



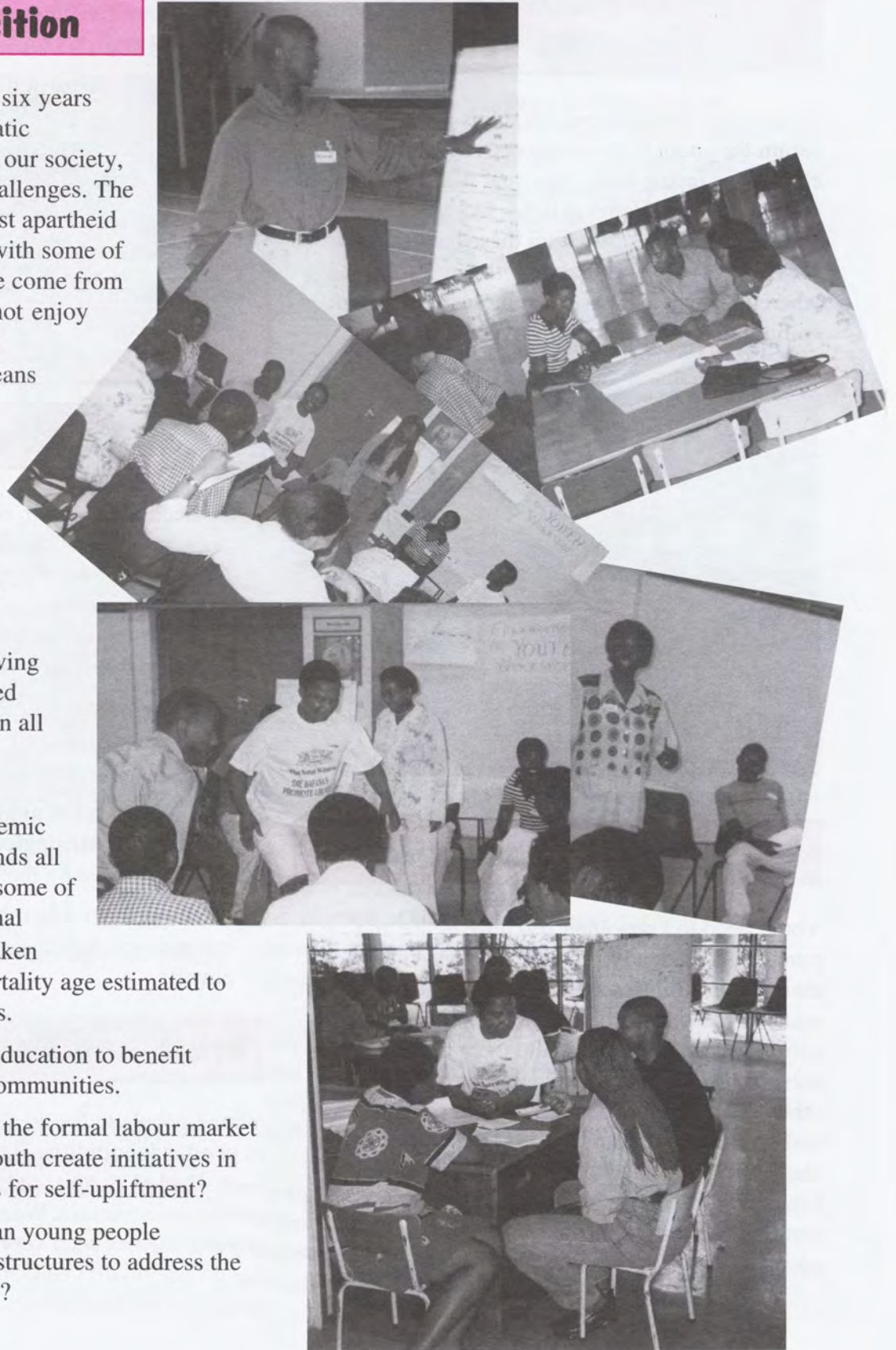
CHALLENGES FACING YOUNG PEOPLE

PACSA FACTSHEET NO. 48 NOVEMBER 2000

Facing Transition

Although it is only six years since the democratic transformation of our society, it has come with many challenges. The days of the struggle against apartheid are over but we still live with some of its legacies. Young people come from an era when they could not enjoy their youth to the full and violence was often the means used to settle disputes. There are new struggles and new challenges that come with the new democratic order. What are these issues and challenges that are facing young people?

- ✚ **Marginalisation** - moving from being marginalised youth to participating in all spheres of a new dispensation.
- ✚ **HIV/AIDS** - this pandemic influences and transcends all else. It is liable to kill some of the cream of our national leadership if it is not taken seriously, with the mortality age estimated to drop to a mere 40 years.
- ✚ **Education** - utilising education to benefit themselves and their communities.
- ✚ **Employment** - jobs in the formal labour market are scarce. How can youth create initiatives in their own communities for self-upliftment?
- ✚ **Participation** - how can young people participate in national structures to address the issues youth are facing?
- ✚ **Gender** inequalities.



✚ **Race** issues – how can we deal with them constructively and creatively?

✚ **Peer pressure** – relates to crime, school dropouts, drugs, sexual activity, parental guidance and religion.

✚ **Political tolerance** – learning from past conflict.

Youth Ministry with Christian Values

Churches and related organisations provide a forum for youth to be introspective and debate challenges facing them. Spiritual well-being is vital in these challenging times facing young people. Youth groups within these institutions provide not only spiritual growth but also a place where they can learn about values and experience cultural diversity in a family-type atmosphere.

The Rights of Young People

- ☞ To learn to do their best to **provide** for the future, moving away from self-pity arising from poverty.
- ☞ To be a collective voice in the **governance** of our country.
- ☞ To be an active group in social, economic and political **analysis and debate**.
- ☞ To manage **cultural diversity** and cross-cultural communication. This is an opportunity to work with different people in strategic places for positive solutions for our country.
- ☞ To debate and understand issues of **gender**, sexual violence and their own sexuality.
- ☞ To know and claim their **dignity** they have from being made in the image of God. Each of their lives has a unique and special purpose.



Youth and Education

Youth need to know their **purpose** in life and pursue it confidently. To do so they need to know their needs, **abilities** and the contribution they can make to reconstruction and development in our nation. Education should help them to develop these abilities to the full and use them to **serve** others. Our national context is rapid social change and economic pressure. This presents many social challenges, which education needs to respond to. Education should act as an instrument of liberation from injustice and as a tool of enlightenment on social issues.

The Youth and Economics

Economic growth costs in money, labour and sometimes in human values. Unemployment amidst growing poverty is the economic challenge for youth. This creates opportunities for youth to exercise leadership in **economic development** through:

- ☞ Familiarising themselves with **policies** around development and socio-economic issues.
- ☞ Taking the lead in **analyzing** their own situation and devising **strategies** to alleviate some of the problems faced by their communities.
- ☞ Participating in **planning and implementing** initiatives to help their communities to deal with poverty.

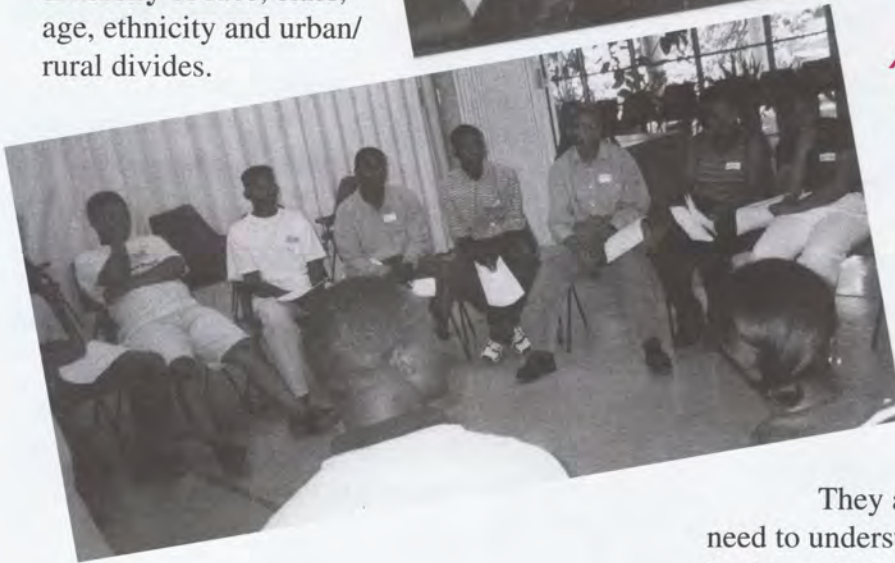
Youth and Gender Relations

Young people today are faced with new challenges in **gender inequalities**. Our society has not only been divided along racial lines but has had a patriarchal structure. Women's participation in governance has been very limited. Our government has a Commission on Gender Equality looking at gender issues and has embarked on a programme

to involve women in government structures and other spheres of our society. Gender issues that need to be addressed seriously include the abuse of women and children (especially rape – see PACSA Factsheet No. 44, 1998 - “Rape”)

How can young people familiarise themselves with Gender issues?

- ☞ By trying to deepen their understanding of gender issues, analyzing the issues involved - starting with relations in the **family**.
- ☞ By understanding **power relations** between men and women.
- ☞ By understanding and debating the gender issue in the scope of the **diversity** of race, class, age, ethnicity and urban/rural divides.



- ☞ By recognising the connections between HIV/AIDS and gender issues.
- ☞ By **breaking the silence** on child abuse, violence against women and also violence in general against the powerless.
- ☞ By reading the relevant chapters in **scripture** which had been previously left out which can enhance and promote **co-operation** between men and women.
- ☞ By **critically reading** chapters of scripture that have been used to support **unequal relations** as the will of God.

Sexuality and Young People

What is sexuality to young people? How is it to be understood in relation to Gender and HIV/AIDS?

Sexuality is central to our identity as human beings. It is a life-force, and a gift of God. It is a dominant issue for young people, as their bodies are sexually maturing and their sexuality is changing and developing. They have to integrate many changes in their lives at the same time as their bodies, feelings and relationships undergo dramatic change.

Sex and sexuality were shrouded in mystery and danger for many people, especially older generations. Even though it can be difficult, the old and the young need to discuss sexuality together, to help the young to integrate their sexuality into their identity.

A Time for Growth

Youth is a time of great openness and growth yet also of vulnerability. Youth are faced with issues relating to the direction of their lives and to their sexuality - including the possibility of destructive, violent or possessive relationships (especially if they are looking for closeness and affection).

They are still emotionally immature but need to understand the possible implications of having sexual relations - teenage pregnancy and parenthood and contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

They have to deal with questions about “Who am I?” and “What are my values?” Self-respect and self-esteem influence these questions and deeply influence how young people see themselves and relate to others, especially the opposite sex.

The expression of a young person’s sexuality comes from how he or she thinks of him or herself. This is shaped by others, so they need support and respect from family, significant adults (e.g. teachers, health care workers and pastors) and

social networks. Then they are more likely to have a good opinion of themselves and feel empowered to make good decisions.

Self Worth and Life for Young People

Most young South Africans have grown up in a very violent society, participating in violence or being victims of it. This has influenced their minds. It has created an attitude of not “loving life”. The trend is “**living fast and dying young**”. The deadliness of **HIV/AIDS is trivialized** by calling it *amagama amathathu*, *iOMO*, *iUNO* or referring to the use of condoms as “eating a sweet in its plastic wrapping”.

Weapons, especially guns, are worshipped and seen as fashionable. This is promoted by TV programmes presenting using guns and other violence as the norm.

How can young people learn to value life?

- ✎ By **enriching themselves with experiences** that depict **life as a journey of discovery - about life, the universe, God, fellow people and the value of goodness.**
- ✎ By **questioning and challenging norms** and values that glamorize what could be detrimental to their own lives e.g. the use of drugs and the worship of the gun. This includes dealing with peer pressure, which can push them to experiment, e.g. with drugs.
- ✎ By understanding and projecting themselves as the leadership of the future.

For more information, contact PACSA for free copies of our recent Factsheets:

- Factsheet 44: Rape
- Factsheet 45: Domestic Violence.
- Factsheet 46: Gender, Violence and HIV/AIDS
- Factsheet 47: Government Budget and Responsible Citizenship.

The Ministry of Reconciliation for the Youth

Our society has been divided racially and politically for decades. Polarization in society has been so high that it has often been accompanied by death and self-destruction by youth in the struggle. Youth from different racial backgrounds were separated geographically and by institutions like schools and churches they had to attend. Today's youth should not dwell too much on the past but focus on working together for their country's well-being.



How can young people move from the legacy of separation to interaction?

- ✎ Understand the culture of human rights, to enable better social and political participation in their communities.
- ✎ Learn about **tolerance**, understanding that our society has diverse ideologies, but that diversity does not have to lead to violence and oppression.
- ✎ Realize peace is necessary to create an environment where everyone's rights are recognized and can be exercised without fear.

Young people have a responsibility to our country to help promote some of the things discussed in this factsheet. They need to play a very active role in deepening their understanding of the social issues affecting them and thus in making a contribution to society as responsible citizens.



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