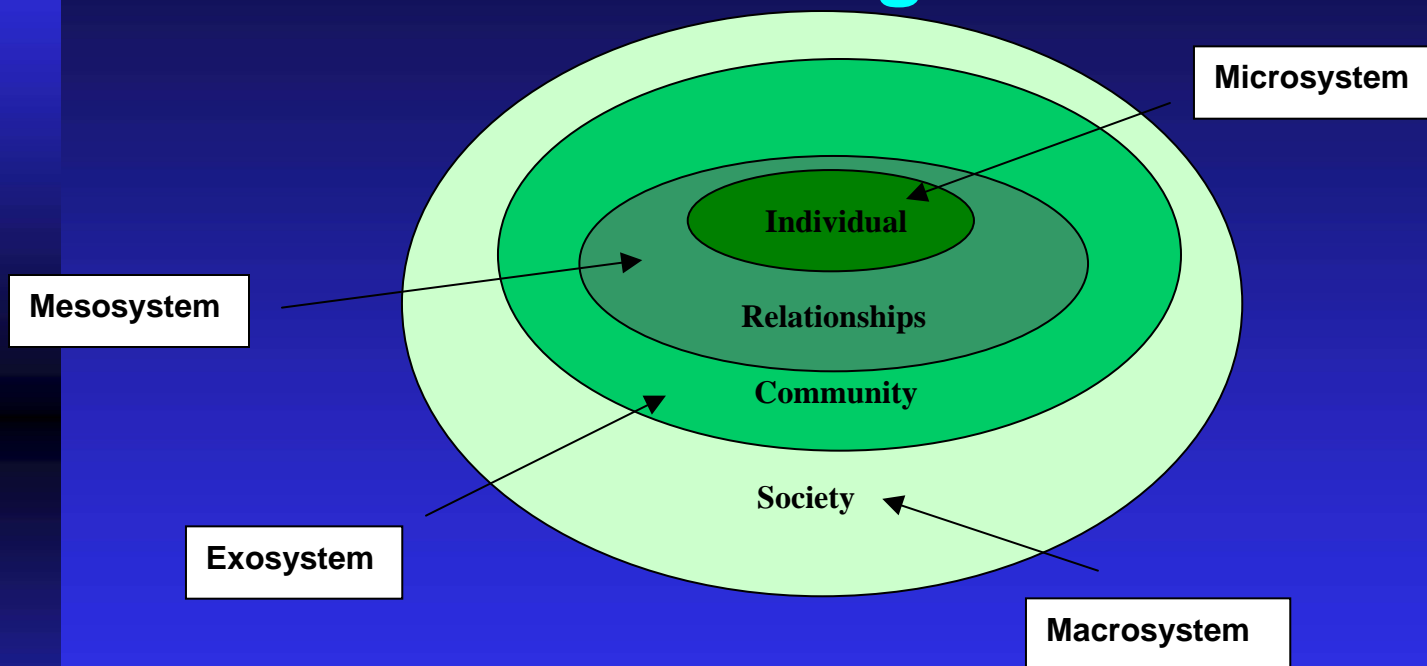
Role of the Environment

- One-third of African population is 10-24 years of age: 257 million youth
- Despite high mortality (IMR of 94/1000), most not only survive but thrive in highly variable and unequal environments
- Each girl and boy has rights and needs, as well as contributions to make in transition to adulthood

Supportive Environments Help Youth to...

- Develop knowledge how to sustain themselves and family
- Acquire social and human capital
- Establish healthy relationships
- Protect themselves from the risks of unwanted pregnancy, unwanted infections and violence

Theoretical Framework: Human Ecological Model



Levels of Model

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Individual: | Youth |
| Relationships: | Family, friends, teachers, co-workers, mentors |
| Community: | Work, marketplace, religion, health care system |
| Society: | National and international policy and communication |

Utility of Ecological Framework

- Useful for understanding diverse and multiple contexts in youth's lives
- Emphasizes interrelationships among levels
- Identifies factors in each level that are supportive, indifferent or harmful to youth
- Suggests diverse strategies for intervention based upon age, gender and setting
- Adapts to changing environmental conditions

Microsystem - Individual

- Support individual strengths and actions to meet a youth's unique personality, values, skills and needs
- Programming examples
 - ✓ Hot lines
 - ✓ Pregnancy prevention and VCT services for youth
 - ✓ Skills training

Mesosystem - Relationships

- Support healthy relationships with family, friends, teachers, employers and mentors
- Programming examples
 - ✓ Parent-child communication
 - ✓ Safe schools and sports
 - ✓ First time parents programs
 - ✓ Peer education programs

Exosystems - Community

- Supports networks in which youth function, including indirect role of community institutions
- Programming examples
 - ✓ Youth-friendly health services
 - ✓ Family life training of teachers
 - ✓ Community violence prevention

Macrosystem - Society

- Supports international and national efforts on behalf of youth and with youth
- Programming examples
 - ✓ Millennium Development Goals and international conventions on rights
 - ✓ National youth policies and policies affecting youth, e.g. Tanzania or EC
 - ✓ Communication media

Multilevel Programming

- Recognizes multiple contexts of youth lives; no one is left out
- Involves youth - “Nothing for us, without us”
- Mobilizes contributions from multiple stakeholders, e.g. multisectoral
- Promises resiliency in changing environment
- Yet ... responsibility is diffuse, presents challenges in process of implementing multilevel efforts, the timing of benefits is unclear, and costs are usually undefined

Recommendations for Policy Makers and Program Managers

- Develop clear national policies and guidelines for supporting youth
- Provide multilevel support for youth, including affordable integrated health services
- Make strategic investments in those most at risk of poor sexual and health outcomes
- Engage community support in identifying and acting on local protective and risk factors
- Ensure participation of youth at each level

Recommendations for Community Leaders

- Acknowledge that traditional supports for youth, particularly for girls are weakening
- Mobilize community support by educating and involving parents
- Support the work of youth-focused advocacy networks in fostering public debate
- Build local capacity to enhance supportive environments, i.e. both older champions and new leadership

Limitations of Environmental Approach

- Approach suggests principles, not actual interventions, for all environments
- Multiple actors requires larger vision
- Little guidance on “how to” or “when to”
- Lack of coordinated strategy among competing alternatives
- Challenge in scaling up cost-effective models and making sound investment decisions

Role of Monitoring, Evaluation and Research

- Meaning of key supportive concepts
- Documentation of best practices
- Monitoring of policies and programs, factors affecting coverage and quality
- Identifying resource requirements
- Evaluation to determine if promising interventions are robust for scale up

Conclusion

- Diversity among young boys and girls and the contexts in which they live, demand more strategic thinking on how to provide support
- Insight needed into key elements of transition to adulthood
- Use of models and evidence on regional experience (+/-) suggest promise
- “Healthy, happy and hopeful”